AUTHOR(S):

TITLE:

YEAR:

Publisher citation:

OpenAIR citation:

CHAPTER 2

Inequality and deliberative democracy

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As is clear from the Introduction and other chapters in this book, the meaning of deliberative democracy has been debated, deliberated over and contested over the years. Debates about the meaning of the concept continue. I shall not consider the arguments in this chapter, however. Instead, I shall summarise what I think are the core features of deliberative democracy and the areas where I think there continue to be debates and differences among scholars of deliberative democracy. This will establish the background for a consideration of the relationship between deliberative democracy and (in)equality.

It is probably fair to say that there is much agreement among writers that deliberative democracy represents a situation where participants can be swayed by the reasons, arguments and justifications of others, and participants give reasons, arguments or justifications in support of their positions in a reciprocal manner. There are debates, however, about the role that 'non-cognitive' reasons and emotions should play within deliberative democracy. Deliberation, as opposed to democratic deliberation, does not necessitate inclusion of all opinions on the subject under deliberation and groups who will be affected. With deliberative democracy, however, the inclusion of all interests and opinions is generally seen as essential. Debates continue about whether deliberative democracy is compatible with self-interest and whether deliberative democracy demands consensus between participants, though most writers on deliberative democracy today would not regard consensus as an essential element of deliberative democracy (for a consideration of these issues see, for example, Mansbridge et al., 2010 and Thompson, 2008). There is another approach to deliberative democracy, based around the contestation of discourses. I shall look at this approach later in the chapter.

If core features of deliberative democracy include the giving of reasons, arguments and justifications for their opinions by participants in a 'political' interaction, in a reciprocal way, and a willingness to be swayed by the strength of the arguments presented by other participants; and if it is also based on the inclusion of all opinions and interests relevant to the subject, how does deliberative democracy relate to questions of inequality? To address this general issue, I shall consider a number of related questions. Can deliberative democracy hope to achieve the inclusiveness that it is seen as demanding, given that participation in political activities, such as voting to elect political representatives, in many

countries, achieves figures far short of 100 per cent (IDEA International, 2009) and voting turnout often reflects major social differences between those who do and those who do not participate? This raises important issues of motivation. Why should those who currently benefit from 'non-deliberative' processes, in terms of the exercise of power and material advantage, agree to participate in processes of deliberative democracy that might threaten their exercise of power and the benefits that accrue from it? This raises questions about whether deliberative democracy can be institutionalised. If deliberative democracy is institutionalised, what guarantees can there be that the powerful in society will abide by the requirements of deliberative democracy in practice? Will deliberative democracy always work in favour of the educated and the articulate, those who know how to operate within the 'rules of the game', and against the interest of the less well educated, the inarticulate and those who feel uncomfortable with the deliberative democracy rules of the game? Would deliberative democracy, if fully instituted, demand too much of some social groups: for example, those in paid employment who also have caring responsibilities? Can deliberative democracy only be achieved if social justice and social equality exist? In the rest of this chapter, I shall consider these questions.

Can deliberative democracy achieve inclusivity?

Deliberative democracy is generally seen as demanding that all interests which will be affected by an issue and all opinions on the issue should be included. This is in line with the 'all-affected principle' which is seen by some as an essential element of democracy (cf. Fraser, 2005). It is argued, however, that this will never be achieved as some social groups will always participate more in politics than others. Turnout in 'political elections' can be used to support this contention. Let us take as an example the turnout in general elections in the United Kingdom. Based on a survey of citizen participation in Britain, Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2003: 632–3) argue that the 'well-resourced' (those with good educational qualifications and high incomes) participate more in formal politics (including in elections) and civil society activity than those who are 'less well resourced' (lack educational qualifications and have low incomes). Britain is not unusual in experiencing such outcomes. Similar outcomes occur in a number of other countries (see Dalton, 2006; Hay, 2007: 19–20). Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2004: 282) end their consideration of the conditions under which active citizenship can thrive by warning of the dangers extreme inequality presents to this. They argue:

> Civic values are best protected by an egalitarian ethic which emphasises social inclusion. The fact that everyone's vote counts the same in a democracy provides legitimacy to governance. If individuals are marginalised in a system that depends increasingly on financial power in the marketplace rather than voting

power in the *polis*, then citizenship will be fatally weakened. In an extreme case government itself will be seen as irrelevant in such a system, as the well resourced attempt to buy their way out of the insecurities produced by extreme inequality and social exclusion, and the excluded fight back against the injustices resulting from these developments.

