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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Book Reviews Volume 16, Issue 1

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In this inaugural issue of the *Journal of Deliberative Democracy*, we are pleased to present reviews of five recently published books that will shape the scholarship on public deliberation in the years to come. These books engage with key theoretical and methodological debates in the field, contribute to the way we understand deliberation in relation to other political practices, and present compelling empirical accounts of how deliberative democracy comes alive in contemporary times.

The reviewed titles are *Mapping and Measuring Deliberation* by André Bächtiger and John Parkinson (2019); *Demagoguery and Democracy* (2017) by Patricia Roberts-Miller *Re-imagining Democracy* by Jane Suiter and David Farrell (2019); *Oral Democracy* by Paromita Sanyal and Vijayendra Rao (2018) and *Beyond Liberalism* by Michael Briand (2019, Praeger).

Keywords: deliberation; democracy; participation; assemblies; liberalism; civic engagement

In this inaugural issue of the *Journal of Deliberative Democracy*, we are pleased to present reviews of five recently published books that will shape the scholarship on public deliberation in the years to come. These books engage with key theoretical and methodological debates in the field, contribute to the way we understand deliberation in relation to other political practices, and present compelling empirical accounts of the contemporary relevance of deliberative democracy.

We begin with a review of *Mapping and Measuring Deliberation* by André Bächtiger and John Parkinson (2019 Oxford University Press). This book puts forward a novel understanding of processes of deliberation that is sensitive to the goals and contexts in which these processes take place. This is followed by a review of Patricia Roberts-Miller's book *Demagoguery and Democracy* (2017 The Experiment Publishing), which reveals how deliberative ideals are important tools in avoiding demagogic practices in liberal democracies. Like Bächtiger and Parkinson, Roberts-Miller (2017 The Experiment Publishing) defends the significance of a contextually situated understanding of public discourse and proposes correctives to corrosive demagogic practices.

We then turn our attention to two books that discuss what could be considered the most celebrated democratic innovations in recent years. *Re-imagining Democracy* by Jane Suiter and David Farrell (2019 Cornell University Press) tells the story of the Irish Citizens' Assembly project, while *Oral Democracy* by Paromita Sanyal and Vijayendra Rao (2018 Cambridge University Press) investigates the democratic value of village assemblies in India – the world's largest democracy.

Both books demonstrate the transformative potential of large-scale deliberations in societies divided by economic status and religious beliefs and prompt readers to reflect on the applicability of well-designed deliberative processes in other political contexts.

Our book reviews conclude with an assessment of Michael Briand's *Beyond Liberalism* (2019 Praeger), which offers a vision for liberal democracy beyond individualistic accounts of freedom. Briand explains how the practice of ethical dialogue and deliberation can address some of liberalism's nastiest vices that compromise democratic politics today.

We hope these five books will inspire readers who continue to envision societies that uphold the virtues of deliberative democracy and have the courage to bring this vision to life.

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Bächtiger, André., and Parkinson, John. (2019). *Mapping and Measuring Deliberation: Towards a New Deliberative Quality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

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André Bächtiger and John Parkinson set out to develop nothing less than 'a novel understanding of deliberation' that will deliver more 'plausible' and 'persuasive' 'empirical results' (1). It is commonly assumed that 'deliberation can be adequately defined for empirical purposes without asking what its goals and contexts are' (2). Yet, as the authors observe, 'this cannot be right' (ibid.). *Mapping and Measuring Deliberation* makes a case for a contextualist approach to the study of deliberation. Actors' goals and communicative acts, and the standards by which we judge them, can and should vary with context (40). The book makes a compelling case for this proposition.

Regrettably, however, the authors depart from their own professed contextualism in key respects.

The authors first attempt to identify and understand what deliberation '*is,* exactly, and how it works in practice' (1). Deliberation is 'just one mode of communication,' they observe. It isn't 'necessarily the most important [one] given particular configurations of communicative and decisional power in particular contexts' (131). Nor do deliberative norms 'require that people should *always* and *only* be sitting and giving reasons mutually, respectfully, inclusively' (7).

