
A systemic approach to deliberative democracy

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The last several decades have seen growing agreement among political theorists and empirical political scientists that the legitimacy of a democracy depends in part on the quality of deliberation that informs citizens and their representatives. Until recently, those who wanted to study and improve the quality of deliberation in democracies began with, basically, two strategies. One concentrated on deliberation in legislative bodies of all sorts and the campaigns that produce their members. The other strategy, not necessarily at odds with the first, addressed the design, promulgation, and empowerment of small deliberative initiatives in which citizens could deliberate under relatively favourable conditions.

Both of these strategies, however, focused only on individual sites and not on the interdependence of sites within a larger system. Typically, the ideal has been cast in the image of the best possible single deliberative forum. Most empirical research on deliberative democracy, accordingly, has concentrated 'either on a single episode of deliberation, as in one-time group discussions, or on a continuing series with the same group or in the same type of institution' (Thompson 2008a: 213). Yet no single forum, however ideally constituted, could possess deliberative capacity sufficient to legitimate most of the decisions and policies that democracies adopt. To

This introduction was written in a process of deliberative co-authorship led by Jane Mansbridge, who prepared the first draft from multiple contributions and oversaw the many revisions. Although each co-author, if writing independently, would no doubt present the arguments and analyses somewhat differently, the chapter represents a direction of thought to which each co-author has substantially contributed and which all collectively endorse.

understand the larger goal of deliberation, we suggest that it is necessary to go beyond the study of individual institutions and processes to examine their interaction in the system as a whole. We recognize that most democracies are complex entities in which a wide variety of institutions, associations, and sites of contestation accomplish political work – including informal networks, the media, organized advocacy groups, schools, foundations, private and non-profit institutions, legislatures, executive agencies, and the courts. We thus advocate what may be called a *systemic approach to deliberative democracy*.¹

Thinking in terms of a system offers several advantages. First, a systemic approach allows us to think about deliberative democracy in large-scale societal terms. A continual challenge for deliberative democracy theory has been the problem of scale. Face-to-face deliberation happens only in small groups. Parliamentary deliberation is confined to those forms of deliberation organized by states or subnational units. In what sense can we say that whole societies, *demos*, peoples, or even different communities deliberate together? A systemic approach allows us to think productively and creatively about this question. It expands the scale of analysis beyond the individual site and allows us to think about deliberations that develop among and between the sites over time.

The systemic approach does not dictate that we take a nation or large polity as our object of study. Schools and universities, hospitals, media, and other organizations can be understood along the lines offered by a deliberative system approach. But in allowing for the possibility of ratcheting up the scale and complexity of interrelations among the parts, this approach enables us to think about democratic decisions being taken in the context of a variety of deliberative venues and institutions, interacting together to produce a healthy deliberative system.

Second, a systemic approach allows us to analyse the division of labour among parts of a system, each with its different deliberative strengths and

¹ Habermas suggested a broad approach, compatible with a systemic one, in his earlier writing. In (1996) he advanced a 'two-track' view combining a relatively 'wild' sphere of deliberation among 'weak' publics with more formal legislative deliberation. For a recent view, see Habermas (2006). On deliberative systems, see Mansbridge (1999) introducing the term and concept of a 'deliberative system', Goodin (2005) on 'distributed deliberation', Parkinson (2006a) on 'legitimacy across multiple deliberative moments and the wider deliberative system', Hendriks (2006a) on an 'integrated deliberative system', Bohman (2007) on 'institutional differentiation' with 'multiple and intersecting processes of public deliberation', Krause (2008) on the 'different types of constraint on deliberation in each domain', Thompson (2008a) on the 'allocation of deliberation', Dryzek (2009) on 'deliberative capacity' in the system, on the 'systemic turn' in deliberative theory (in a book [2010a] largely on the deliberative system), and Neblo (2010) on elements of a deliberative system working together to 'serve the larger deliberative standard'.