This argument has relevance beyond voting in political elections and is potentially an important obstacle to the achievement of deliberative democracy. Inequality has grown around the world in recent years and, in some cases, considerably (cf. Therborn, 2006). Such a climate is hardly ideal for the advancement of deliberative democracy.

One possible way around the problem of the underrepresentation of individuals from certain social groups is to ensure that all affected interests and social groups, if not individuals, are represented. This is what citizens' juries and some other deliberative mechanisms try to achieve, in respect of social group representation, through the use of stratified random sampling. Ensuring that all opinions on a subject are represented is much more difficult, as people are not included because of their opinions but because of their social position. It might be argued that the use of experts and specialists to give information and opinions to jurors who can question the experts and specialists can ensure that all opinions on the subject are considered. This does not ensure, however, that, in their deliberations, jurors will give the same importance to all the views they hear. If none of the jurors initially supported an opinion, that opinion might not get much of a hearing in their subsequent deliberations even if the facilitator tried to ensure that this happened.

Why should the powerful support deliberative democracy?

If deliberative democracy is to mean more than the ad hoc use of citizens' juries, consensus conferences and citizens' assemblies to contribute to policy development on specific issues, then non-deliberative mechanisms in the public policy process will either have to be adapted, replaced or integrated into a system that is dominated overall by mechanisms that promote deliberative democracy. This raises issues about how this can be achieved in a society where there are substantial inequalities of power. Cohen and Rogers (2003) address this issue in their response to the case studies on Empowered Participatory Governance contained in Fung and Wright's book *Deepening Democracy*. They argue that, if power imbalances exist between participants, those with the greater power will be able to pressurise others to accept their view of the world (or the subject under discussion). Deliberation, where the views of all participants count equally, may not require complete equality of power between participants but large-scale inequalities of power may inevitably distort such deliberation. Political equality is widely seen as a crucial element of democracy. While there have been debates

about whether political equality requires social equality, it has generally been accepted by scholars that liberal democracy can exist without social equality and that political equality can be divorced from wider social inequality. The work of Pattie et al. outlined above, however, and the arguments of Phillips (1999) give cause to question this. More specifically, the argument of Cohen and Rogers raises strong questions about whether deliberative democracy is achievable where there is large-scale social inequality. As Cohen and Rogers (2003: 248) put it, the powerful are unlikely to engage in deliberation:

> They will recognize, to paraphrase Hobbs, that reasons without the sword are just words with no force to tie anyone's hands. So actors with sufficient power to advance their aims without deliberating will not bother to deliberate. Or if for some reason they formally agree to deliberation, we can expect them only to offer 'reasons' for action that in fact are purely self-serving proposals.

Fung and Wright (2003a: 259–60) accept the force of the argument of Cohen and Rogers. They recognise that power inequalities can undermine deliberation. They, therefore, argue that for Empowered Participatory Governance (which can be seen as in line with deliberative democracy) to be successfully implemented, countervailing power needs to be in evidence. They say 'the key question, then, is whether or not it is plausible that the required kind of countervailing power can emerge in the contexts of EPG [Empowered Participatory Governance] institutions to enable them to function in a robust, sustainable manner'. They raise the question of whether the idea of countervailing power is compatible with ideas of deliberative democracy, as it is usually seen as based around the issuing of threats and the mobilisation of people in opposition, rather than the use of reason. They conclude, however, that countervailing power is compatible with ideas of deliberative democracy and that, indeed, EPG depends on it. They argue that achieving collaborative countervailing power is very difficult in many cases. I shall not consider their specific arguments on this subject but will stress that the question of inequalities of power, and that countervailing power may be needed to overcome the distorting impact of power inequalities, makes the development of successful deliberative institutional designs even more difficult. This is particularly the case if Fung and Wright (2003a: 267) are correct that, generally, even the most robust rules and procedures will not on their own ensure the inclusion of collaborative countervailing power: 'Appropriate institutional design can facilitate the rise and entry of countervailing voices. However, explanations of their presence and strength are separate from, though linked to, questions about the shape of collaborative institutions themselves.'