Deliberation is but one of several values in a democracy, and 'the precise form it takes and its relationship to other forms of action depend on goals and contexts' (19). But deliberative processes do place special emphasis on a quality that other processes do not, and extensive deliberation does produce a particular deliberative 'timbre' in a democracy (5–7). That 'timbre' can – but needn't always – promote a variety of democratic goods.

By contrast, 'most empirical deliberative scholarship,' Bächtiger and Parkinson posit, has relied on a 'narrow definitional approach which understands deliberation as a fixed and unitary concept producing an array of desirable outcomes, largely ignoring the diverse goals and contexts of deliberation' (1). Deliberation, on their view, involves cultural practices or 'scripts,' which participants variously deploy in particular problem-contexts (71, 153). Accordingly, 'deliberation is a concept whose precise content' can and should depend 'to some extent on various goals—epistemic, ethical, legitimacy-oriented, emancipatory, transformative, and clarifying—as well as on different contexts and sites in which deliberation takes place' (19).

Critically, however, the authors 'uphold the idea of a deliberative core, consisting of reason-giving and listening, which turns deliberation into *a communicative activity which can be analytically distinguished from other forms of communication*' (19, emphasis added). Here, they resist an alleged tendency in recent literature 'to inflate the concept of deliberation to the point that it now seems to include every possible mode of human communication' (ibid.). Responding to criticisms from difference democrats, agonistic democrats, and others,

> 'expanded' conceptions of deliberation began to incorporate other forms of communication, such as rhetoric, testimony, story-telling, angry outbursts, performances, even symbolic acts which both open up the range of ways of making a point, and are often necessary to challenge attempts to silence others by fetishizing the rules of so-called civilized discourse. (23)

After describing how to identify deliberation, the authors consider how to locate and assess *democratic* deliberation and the deliberative quality of systems. They critically review some twenty years of 'micro research,' which has overwhelmingly focused on deliberative interactions in single forums such as minipublics and parliaments (45). A contextualist approach, they show, leads to insights missed by many of the pioneering empirical researchers in this area. For example, the authors highlight various prospective trade-offs between deliberative ideals and democratic standards — indicating, for instance, that certain conditions that facilitate deliberative quality in parliaments ('a lack of mass publicity, a lack of party discipline, and the need for consensus-seeking') can *lower* democratic accountability and responsiveness (16, 64). Such contextualist insights temper unqualified enthusiasm for the democratic potential of these deliberative forums.

Equally, however, the findings generally *undermine* critics' contention that lay citizens cannot deliberate at high-quality levels; sceptics are generally mistaken concerning the deliberative capacities of citizens under the specific, supportive conditions of minipublics, for instance (51–54).

Additionally, the authors usefully outline six problem-based avenues for future micro research (66, 70–77). The existing 'quantitative orthodoxy,' they observe, has failed to capture 'contextual logics' that need to be understood as dynamic and as intersecting with diverse deliberative goals (69, 156). We ought to try to capture the contingency, performativity and distribution of deliberative acts within *and* across venues (16, 44).

With this in mind, the authors shift to large-scale deliberative dynamics, critically evaluating three approaches in the literature: the discursive model (e.g., Dryzek 1990; Schlosberg 1999), the spatial version of the deliberative systems approach (e.g., Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012; Dryzek 2009, 2010), and the sequenced version of the deliberative systems approach (e.g., Goodin 2005; Parkinson 2006). In response, they develop their own deliberative systems approach that focuses on three elements of sequencing: listening, structuration, and deciding (81–103). The authors' attractive normative vision is itself a contextualist one. It is of a deliberative society

> which, in goal- and context-sensitive ways, systematically *listens* to narratives and claims in the public sphere, ensuring an *inclusive* range of per-

> spectives; which *connects, processes,* and *weighs* different claims and reasons (which themselves can take a richly symbolic, cue-setting form) in a visible way; which makes binding collective *decisions* on the basis of that process of weighing; and which reflects back to citizens what is happening at every stage. (157)

This vision sets out 'empirical cues which will allow researchers to locate the deliberative quality in large-scale democratic systems' (129).

The book contains a plethora of neologisms, which are not always easy to keep track of.

Moreover, it sometimes speaks with two voices – as the authors themselves acknowledge ('the pair of us come at our subject from very different directions,' and 'there are some issues on which the discussions pull in different directions'; vii–viii). Regrettably, this leads them to depart from their own professed contextualism in important respects.

