

Democratic Change and Emancipative Politics

By Balduin Weinmann

1st Thesis: Deliberative democratic practices are transformative and emancipative

- Deliberative framework by Habermas (1994) and Benhabib (1996)
- Transformative: Change of attitudes, beliefs, and relationships during deliberation
 - o Contrast to mere expression of fixed personal preferences through a voting system
- Emancipative: Increase in freedom through participation
 - o Three possible candidates for an emancipative element:
 - Power: Exercise of direct influence on personal environment
 - Increase of influence means an increase of power with more and better available choices -> increase in freedom (understood in a choice framework)
 - Not a good candidate because once a person participates their power stays roughly the same, not accumulative since it is relative
 - Social: Building unique relationships/constituting a democratic community
 - Democracy as a “way of life” cf. Dewey’s *Creative Democracy*
 - Subject is differently constituted by democratic institutions and by the democratic process -> a freer subject, but in which way?
 - Given the subject is freer once constituted then still not accumulative or rather a question of degree
 - Epistemic: Participation as a learning process which constitutes knowledge
 - Democratic practice as a mode of social inquiry to solve a specific problem (individual flourishing vs. common good) -> is accumulative!
 - Why is knowledge emancipatory? Increase in freedom through a better choice set
 - Why does participation constitute knowledge? Through new experiences, but experience alone is not enough

Critique

- Habermas: Democracy should be limited to the lifeworld because other spheres like the economic sphere have their own functional logic (cf. Selk and Jörke (2019))
 - o The scope of Dewey’s notion of democracy is too wide
 - o Counterargument: Democracy has been successfully applied to economic sphere by cooperatives. So, functional logic is not a good reason for restricting scope
- Is the justification of democracy mere instrumental as the best tool to reconcile individual and collective interests?
 - o 1st answer: Normative justification based on equality since without the recognition of others as equals there is no democratic deliberation (cf. Benhabib, Christiano (2008))
 - o 2nd answer: Accept instrumental justification, but burden of proof just shifted to the goal -> why even solve the problem of the tension between individual and collective interests? Because it is a problem that every political society confronts (cf. Prisoner’s dilemma), solving it avoids suffering/crisis, creates common benefits etc. Normative justification lies in those reasons (?)

- Challenge the deliberative model: Conflictual/contentious dimension is missing in the discursive approach -> leads to second thesis and discussion of social movements

2nd Thesis: Emancipatory social movements lead to transformation in form of democratization when successful (cf. Dewey's endorsement of experimental political action)

- What is an emancipatory social movement?
 - o Emancipatory: goal includes an increase in freedom/reduction of oppression
 - o Problem: Premise of a movement being emancipatory already includes democratic aspirations
 - Not obvious, many movements would say they fight for freedom and not necessarily for democracy
- Democratization: overcoming barriers to participation in the parliamentary system and in the community
 - o Cf. civil rights movement
 - o Goal of becoming part of the deliberation process
- Example: Labor movement leads to democratizing the workplace but in different degrees
 - o Weak participation through influencing legislation regarding worker rights and labor markets regulations -> increase in bargaining power
 - o Stronger participation through unions and worker councils
 - o Strong participation through cooperativism which implies a different notion of private property

Critique

- Social movements which use tools like civil disobedience do not lead to democratization since they are already part of a democratic practice which is protected by basic rights cf. Celikates' *Rethinking Civil Disobedience*
 - o Civil disobedience can be a democratic practice and at the same time lead to democratization
- Climate movement is not an emancipative movement since the fulfillment of their goals can be in principle achieved without systemic change or overcoming barriers to participation, but excluding the strongest contemporary movement from the account would weaken it
 - o Dismissal of climate movement exhibits democratic deficits by not integrating in the deliberative process those who are affected the most (e.g. global south)

Suppose both theses are true:

- Reductionism: Movements concerning race, class, or gender have in common the goal of democratization while focusing on different barriers – self understanding as democratic movement as a basis for coalition building
- Leads to specific notion of democracy and social transformation
 - o Necessary connection between both
 - o Constant transformation through democracy
- If the 1st thesis is true, why do we need social movements? A full engagement in democratic practices should then be enough for emancipatory change
 - o Role of democratic deficits since many cannot fully engage in democratic practices -> overcoming them is only possible from the outside of the parliamentary system since fully participating groups have no immediate incentive to abolish barriers