Przeworski (1998) has argued that, where interactions are about the means to achieve certain ends, rather than the determination of ends, the less powerful can be ideologically dominated by the more powerful, as well as by the organised and the articulate. In such cases, Przeworski (1998: 141) argues, decisions

are generally on technical matters where some will be able to give the impression that they are more knowledgeable than others. The less powerful may end up supporting positions that do not reflect their interests. (For a consideration of the role of experts in deliberative democracy see Chapter 3, 'Expertise and deliberative democracy', by Mark Brown.)

Can deliberative democracy be institutionalised?

The questions surrounding whether the powerful will engage in deliberation with the less powerful feed into issues surrounding the institutionalisation of deliberative democracy. There are debates between scholars about what the institutionalisation of deliberative democracy would involve. Some, like Dryzek (2000, 2010), support the development of a system dominated by discourses. In this view, the aim should be to produce a political system where different discourses are considered and compete for influence. It is the access to different discourses that is crucial in this approach. For Dryzek (2000: 18):

> A discourse is a shared means of making sense of the world embedded in language. Any discourse will always be grounded in assumptions, judgement, contentions, dispositions, and capabilities. These shared terms of reference enable those who subscribe to a particular discourse to perceive and compile bits of sensory information into coherent stories or accounts that can be communicated in intersubjectively meaningful ways. Thus a discourse will generally revolve around a central storyline, containing opinions about both facts and values.

This approach rests on 'a conception of democracy that emphasizes the construction of public opinion through the contestation of discourses and its transmission to the state via communicative means, including rhetoric' (2000: 4). How this transmission takes place, or might take place, is not completely clear. (In recent work, Dryzek and Niemeyer (2010: 42–65) have proposed the establishment of a chamber of discourses but questions about the accountability of the chamber to 'the people' and its role in the public policy process remain.) In so far as Dryzek's approach may be lacking in a completely clear and entirely convincing picture of how the contestation of discourses will link into a democratic public policy process, it can be subjected to the same criticisms as the two-track approach of Habermas (1996) where public opinion is constructed through deliberation in the informal public sphere and is taken up, in a largely unspecified way, by the people's elected political representatives. This approach can also be criticised from a Marxist perspective for failing sufficiently to recognise that, in a capitalist society, the discourses that oppose, or are critical of the workings of, capitalism will find it very difficult to get the same hearing as pro-capitalist discourses (cf. Miliband, 1973: 196–213). Moreover, in a society with widespread inequality, what can be termed for short 'anti-capitalist' discourses

will struggle to be accepted by public policy-makers, given the imperatives of the state to maintain capital accumulation and the conditions for the successful operation of private businesses – a point that Dryzek himself has, at least in part, accepted (Dryzek, 1996). (For further consideration of this issue, see Chapter 1, 'Conflict and deliberation', by Georgina Blakeley.)

This discourse view, however, is only one wing of the 'deliberative democracy school' and not the most popular. Other approaches are more concerned with how the type of principles associated with deliberative democracy, and set out at the beginning of this chapter, might inform the whole political system. This is not necessarily incompatible with some element of democratically elected representation. The aim is to produce a system where the interactions between participants in the making and implementation of public policy are dominated by the reciprocal giving of reasons, arguments or justifications in support of positions, where people are swayed by the force of the arguments they hear and willing to change their positions on the basis of strong arguments and where all interests and opinions are included in the deliberation. Developing institutions that reflect these principles is an important part of this commitment. A number of writers in recent years have argued that 'institutionalising deliberative democracy' is the major task ahead for academic supporters of deliberative democracy (Elster, 1998; Fung and Wright, 2003b; Smith, 2003; Warren, 2007; Thompson, 2008 and Elstub, 2010a). Given large-scale social inequalities, however, it might be asked whether this is possible. If one of the reasons for supporting deliberative democracy is that it is likely to produce more just policies, then there are reasons to believe that deliberative democracy may not be universally popular. The socially powerful, whose power tends to be connected to their wealth, their sex (men are more likely to be socially powerful than women) and their ethnic origin, and who are gaining from the existing non-deliberative democracy are, as Cohen and Rogers argue, likely to oppose the development of deliberative democracy, especially if they see it as potentially threatening their power, their wealth and their other privileges. There is no intrinsic reason to believe that the opposition of the powerful cannot be overcome in liberal democracies but there is also no reason to believe that doing so will be easy.