Consider the 'novel understanding of deliberation' at the center of their analysis (1). On one hand, they adamantly defend the notion of a 'deliberative core, consisting of reason-giving and listening' (19). Here, deliberation is regarded as 'a communicative activity which can be analytically distinguished from other forms of communication' (ibid.). Crucially, this includes 'story-telling' – one of several 'different communicative practices which we need to hold conceptually apart' (24). Yes, storytelling can 'combine' or 'mingle' with deliberative 'acts,' 'practices,' or 'elements,' they say; it can be part of a 'deliberative *sequence*' (15–20, 22–25, 65, 90–92, emphasis added). But storytelling is a different 'mode of communication' – which can only serve 'deliberative *functions*' (15, 25, 70). Storytelling 'can take deliberative functions by spurring reason-giving and listening, but we keep [it] conceptually distinct from deliberation' (15); deliberation is 'a particular mode of communication which can be unravelled empirically from other modes, and whose effects can then be isolated, especially when researchers control for other variables' (70).

Now, this all reads like storytelling isn't ever a deliberative 'act,' 'form,' 'practice,' 'element,' or 'mode' of communication (and says more than that it isn't *necessarily* such an act, as of course it isn't). Oddly, though, the authors also affirm that 'reason-giving' can 'take the form of story-telling that establishes more general claims about entities, membership, boundaries, relationships to people and land, authority to speak, and so on' (23–24). Yet, if 'deliberation' *must* involve 'reason-giving,' and 'reason-giving' *can* take the form of 'story-telling,' why suggest that storytelling isn't *ever* a deliberative 'act,' 'form,' 'practice,' 'element,' or 'mode' of communication? Why insist that it can only ever serve deliberative 'functions' – that storytelling is simply a different 'mode' (15, 25, 70)? One wishes the authors had been more consistent with their own professed contextualism here – consistently acknowledging that storytelling can (but needn't) itself amount to reason-giving. After all, a central aim of their analysis is to understand what deliberation '*is*, exactly, and how it works in practice' (1).

Relatedly, one wishes they hadn't claimed that 'the tendency in recent years [has been] to inflate the concept of deliberation to the point that it now seems to include every possible mode of human communication' (19). It is not clear who, if anyone, actually construes deliberation in this amorphous way; Young (2000) and Polletta and Lee (2006), who they cite in relevant passages, certainly do not. Without a judicious rendering of their interlocutors' positions, the reader cannot accurately place Bächtiger and Parkinson's own communicative acts in context.

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Roberts-Miller, Patricia. (2017). *Demagoguery and Democracy*. New York, NY: The Experiment Publishing

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Patricia Roberts-Miller's *Demagoguery and Democracy* participates in and mobilises two ongoing developments in public deliberation studies. First, it articulates some of the theoretical contributions to deliberative theory made possible by interdisciplinary rhetorical studies. The author documents how rhetorical discourse can constrain or enable potential evolutions in political thought and public policy, diagnoses some persistent rhetorical hazards

for democratic deliberation and defines rhetorical norms for cultivating deliberative habits of communication. Second, the book advances a powerful argument in favour of democratic deliberation as a model for anti-demagogic practices and structures in political discourse. Roberts-Miller explains not only *why* but also *how* principles of democratic deliberation may be applied to defuse and divert demagogic impulses in the public sphere and in the lives of ordinary citizens.

This slim volume, written in an accessible tone suitable for assigned reading at any level of higher education, proceeds in three stages. The first stage outlines the problems arising from certain commonplace misconceptions about demagoguery. The introduction is devoted to refuting the conventional notion that defines demagoguery as an aberration of an otherwise healthy public sphere caused by manipulative and opportunistic individuals. Arguing that such a definition can only exacerbate demagogic patterns of communication, Roberts-Miller asserts the need for a reliable definition of demagoguery with substance beyond mere pejorative connotation (6). In the author's refined definition, demagoguery is 'discourse that promises stability, certainty, and escape from the responsibilities of rhetoric by framing public policy in terms of the degree to which and the means by which (not whether) the out-group should be scapegoated for the current problems of the in-group' (33). The first chapter outlines some theoretical principles and perspectives for such a definition, based in rhetorical studies, deliberation studies and democracy studies. The second chapter documents the problems following from commonplace misconceptions of demagoguery, which are so imprecise as to be selectively applicable to nearly any political movement.