weaknesses, and to conclude that a single part, which in itself may have low or even negative deliberative quality with respect to one of several deliberative ideals, may nevertheless make an important contribution to an overall deliberative system. For example, highly partisan rhetoric, even while violating some deliberative ideals such as mutual respect and accommodation, may nonetheless help to fulfil other deliberative ideals such as inclusion. In another example, serious discussions on European Union (EU)-wide matters take place mostly among elites, while the national media and, to a lesser degree, national politicians, organize the public debate on EU issues. Although the overall system is far from ideal epistemically, the elite discourse provides expertise, reasoned and informed mutual accommodation, and mutual respect, while the nationally instigated deliberation provides perspectives that might otherwise not be heard. By enhancing inclusion, the national media also increase the EU's normative democratic legitimacy.

Parts of a system may have relationships of complementarity or displacement. In a complementary relationship, two wrongs can make a right. Two venues, both with deliberative deficiencies, can each make up for the deficiencies of the other. Thus an institution that looks deliberatively defective when considered only on its own can look beneficial in a systemic perspective. Conversely, an institution that looks deliberatively exemplary on its own, such as a well-designed minipublic, can look less beneficial in a systemic perspective when it displaces other useful deliberative institutions, such as partisan or social movement bodies. In another instance of displacement, legislatures are less likely to take their deliberative responsibilities seriously when a constitutional court is treated as the primary deliberative forum (Gutmann and Thompson 1996: 45–7; see also Dryzek 2010a: 13).

Third, a systemic approach introduces into the analysis large contextual issues and broad systemic inadequacies that have an impact on individual sites and shape the possibilities of effective deliberation. Once we identify what a deliberative system should accomplish, we can identify gaps in a system's deliberative quality. For example, a deliberative system may fail to include in a policy deliberation individuals with legitimate claims for inclusion, owing to legal exclusion or to deficiencies of education, information, or transparency. Or a system may rely excessively on parliamentary processes that frame debate but fail to make space for deliberation, leading to decisions of relatively poor quality. Even if a legislature has a high quality and well informed debate about, for example, reducing the deficit, the deliberation looks less adequate in the context of a system that permits highly unequal campaign contributions or enables the media to frame the issue by highlighting the dangers of deficits with little mention of the harm

that cuts would do to the least advantaged citizens in society or to fiscal stimuli aimed at stemming recession. A systemic approach allows us to see more clearly where a system might be improved, and recommend institutions or other innovations that could supplement the system in areas of weakness.

In the next section we lay out, in general and programmatic terms, what a systemic approach to deliberation entails, and discuss in more detail the benefits of this approach. While we may at times favour certain directions and theoretical orientations over others, we want to stress that the approach we outline could be taken up by any number of theories of deliberative democracy. Like any useful paradigm, deliberative democracy theory contains many theoretical variations, competing articulations, and contested definitions. Our aim is to articulate an over-arching approach to deliberation that could signal a new and we think exciting direction for deliberative theory, but which is not itself a free-standing theory of deliberative democracy.

We take up in a separate section three elements of a democratic system that are usually not considered part of the exercise of deliberative democracy, and reconsider their place in terms of the system. We evaluate experts, pressure, and protest, and the partisan media, asking whether they do or could enhance the quality of deliberation in the system. We present these three only as examples of the sorts of directions a full systemic approach to deliberative democracy might take. Nevertheless we think that they represent central elements in almost any deliberative democratic system. They illustrate particularly well the advantages of a systemic approach, because all three are often assumed to be incompatible with deliberative democracy and do in fact create tensions with it. In a final section we identify five potential pathologies that threaten any deliberative system. Although some of these pathologies have their analogues at the level of individual sites, they are fundamentally problems inherent in a system and most clearly discerned through a broad systemic approach.

What is a deliberative system?

