

Review: Deliberative Environmental Politics: Democracy and Ecological Rationality

By Walter F. Baber and Robert V. Bartlett

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Deliberative democracy has with unusual alacrity become a popular shibboleth within such diverse fields as science and technology assessment, international development practice and, crucially, global environmental protection efforts. Multilateral aid donors, national governments, and public agencies who frame public policies in science, technology and the environment, have all sought to incorporate deliberation within their programs with the hope that it translates into "better" democratic implementation than characterized by "business as usual" liberal democracy. This frame shift in public policies, according to the authors, is matched within "the theory of democracy [by] a strong deliberative turn in recent decades" (p. 6). This book successfully brings a strong analytical focus to bear on the potential of deliberative democratic instances to foster the development of an ecological reasoning. The authors categorize the disparate "participants within this theoretical dance" into at least three significant models - "one anchored in the theory of justice of John Rawls; a second derived from the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas; and a third advanced by Bohman, Gutmann and Thompson ... that embraces and seeks to realize the traditional tenets of liberal constitutionalism" (p. 6-7).

The book is divided into two sections, each of which maps the threefold classification of deliberative democracy the authors have assumed. The first section, composed of chapters 3-6, launches an intense theoretical inquiry by subjecting each typology of deliberative environmental democracy to a menu of analytical queries: what are the prerequisites? What counts as success in deliberation? What is the style of reasoning for public deliberation? What are the roles of experts? (p 33). The second section, consisting

of chapters 7-11, adopt as less theoretically demanding style sprinkled with illustrative examples in order to outline the insertion of the theoretical project of environmental deliberation within established liberal democracy and institutions of the administrative state (p 121). The authors assemble architectures of institutional arenas, with roles assigned for citizens, experts and social movements as per the three-fold schema, which attempt participative environmental deliberation and adjudication. Various strategies such as political decentralization, administrative partnerships such as policy dialogs and citizen juries, and arenas for enhanced civic politics are some examples of the institutionalization of environmental deliberation that the authors feel are required (p.125-142). Experts and social movements, according to the authors, are "problematic but still desirable participants" (p.185) who require special arrangements to be integrated into the deliberative process without damaging the reasoning process that is central to it.

Through some lucid theoretical reasoning, and pertinent examples of deliberative institutions and expertise, the authors have presented an excellent and optimistic exposition of the challenges and requirements in designing architecture of deliberated environmental decision making. The authors do acknowledge that their overly optimistic characterizations of the incipience of discursive designs ignore its existence within a hostile landscape of markets, bureaucracies and established political institutions (p 203) but believe that constructing durable deliberative arenas of collective will-formation is entirely possible (p. 232). This well-crafted work on environmental deliberation will be of interest to advanced students of political philosophy, environmental politics, and public administration in general, but will also enlighten public policy practitioners, environmentalists and decision makers.

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