Roberts-Miller's rhetorical perspective provides a novel point of leverage for addressing the problems of demagoguery as conventionally understood. One of the book's main implications is to turn away from demagoguery as an issue of individual malpractice and toward the set of communication contexts that enable and incentivise demagogic discourse (2). In this way, *Demagoguery and Democracy* responds to the call by some scholars of democratic deliberation for an approach to public discourse informed by systems thinking (Parkinson & Mansbridge 2012). In a similar spirit, Roberts-Miller affirms that demagoguery is 'about how we, as citizens, argue, reason, and vote' (8), reflecting deliberation studies' interest in the communication practices of ordinary folk (Black 2012; Tracy 2011). Further, the author's rhetorical vantage point leads her to observe that political arguments might not be best understood as vehicles for pragmatic or ethical propositions, but may be conceived of as 'performances of loyalty,' expressing one's familiarity with a social code capable of signalling group inclusion (5). In these and other ways, *Demagoguery and Democracy* demonstrates how interdisciplinary rhetorical studies can supply fresh solutions to some durable problems in political theory.

The second stage — the third, fourth and fifth chapters — proposes an alternative definition of demagoguery based on historical analysis of specific, contextually-situated instances of public discourse. In the third chapter, Roberts-Miller develops from some paradigmatic cases of demagoguery a definition that can also be applied to its more covert expressions. The fourth chapter describes the common qualities of demagogic discourse (such as naïve realism, identity as logic and victimisation), and the fifth chapter illustrates these qualities as they appear in a focused analysis of Earl Warren's congressional testimony on Japanese internment. With its emphasis on specific, contextually situated artefacts of public discourse, the book's second stage provides an excellent example of the methodological insights offered by interdisciplinary rhetorical studies.

The third stage, composed of the final two chapters, formulates a systemic theory of demagoguery and suggests the norms of discourse that may most effectively counteract demagogic habits of communication. The sixth chapter builds a case for considering demagoguery as a feature of a political system, capable of growing so rapidly that it may supersede alternative modes of political discourse (79). The book closes with the seventh chapter's advice about how best to negate demagogic discourse: nullifying its advantage in electoral politics, testifying to the merits of political plurality, arguing against its talking points only when doing so is worthwhile, and supporting the practices of democratic deliberation. This chapter also includes a list of fallacies typical of demagoguery and a set of four basic principles for performing anti-demagogic discourse.

The third stage displays rhetorical studies' full utility in discerning correctives for demagogic maladaptations and designing normative models for cultivating civic discourse. Roberts-Miller's anti-demagogic rhetorical norms align well with the values and perspectives of democratic deliberation. Principally, she counsels against excising demagogues from public discourse, as doing so would accelerate the cycle of demagogic growth, advising instead that demagogic rhetoric be defused through cultural transformation (93). A significant component of this corrective change in culture involves the implementation of democratic deliberative principles in public discourse (123). The book's conclusion synthesises theories of rhetorical democracy and democratic deliberation to devise a programme capable of countering demagogic tendencies in public discourse.

What limitations one finds in *Demagoguery and Democracy* appear where its conceptual follow-through is less than total. For instance, the book returns throughout to the idea that demagoguery is contrary to 'compassion' (77) and 'empathy' (99). Recognising that this book's cases of demagoguery are associated with a high degree of 'in-group compassion', the contrary of demagoguery that the author envisions could be expressed more precisely as 'out-group compassion'. Elsewhere, *Demagoguery and Democracy* does not press the full advantage of rhetoric's audience-centered perspective on communication. The book's theoretical turn deemphasises individual demagogues to focus on political and media systems (88–89), but does not address explicitly the agential

role in those systems of the audiences themselves, who may be found acclaiming and rewarding demagogues who promise to satisfy their grievances. Such limitations do not threaten the integrity of the project's overall argumentative structure, but are the kind of unresolved puzzles around which future research may accumulate.