If, for the sake of argument, we assume that deliberative democracy can be institutionalised, that does not mean that deliberative democracy will automatically follow. Establishing the right institutions may be a necessary condition for deliberative democracy but it is not a sufficient condition. As Shapiro (2003: 48) has argued:

> It is doubtful … that government can ever really insist that people deliberate. Government can try to structure things so as to make deliberation more or less likely, but ultimately deliberation depends on individual commitment. By its terms, deliberation requires solicitous goodwill, creative ingenuity, and a desire to get the best answer. These cannot be mandated.

From the concerns of this chapter, the question is whether large-scale inequality will prevent the powerful from having the motivation to deliberate. As has been shown, Cohen and Rogers are doubtful that the powerful will have the right motivation. If they are correct, the point becomes whether they can be made to participate in a deliberative fashion. A number of writers on deliberation have argued that the motivations of participants are not crucial in determining whether deliberative democracy occurs. Habermas (2006b: 419–20), for example, has argued that, if the institutions are right, then deliberation will follow. He argues:

> Players on the virtual stage of the public sphere can be classified in terms of the power or 'capital' they have at their disposal. The stratification of opportunities to transform power into public influence through the channels of mediated communication thus reveals a power structure. This power is constrained, however, by the peculiar reflexivity of a public sphere that allows all participants to reconsider what they receive as public opinion. The common construct of public opinion certainly invites actors to intervene strategically in the public sphere. However, the unequal distribution of the means for such interventions does not necessarily distort the formation of considered public opinions. Strategic interventions in the public sphere must, unless they run the risk of inefficiency, play by the rules of the game. *And once the established rules constitute the right game – one that promises the generation of considered public opinions – then even the powerful actors will only contribute to the mobilization of relevant issues, facts, and arguments.* [emphasis added]

From a slightly different angle, Thompson (2008) also argues that the motivations of participants in deliberative democracy are not crucial. For him, if a participant gives reasons for his or her opinions that other participants can engage with in a reciprocal manner, the motives of the person for giving those reasons do not matter.

Theory alone will never determine which of the arguments is correct. It seems justified to say, however, that some institutions, where the initial differences between the participants are great, the participants are expected and encouraged to engage in strategic bargaining, participants have much to gain or loose, and the powerful participants have an effective veto, can make deliberation almost impossible. Institutions do matter. But it has not been shown that institutions are *all* that matter.

Another argument that suggests that getting the right institutions may not ensure deliberative democracy is provided by writers who argue that societies should not make too many demands on people to engage in politics. This type of argument is put forward by Weale (1999: 54–102) who maintains that, while politics is an important aspect of life, it is not the only commitment that people have, and it is unreasonable to expect people to prioritise political activity over all other activities. It is extremely likely that a system of deliberative democracy would expect people to participate more in politics than is generally the case in

liberal democracies where the hope is that people will vote periodically in political elections and little more is expected. It can be questioned, however, whether deliberative democracy would demand so much participation from individuals that it interfered with other social or personal commitments. At present, in most liberal democracies, people's engagement in politics is small, and in some cases non-existent. There is surely space for most adults to participate more in politics. Occasionally participating on a citizens' jury or its equivalent would not seem an unreasonable expectation and surely would not have fatal results for the economy or for people's lives more generally.

That said, one aspect of social inequality may well have an impact on this issue. It is common in advanced capitalist societies for women to have greater domestic and caring responsibilities than men. It may, therefore, be much easier for most men to find the time to engage more fully in politics than most women. And it may be easier for middle-class women, who can afford to pay for care while they take part in political activities, than it is for working-class women who may well lack the resources to buy help with their caring responsibilities. There are two possible ways round this: the caring responsibilities could be shared more equally between women and men and people could be paid to engage in political activities. Whether the state is willing to pay people to engage in politics would probably depend on the general importance that political activity was seen as playing in the society, and that cannot be determined in the abstract. It should be noted that, in some cases in some countries, people are paid for participating in deliberative events.

Will deliberative democracy mean the rule of the articulate and the highly educated?

