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How Should We Deliberate? Between the Argumentative and the Representative Dimensions of Democratic Deliberation

Abstract: My paper focuses on an important subject of the contemporary theory of democracy: what is the relationship between the argumentative and the representative dimensions of deliberative democracy? Using James Fishkin’s account of deliberative democracy and its relations with other democratic models I will argue that there is a severe conflict between these two dimensions: the attempt to enhance the value of argumentation presupposes a decrease in the representative value and the attempt to enhance the representative value results in a decrease in the argumentative value. This conflict is generated by what I call ‘the paradox of democratic deliberation’: the legitimacy of political decisions demands for the ‘raw’ opinion of the citizens, while the epistemic rightness of political decisions demands for a ‘filtered’ public opinion. But we cannot have both. In the final part of this paper I will sustain a moderate conception regarding the role of deliberation in democracy which offers us a way around this paradox but only at the price of significantly reducing the importance of deliberation.

Keywords: deliberative democracy, argumentation, representation, paradox of democratic deliberation