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Suiter, Jane., and Farrell, David. (2019). *Re-imagining Democracy: Lessons in Deliberative Democracy from the Irish Front Line*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press

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Anyone with a keen interest in the future of democracy will know about Ireland's first Citizens' Assemblies and how each helped to pave the way towards removing that country's notoriously restrictive prohibitions on same sex marriage and abortion.

However, until the release of a new and very helpful monograph by Irish academics and deliberative impresarios, Jane Suiter and David Farrell, the details to all but the closest observers have been blurry. How many assemblies have there been? How did one lead to the next? What was learned along the way?

Re-imagining Democracy: Lessons in Deliberative Democracy from the Irish Front Line was published shortly after Suiter and Farrell received the 2019 Brown Democracy Medal. It is a forthright account of how these two academics drew inspiration from abroad, put theory into practice and successfully scaled up one of the most significant democratic innovations of their generation.

Re-imagining Democracy comes in two parts. The first describes how the Irish approach to Citizens' Assemblies evolved over the course of three distinct exercises: We the Citizens (2011), the Citizens' Convention on the Constitution (2012–14) and the Irish Citizens' Assembly (2016). The second half provides guidance for others hoping to learn from and replicate the Irish experience.

They begin in circumstances easily recognised by most democracies: political malaise and a popular loss of confidence in the country's political institutions — which in this case had been deepened by the collapse of the Irish economy in 2008 following its explosive years as the 'Celtic Tiger.' But Suiter and Farrell are careful to acknowledge that this malaise wasn't the only factor contributing to the Assemblies' success. A much larger 'seismic shift' was also underway. Rocked by scandal, the dominance of the Catholic Church was cracking.

In response, and with initial backing from the Atlantic Philanthropies, Suiter and Farrell launched their experiment to show that public judgement was still possible and that citizens were not apathetic, incapable of understanding complex policy issues or else too polarised to help steer towards safer ground. As Suiter and Farrell write, 'the simple idea is to bolster representative democracy through adding a deliberative element.'

But simple ideas still have a way of going wrong. The authors admit to nerves as the first day of the 'We the Citizens' Assembly approached. At considerable cost, they had invited 150 of their fellow citizens to spend a weekend deliberating on broad topics of public concern. On the appointed rainy night, slightly more than 100 people showed up, 'just enough to allow [them] to proceed.' As Suiter and Farrell would discover, these citizen delegates hadn't come to fight or appoint blame, but were ready to learn from their peers as well as experts. Any fears that the meetings might run out of control were unfounded. As Suiter and Farrell recount, 'What was most revealing […] was the sheer hunger for reflective dialogue.'

Soon after, they received a commission from the Irish government to launch a Citizens' Convention to explore eight different topics, including, most famously, same-sex marriage.

Ultimately, the Convention made forty-three recommendations, eighteen of which required a referendum to enact, and three of which have taken place, with popular votes on both marriage equality and blasphemy leading to constitutional change.

The breadth and consequence of the Convention's agenda and the rapid pace with which its citizen-members had to work remain two of its most striking elements. The third was the appointment of elected politicians who sat alongside the randomly selected citizen members. This 'hybrid assembly' would help to normalise the process amongst sceptical legislators.

The success of the Convention paved the way for the 2016 Citizens' Assembly that would tackle, among other things, Ireland's most fraught political issue: reproductive choice. (Though welcomed by many across the political establishment, it would still take a 'final push' by an independent legislator who made putting the divisive issue to a new Assembly a condition of her joining the 2016 coalition government.)

With politician members now removed from this third deliberative process, the 2016 Assembly was launched and delivered a 'landmark call' on abortion. Soon after, the *Irish Times* celebrated their deliberations as having performed a 'vital public service' and a new referendum overwhelmingly approved the Assembly's recommendation.

Today, several new Citizens' Assemblies are underway in Ireland and the model appears to be taking root, not only

nationally, but municipally as well. The Irish experience has also proved catalytic, inspiring similar processes throughout Europe and beyond.