It has long been recognised that those with good educational qualifications have a strong tendency to participate more fully in politics in liberal democracies than those who have few educational qualifications (Dalton, 2006; Hay, 2007). The well educated are seen as having largely unintended political advantages in these societies. It is argued that promoting deliberative democracy would only increase the advantages of the educated 'middle-class', even further. This is because those who have had a university education have gained the skills on which deliberative democracy thrived. In other words, they are articulate, tend to be unafraid of speaking in public and expressing their views, and understand the 'rules of the game' that are associated with deliberative democracy or find it easy to accommodate to the rules. Perhaps the most consistent critic who argued in this style was Iris Marion Young. Young did not criticise deliberative democracy because she thought it was, in principle, undesirable but because she thought it would not be sufficiently democratic and would not help to empower or improve the position of the most disadvantaged in advanced capitalist

societies. In a series of works, Young (1996: 129–32; 2000: 57–77) argued that people from minority ethnic groups, women, and working-class men would be disadvantaged under deliberative democracy as it was generally proposed. She did not suggest that the traditional institutions of liberal democracy were a satisfactory alternative to deliberative democracy. Instead, she argued that the processes of deliberative democracy should be amended so that people from disadvantaged social groups could participate more easily and play a bigger part.

For her, it was crucial to recognise how socially and politically disadvantaged groups communicated. She, therefore, called for greeting, storytelling and rhetoric to become an accepted part of deliberative democracy. Without a change in the rules of the deliberative democracy game, Young argued, deliberative democracy would prove unacceptable. Her work in this area produced a wideranging debate. Miller (2000), for example, denied the distinction, made by Young, between reason and emotion. For Miller (2000: 153) 'all political speech and argument must convey the feelings and commitments of the speaker, but must also give reasons either positively for some proposal or negatively against some alternative (which might just be the status quo)'. He argued that rhetoric is more likely to benefit the advantaged, rather than the disadvantaged, and 'because rhetoric conceals rather than reveals the grounds on which decisions are taken, it is less likely than reasoned argument to produce socially just policies' (Miller, 2000: 156). For Miller (2000: 155–6), testimony has two drawbacks: it is often very difficult to know if the testimony of one person is reflective of the experience of others; and adding together individual testimonies is unlikely to provide a solution to problems the testimonies are expressing. Others, however, have taken on board Young's arguments, and now see storytelling and emotional justifications as, in principle, compatible with deliberative democracy (cf. Mansbridge et al., 2010).

Some argue, however, that, even if the definition of deliberative democracy is extended, it is still likely that it will favour some and not others. One writer who takes this approach is Hooghe (1999). He makes a number of points against the practicality of deliberative democracy. One of these is the importance of cultural hegemony. If the term is used as it was originally developed by Gramsci, he argues, then we have to accept that the rules of the game operate in the interests of the advantaged elite. He writes that:

> It is not possible to think of a speech situation in which literally everybody has an equal chance to get his or her voice heard. Even in our efforts to conceive such an ideal speech situation we will always be influenced by our own class, gender and culture. (Hooghe 1999: 292)

As a supporter of Walzer's theory of complex equality, he argues that deliberative democracy could only possibly work in a society that is egalitarian to an extent which has never been seen, certainly in the modern world. His criti-

cism of the practical impact of trying to achieve deliberative democracy goes even further. He argues that deliberative democracy goes against the insights developed by Walzer (1983) in his idea of complex equality, where those who benefit in one area of social life cannot use those benefits to gain advantage in other areas of social life and, therefore, different people will benefit in different areas or spheres. For Walzer there is no single unifying principle that determines how benefits and burdens will be distributed across society. Each sphere of society should have its own defining principle of distribution. For Hooghe (1999: 293–4), deliberative democracy falls foul of this understanding. It privileges the articulate middle class, and would continue to do so, in Hooghe's view, even if greeting, storytelling and rhetoric were included, when the skill of being able to argue most convincingly is more appropriate in the scientific or educational spheres. In other words, members of the educated middle class are able to take skills developed in the educational sphere and apply them to the political arena where they are inappropriate. This would undermine the equality of the vote in electing political representatives and represents, in Hooghe's argument, a retrograde step.

A number of criticisms has been made of Walzer's approach to justice (cf. Miller and Walzer, 1995). Whether or not this is an attractive theory of justice, however, will not be considered here; it will simply be accepted that it is. Instead, the focus will be on whether deliberative democracy is compatible with the theory. Does deliberative democracy really favour the well-educated, articulate members of society, who are relaxed about speaking in public, at the expense of the less well educated, the inarticulate and those who are not so happy about speaking in public?