Throughout their writing, Suiter and Farrell acknowledge that the upheaval and social change that characterised the first decade of the twentieth century was crucial to paving the path for piloting a nationwide Citizens' Assembly. In this context, it's reasonable to ask whether the Citizens' Assemblies were unique in their ability to secure these reforms, or whether a more conventional blue-ribbon commission that reached the same conclusions might have delivered the same results.

Similarly, we might also ask whether the Assemblies were successful not because they galvanised public opinion, but rather because they amplified it and provided a timely channel to reach official ears and overcome a longstanding parliamentary impasse. In this respect, they succeeded as a tool to consolidate democratic legitimacy, rather than as a source for original insight or the cultivation of new sensibilities.

To agree would not be to diminish the utility of Citizens' Assemblies, but instead to better understand their use within a specific context. A pragmatic and considered appreciation of Ireland's success reminds us that assemblies aren't cure-alls but rather tools to promote greater inclusion in our democratic processes. This point might also help temper some of the fervour among assembly enthusiasts.

It's striking that over the course of their now decade-long venture, Suiter and Farrell have focused on bolstering Ireland's existing parliamentary architecture and have never claimed to supersede it. In their capable hands, democratic deliberation is a complementary political project and not, refreshingly, a heroic one.

As citizens' assemblies now enter Ireland's mainstream and institutionalised political culture, we can wonder whether they will fall prey to the same public cynicism suffered by parliament or instead become a durable and trusted source for democratic legitimacy. The answer may depend on their ability to bring their extraordinary experiment to scale, which will ultimately determine whether citizens' assemblies remain a relative rarity — used only in extraordinary political circumstances — or else become a feature not only of Ireland's political system, but of democratic citizenship itself.

Sanyal, Paromita., and Rao, Vijayendra. (2019). *Oral Democracy: Deliberation in Indian Village Assemblies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

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Oral Democracy: Deliberation in Indian Village Assemblies sheds light on the role of talk in the world's largest democracy. The book focuses on the constitutionally mandated practice of holding village assemblies — *gram sabhas* — , and examines how such assemblies can foster civic virtues necessary for democratic deepening.

The book begins with the premise that oral competence is a skill that 'is unequally distributed across social strata and policy regimes' (179). *Gram sabhas*, therefore, can serve as discursive spaces which temporarily reverse the power relations between the rich and the poor, the state and its citizens through deliberation. In these forums, citizens have the power to challenge authority and deliver grievances of their personal hardship while the state commits to respond to these grievances or explain the rationale behind the allocation of resources.

Paromita Sanyal (an Associate Professor of Sociology at Florida State University) and Vijayendra Rao (the Lead Economist in the Development Research Group at World Bank) make a compelling case for the democratic potential of *gram sabhas*. What makes their discussion rich and nuanced is their critical assessment of how exactly the potential of these forums is realised in practice. The study draws from '298 transcripts of village asssemblies from four neighbouring states in Southern India recorded between 2003–2004' (15). The book offers a range of critical insights that enrich the empirical scholarship on deliberative democracy. Here are some highlights.

First, there are diverse kinds of speech taking place in these forums. Most talk involves citizens' drawing attention to their everyday needs such as roads, drinking water, electricity or housing subsidies. Other forms of talk take an adversarial tone by holding officials accountable for their failures. For example, in Dakshin Kannada, Karnataka, the official was accused of not keeping the promise of informing villagers of the government programmes and budgets before *gram sabha*.

Others, meanwhile, sought to '[transform] individuals with private interests into citizens with public interests' (41), as in the case of different caste groups struggling for dignity and material benefits during the allocation of resources. Deliberators are assumed to be rational beings capable of articulating arguments without considering financial hardship. However, villagers in the *gram sabha* struggled to talk their way out of the poverty due to their different levels of wealth and literacy. Deliberative democracy in the real world is thus tightly connected to the issues of poverty and development that researchers often ignore.

Second, the practices of *gram sabhas* vary across India due to different levels of socio-economic development and local conditions. In some regions, local governments are less enthusiastic, which lowers the deliberative capacity of these assemblies. Under these circumstances citizens were passive, and the state was a mere collector of complaints. For the regions with a higher capacity to deliberate, the state acted like a planner while citizens were the benefit invigilators. For villages between high and low capacities of deliberation, the state could be a social reformer, scrutiniser or informant, and citizens would react accordingly depending on the different roles played by the state. The variations observed in this study remind readers that deliberation unfolds differently in

different contexts and that outcomes are not uniform, since they rely on existing levels of deliberative capacity.

The level of literacy also determines the performance of *gram sabhas*. In low-literacy communities, citizens tend to be passive, inclined to be led by elites or rude to the public authority when they cannot articulate their demands well. In medium literacy communities, citizens were found to be slightly more articulate, while they were most knowledgeable — and thus sufficiently well-informed to challenge the public authority with hostility — in high-literacy communities. As formal literacy can make a massive difference in *gram sabhas*, the state can constructively mitigate the issue of illiteracy by actively engaging with how *gram sabhas* are structured.

Although the authors demonstrate many limitations of *gram sabhas*, they also identify precisely how these forums deepen local democracy. They beautifully catch moments when the poor suddenly realise their bargaining power against the state or when citizens challenge the public authority. For instance, a villager in Beerjepalli, Shoolagiri, managed to relate local hygiene issues to the lack of funding for infrastructure and the incompetence of the local government. In addition to the power inversion between the state and citizens, the authors emphasise the role of the state in contributing to the deepening of local democracy. By providing 'the authoritative source of public information' (184), the state actively bridges the gap of information asymmetries and delivers the required knowledge for resource allocation and the policymaking process. State agents sometimes even condemn villagers for assuming public goods as free resources and refusing to pay taxes. The authors' efforts in patiently recording *gram sabhas* at a large scale have set a tremendous standard for studies of deliberative democracy. Every lesson learned from a village assembly can inspire many villages around the world suffering from illiteracy and poverty to innovate democratic practice.

The book undoubtedly makes an important contribution to the field of deliberative democracy, though it misses one key opportunity: an analysis of the impact of these village assemblies in the macropolitical public sphere. As *gram sabhas* are analysed as distinct practices of village assemblies across the nation, the book has little to say about the impact of these forums on the level of the deliberative system. How, for example, can the success of *gram sabhas* in one village influence and shape the character of *gram sabhas* in other villages? How does the gradual improvement of villages make an impact on politics at the provincial or national level? Do village assemblies have an impact on electoral politics and regime change?

In studies of democratisation, scholars tend to maintain that no matter how corrupt, unfair or manipulated elections are, giving people the power to vote gives them a chance to subvert the power relations between the ruler and the ruled. Employing a similar rationale, we could conclude that no matter how illiterate or impoverished people are, giving them the power to speak could potentially overcome inequalities in oral competency, suspend power relations, challenge public authority and foster civic virtue. *Oral Democracy* shows us this possibility without conceding to naïve optimism.

Briand, Michael. (2019). *Beyond Liberalism: Toward a Purpose-Guided Democracy*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger

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Beyond Liberalism: Toward a Purpose-Guided Democracy is a timely, accessible response to political issues that trouble contemporary liberal democracy. Michael Briand argues that as society moves away from deliberative democracy, it ceases to function ethically. He explains that deliberative discourse, where citizens 'work toward our judgement about the best course of action by seeking and considering information that is relevant, accurate, sufficient, and illuminating,' is one of the essential elements of ethical thinking (128). Ethical thinking enacts reciprocity; and reciprocity is a moral principle that citizens in a democracy must accept (145). When deliberation, ethical thinking and reciprocity are nonexistent, democracy loses an ethical viewpoint and mutual commitment to others' needs, and is unable to meet the needs of the society.

Briand invites readers to revisit the foundational ideals of liberalism. He argues that while liberalism is a pivotal achievement, 'it has reached the limits of its ability, without further modification and supplementation, to continue meeting our most important needs in the face of unprecedented change and complexity' (ix). Currently, liberalism provides individuals in the United States with a negative view, not only of individual rights and responsibilities — we do not want our rights infringed on and believe people should be allowed to have pluralistic viewpoints and lifestyles — but also of our responsibilities to our communities. To support this argument, Briand outlines the values, beliefs and history of liberalism to make a case that deliberative ethics can save our modern democracy, which is built on liberalism.