In response to this criticism, it might be pointed out that liberal democracies tend to be dominated by the economically successful, the well educated and the articulate who are happy speaking in public. Taking Britain as an example, the overwhelming majority of MPs in the House of Commons have degrees and/or occupied professional or managerial positions before they entered Parliament (cf. Hackett and Hunter, 2011). Critics might reasonably reply, however, that deliberative democracy claims to overcome the weaknesses of liberal democracy by promoting a more inclusive form of democracy which strengthens ideas of political equality. Moreover, this is irrelevant, it can be argued, to a discussion of whether deliberative democracy is compatible with Walzer's theory of complex equality. In reply, it might be argued that some deliberative mechanisms, such as citizens' juries, consensus conferences and planning cells, make use of facilitators or moderators to try to ensure that participants do deliberate and that some participants do not dominate the discussion at the expense of others. (See Chapter 10, 'Mini-publics', by Stephen Elstub for a full discussion of the role of facilitators and moderators.) Provided, therefore, that the membership of deliberative democracy institutions is representative of the major social groups,

and assuming facilitators and moderators perform their roles successfully, in principle, there is no reason why at least some deliberative democracy mechanisms should be dominated by a particular section of society. Admittedly these are big assumptions as has been shown earlier. It would be foolish, however, to deny that any activity where the giving of reasons, the construction of convincing arguments, the uncovering of flaws in arguments, and the presentation of opinions in public will favour those who have had a training in those activities. As those skills will always be crucial elements of democratic politics, and especially deliberative democracy, and they are generally developed through a good formal education, the case for improving the formal education of the most educationally disadvantaged would seem to be important even if some degree of educational inequality continues. This may be a case where improving the position of the least advantaged may be more important then trying to achieve substantive equality.

It can be questioned, however, whether the articulate having an influence over decisions, which is disproportionate to their numbers, is really a problem for deliberative democracy. If the articulate have 'better' arguments than others, arguments that make it easier to achieve agreed goals, that incorporate all interests or reduce the chances of some people feeling that their interests have been ignored or excluded, why should not their arguments win out? It also seems patronising to suggest that people who have few educational qualifications and who are materially poor are unable to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' arguments if given the chance to do so. Problems occur, of course, when the articulate use their speaking and arguing skills to silence or marginalise the less articulate in the group, whether consciously or unconsciously. If the less articulate feel unable to express their views, then, the principles of deliberative democracy will be undermined. In reviewing the results of empirical studies on deliberative democratic events, Thompson (2008: 499) concludes 'the empirical findings are mixed or inconclusive' in showing whether the aims of deliberative democracy theorists are achieved in such events, including inclusive, egalitarian decision-making. He argues that results of deliberative events are contingent. For him, this means that theorists can use the negative findings from empirical studies to concentrate on reducing the flaws that are exposed. Yet Thompson (2008: 500) also argues: 'Theorists should not take too much comfort from the mixed or contingent character of the empirical conclusions. The conditions under which deliberative democracy thrives may be quite rare and difficult to achieve.'

Do globalisation and international inequalities make deliberative democracy less likely?

So far, the arguments in this chapter have looked at the relationship between deliberative democracy and inequality within nation states. In the world today,

however, it is argued that an increasing number of issues are decided on an international or a global level. International bodies such as the European Union, and global organisations, such as the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, the G8 and the G20, are seen as increasingly important political players. There are, of course, debates about how far these bodies have undermined the power of national governments and the extent to which they extend the power of nation states (or, at least, some of the richer and more powerful nation states) (cf. Scholte, 2005). Developments in this area are also relevant to a consideration of deliberative democracy and inequality.

It is not impossible to imagine situations where people from different countries take part on a face-to-face basis in deliberative events. This would, however, require major organising and would almost certainly be made harder by large-scale international social inequalities. If it is difficult to get poorer people and those with few educational qualifications to engage in political activities, such as political voting, in rich, advanced, capitalist societies, it is easy to see how the problems of ensuring that the poorest and the least qualified participate in international face-to-face events would be compounded. One possible way around this problem is the use of computer technology and other information and communication technologies to bring people together. Experiments in using computers to run deliberative mechanisms have been conducted (cf. Smith, 2009: 142–60). These experiments have been held in rich countries, however, and have not included any of the poorest people in the world. Even in rich, advanced, capitalist societies, access to computers tends to be unevenly distributed, with the poorer members of society and those with a limited education, as well as older people, having less access than others. These sorts of problems are, of course, made even worse if the position of people in the poorer and poorest societies in the world is taken into account. The United Nations has defined Internet use as a human right but the situation where all people have access seems a long way off. This has major implications if we see deliberative democracy as a way of creating democratic inclusiveness and ensuring that all relevant interests and opinions are included. One possible way of addressing the problem is to let people from the rich world speak for the people in the poor world or to let global international non-governmental organisations (such as Oxfam, Amnesty International and Friends of the Earth) represent the interests of people in the poor world. Without in any way wanting to disparage the work of INGOs, such as those mentioned, this seems a less than acceptable solution from a deliberative democracy perspective. (For further considerations on the issues around the 'scaling-up' of deliberative democracy, see Chapter 7, '"Scaling up" deliberation', by André Bächtiger and Alda Wegmann.)

Does deliberative democracy necessarily involve an unachievable level of equality?

As has been shown, Hooghe (1999) argues that deliberative democracy can be hoped to be achieved only if a level of substantive equality is achieved that is unknown in human history and that is unachievable. If correct, his argument is condemning. To consider the strength of the criticism, however, it is important to try to clarify what deliberative democracy does and does not involve. Some have argued that deliberative democracy means the replacement of aggregative voting, as applied in liberal democracies, with decision-making that results from deliberation between participants (cf. Squires, 2002: 133). Deliberative democracy is seen as the opposite of 'aggregative models of democracy'. Squires (2002: 133), however, goes on to write:

> [C]onsideration of most arguments in favour of deliberation reveals that what is being proposed is an augmentation of aggregative democracy with deliberation. In other words, the deliberative democracy literature does not represent a direct refutation of the liberal democratic commitment to representative democracy. Rather it suggests that we could usefully supplement this practice with others, which encourage interactive debate and the transformation of preferences.

While written a decade ago, and despite the developments in the theory and practice of deliberative democracy over the last ten years, Squires's argument can be seen as still generally correct. The extent to which deliberative democracy wants to augment liberal representative democracy, however, remains open, together with the implications of that augmentation.

As is well known, what might be called 'deliberative democracy mechanisms' have been applied by different levels of government and other organisations engaged in the public policy process in a number of countries for a number of years (cf. Fung, 2003; Smith, 2009). These mechanisms include citizens' juries, consensus conferences, planning cells, citizens' assemblies, and deliberative opinion polls. The application of such mechanisms is limited. The decisions reached by the participants are generally consultative and feed into other areas of the public policy process. (An exception to this is citizens' assemblies but, even here, the decisions of an assembly are put to the people in a referendum which either accepts or rejects the assembly recommendations.) The impact of the decisions of such initiatives on public policy is often unclear (cf. Smith, 2009; Hendriks, 2005), and the role the initiatives play in the public policy process is sometimes very limited (cf. McLaverty, 2009). The current use of such mechanisms would not generally be seen as the end point that advocates of deliberative democracy would like to reach.

Most writers on deliberative democracy are not concerned with drawing blueprints of what deliberative democracy might ultimately look like. It is

argued, and I think correctly, however, that deliberative democracy, if it is to be true to its democratic tag, must involve more of the people in democratic deliberation than is mostly the case around the world today, and it must have processes whereby the outcomes of people's deliberations are directly related to public policy decision-making (cf. Chambers, 2009). For some writers, an emphasis is placed on civil society and the extent to which it promotes deliberation and the ways in which the public opinion that is developed in civil society feeds into the formal political system (cf. Habermas, 1996 and 2006b; Chambers, 2009; Dryzek, 2000). In terms of this chapter, a crucial point in relation to this approach is the extent to which social inequalities will 'distort' communication in civil society. In a society with large-scale social inequalities, it is not unreasonable to argue that the opinions of the rich and the powerful will carry more weight than those of other people. From a Marxist perspective, it would also be argued that, in capitalist society, given the imperatives of the capitalist system, the mass media are extremely likely to give more importance to the opinions of the rich and powerful and, given the importance of the mass media, this is likely to undermine open, egalitarian deliberation in the public sphere of civil society. Moreover, there are debates about whether, in capitalist societies such as the United States, people with different political opinions are in the sort of contact that will allow deliberation to take place in civil society (cf. Mutz, 2006), and whether people want to deliberate (cf. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002) – an issue that is discussed in Chapter 9, 'The public sphere as a site of deliberation: an analysis of problems of inclusion', by Maija Setälä .