The introduction of the book is a helpful overview of what Briand argues are the problematic elements of liberalism caused by our lack of deliberation in decision making. He explains that while there are aspects of liberalism that are undeniably praiseworthy, two of its historically foundational elements have provoked adverse reactions and are the source of societal turmoil: atomism and subjectivism (xv–xvii). Atomism and subjectivism reinforce our default method for personal decision making and resolving interpersonal conflict: the principle of freedom. However, these ideas do not have a standard, such as ethics, for individuals to decide what to do or how to prioritise different values when they are in conflict.

When there is no ethical standard for decision making, humans are often driven by egoism and the satisfaction of their own desires rather than the needs of their communities. In situations when the focus is on personal

rights and responsibilities, they end up disillusioned, wondering, 'Is this all there is?' (xiv). Briand argues we should switch the question to consider the impact our decisions have on others by asking, 'How should we live?' (xiv). By answering the latter question, democratic persons create a space where people can participate in 'ethical heroism' by devoting themselves to finding their own wellbeing within their pursuance of the wellbeing of everyone. Briand argues for a sustained, inclusive, public and ethical practice of dialogue and deliberation. By proposing the use of ethical heroism, this book provides the readers with one solution to how citizens can work to secure their identity and find a more reliable foundation for their beliefs of right and wrong than subjective, personal opinion.

The book is written for a wide variety of audiences who are interested in deliberative democracy, ethics and civic engagement. This text is accessible to a citizen who wants to use it as a strategic manual to further engage with democracy and civic reform. It also emphasises theoretical and technical aspects of argument in a way that scholars studying deliberative democracy and liberalism would find useful. While the chapters are not divided into major sections, the author structures the book logically by first offering an in-depth overview of the problems of liberalism, then making an argument for the necessity of ethics playing a primary role in generating solutions, before outlining an ethical perspective and finally justifying Briand's solution of ethical heroism.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 argue that the current liberal conceptualisation of individualism threatens democracy; therefore, Briand offers an alternative: Americans should instead practise individuality. He draws on John Stuart Mill's notion of 'the free development of individuality' to argue for the need for a more ethical, constructive individuality where choices are not just made to benefit the self, but also to lessen negative consequences for others (12). Chapters 2 and 3 examine what counts as a negative consequence, how someone decides what justifies the restriction of their freedom and how personal autonomy can be a resource for expressing one's individuality. These chapters help unpack problems of how the practices of liberalism are currently manifested in democracy.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 create a cohesive argument for the necessity of ethics playing a primary role in solving the problems within the current state of liberalism. After using Chapter 4 to establish 'the essence of ethical decision making,' Briand proceeds to Chapter 5, where he defines ethics, the role of community in establishing ethical rules and the problems with rules without ethical thinking (44). Then, before he makes his case for a new ethical perspective, Briand uses Chapter 6 to argue that decision making must be informed by others and that the 'right thing to do' is what the group determines is best (63). If the reader was struggling with how to conceptualise ethics' role in liberalism, this section provides a persuasive argument to help them understand the function they fulfil.

The book reaches a climax in Chapter 7, where Briand argues that 'when good things conflict, ethical thinking requires that we adopt the ethical point of view' (65). In this chapter, Briand makes the argument for the necessity for mutual comprehension. Then, after explaining this ethical point of view, the readers are able to read through Chapter 8 to answer the question, 'what is good?' and Chapter 9 to understand how to determine 'what is right?' based on Briand's perspective. In Chapter 10, the author provides four characteristics of ethical thinking to help readers understand how to negotiate competing values ethically.

The final chapters argue that readers should think ethically and that being ethical is personally gratifying. But, beyond the personal gratification, Briand argues that, 'In thinking ethically with others, we work toward achieving our own individuality and flourishing. Thinking ethically with others is thus a constituent of a life lived well, and hence a key to the eventual achievement of happiness' (137). Throughout these two chapters, Briand establishes goodwill with his readers after establishing a strong argument about the importance of acknowledging the current problems of our liberal society. Briand offers an inspiring vision for ethical liberalism that gives readers strategies to work toward deliberative democracy.

Competing Interests

Patricia Mockler worked as an occasional facilitator with MASS LBP between 2017–2019. Filipe Motta, Kei Nishiyama, and John Rountree have no competing interests.

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