Some writers have suggested ways in which liberal democracy can be transformed to incorporate at least some direct elements of deliberative democracy (cf., for example, Parkinson, 2006a; Saward, 2003; Mansbridge et al., 2011). The proposals developed will not be considered in any detail. The idea of 'the deliberative system' has gained interest. The basic idea is that deliberative events or elements should be seen as part of a democratic system, not all of whose elements will be deliberative or comply with the principles of deliberative democracy. The overall system will, however, be deliberative. As Mansbridge et al. (2011: 35) argue, however, one of five pathologies that can infect a deliberative system is social domination. 'This arises when a particular social interest or social class controls or exerts undue influence over many parts of the deliberative system.' I think this is a major potential problem for the practical achievement of a deliberative system, in many present-day societies. The danger, in a society of large-scale inequality, is that the rich and the powerful will be able to use their positions in society to dominate a deliberative system and prevent it achieving the three functions Mansbridge et al. (2011) see as connected to a deliberative system – truth-seeking, establishing mutual respect, and inclusive, egalitarian decision-making.

In the 1970s, C. B. Macpherson (1977: 100–8) argued that, in western

capitalist societies, a vicious circle restricted the development of participatory democracy. For him, for greater democratic participation to be possible there had to be greater equality but, for greater equality to be achieved, there had to be more democratic participation. He suggested that there were some loopholes in the circle but he viewed them as no more than cracks in the edifice. Some, like Elstub (2008: 200–4), argue that a possible way out of this circle is to expand socially inclusive deliberative mechanisms into more areas of society. (He supports the development of a social system dominated by associations, run on deliberative lines.) The argument, which connects with that of Habermas above, is that, if more and more decisions are taken using deliberative processes, the rich and the powerful will have to accept this or lose influence over the decisions. If truly inclusive, the use of deliberative mechanisms will involve the poorer and less affluent members of the population. In this way, the vicious circle can be broken.

I think this view is over-optimistic. While I would not suggest that the rich and the powerful in capitalist liberal democracies will always get what they want, I do think that their power in the society, especially if it is based on ownership of the means of production, will make it difficult for governments and others to introduce decision-making processes that they think will, or even might, undermine the interests of the rich and powerful. I am not suggesting that this is impossible but it would probably need a change in social thinking among most of the population so that they explicitly supported such developments.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion, what is the relationship between deliberative democracy and inequality? There seem to be convincing reasons to believe that the achievement of a political system that might be called a deliberative democracy will be made very difficult in any society where large-scale inequalities exist. Where inequalities give political power, and where deliberative democracy is a threat to existing inequalities of power, it is likely that the powerful will oppose efforts to develop deliberative democracy. There have to be doubts, therefore, about the extent to which deliberative democracy can be instituted without much greater social equality than exists in most societies. Even if deliberative democracy could be institutionalised on a far wider scale than it is anywhere in the world, there are strong reasons to believe that the powerful would at best be wary about engaging in deliberation and would at worst refuse to do so. It is the case that those who can put forward arguments in an articulate and convincing way, uncover flaws in arguments and feel happy expressing opinions in public, whether in face-to-face settings or on the Internet, will have an advantage where principles associated with deliberative democracy are applied. The use of facilitators and moderators can help to reduce those advantages but is unlikely ever to remove

them entirely. Within civil society, it seems reasonable to question whether, without limiting inequalities, open deliberation will be the means by which 'public opinion' is established.

Does this mean that it would be sensible to abandon deliberative democracy? I do not think so. Efforts to extend any type of democracy will be hindered by large-scale social inequality. In recent years, the trend has been towards greater inequality in most parts of the world but this is not inevitable. Many countries became more equal in the years between 1945 and the 1970s. In Britain, for example, financial inequality declined from 1918 to 1980 (cf. Dorling, 2010). And there is research that suggests that more equal societies have big advantages over less equal ones (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). Such research may have political impact in the future. Moreover, elements of deliberative democracy have been implemented even in very unequal societies. My final point, however, is that substantial moves towards greater deliberative democracy will need to go hand in hand with moves to greater social equality.