A *system* here means a set of distinguishable, differentiated, but to some degree interdependent parts, often with distributed functions and a division of labour, connected in such a way as to form a complex whole. It requires both differentiation and integration among the parts. It requires some functional division of labour, so that some parts do work that others cannot do as well. And it requires some relational interdependence, so that a change in one component will bring about changes in some others. A *deliberative* system is one that encompasses a talk-based approach to

political conflict and problem-solving – through arguing, demonstrating, expressing, and persuading. In a good deliberative system, persuasion that raises relevant considerations should replace suppression, oppression, and thoughtless neglect. Normatively, a systemic approach means that the system should be judged as a whole in addition to the parts being judged independently. We need to ask not only what good deliberation would be both in general and in particular settings, but also what a good deliberative system would entail.

A systemic approach, in our view, does not require that every component have a function or that every component be interdependent with every other such that a change in one will automatically bring about a change in all others. If a component does contribute to a function, it is not necessary that the function be fulfilled optimally in one location, since in a deliberative system the same function may be distributed across various subsystems. The concept as we apply it is not intended to be mechanistic; nor do we require a system to have clearly identifiable boundaries. Our point is that normatively, in the systemic approach the entire burden of decision making and legitimacy does not fall on one forum or institution but is distributed among different components in different cases.

We expect that a highly functional deliberative system will be redundant or potentially redundant in interaction, so that when one part fails to play an important role another can fill in or evolve over time to fill in. Such a system will include checks and balances of various forms so that excesses in one part are checked by the activation of other parts of the system. We also envision systems that are dynamic rather than static. Thus it may be hard to predict in advance when or why some parts of the system will respond to certain forms of public opinion or represent certain interests and publics or certain kinds of values and procedures.

It should not be surprising that a political system requires a division of labour. Political judgments are complex, and the system in which they are made should also be complex. Because political judgments involve so many factual contingencies and competing normative requirements, and because politics involves the alignments of will, both in concert and in opposition, among large numbers of citizens, it is virtually impossible to conceive of a political system that does not divide the labours of judgment and then recombine them in various ways. The concept of a system highlights these necessities.

To take an example of the systemic approach applied to a concrete policy deliberation, John Parkinson (2006a) has analysed a series of UK initiatives that promoted deliberative public involvement in health policy making, including through citizens' juries – small groups of citizens chosen relatively randomly and convened to deliberate on the issue. As he points

out, health care is 'a tough testing ground of the ability of any deliberative process to handle legitimacy deficits' (2006a: 44). He shows that understanding the deliberative process in the UK on this issue requires looking beyond the particular deliberative site of citizens' juries to a complex deliberative system with many participants – including health service professionals with their unions, activists, administrators, charity groups, and more – each with their own agendas and points of view. The processes cut across levels of government, from the local and regional to the national. Parkinson shows that it matters a great deal which groups commission forms of 'micro-deliberation' like citizens' juries and how they construct the procedures. It also matters at what level of the policy hierarchy such micro-deliberative procedures are used. These procedures 'tend to be used lower down in the hierarchy' because the lower echelons have greater legitimation needs and feel stronger pressures to be responsive (2006a: 64). A systems analysis allows us to see how on this issue the citizens' juries can themselves score relatively high on deliberative standards and at the same time have both negative and positive systemic effects. On the negative side, they to some degree displaced and weakened the existing advocacy organizations, thus reducing the impact of these groups on societal deliberation. On the more positive side, they served as a stimulating 'focal point' (2006a: 177) for organizing societal deliberation. A deliberative system approach thus takes into account not only a particular forum or innovation but also the role of that forum or innovation in the larger deliberative system, allowing us to gauge its democratic weaknesses and strengths within the larger dynamic of groups and levels.

A deliberative systemic approach also suggests looking for 'deliberative ecologies', in which different contexts facilitate some forms of deliberation and avenues for information while others facilitate different forms and avenues. Partisanship and information heuristics or short cuts are usually contrasted with deliberation and seen as among the most serious obstacles to good quality deliberation. But a deliberative systemic approach asks when and where there is an appropriate ecological niche for partisan campaigns and heuristics. Because legislators and citizens in their busy lives will tend to rely on partisan organization and heuristics to guide their decisions, a good deliberative system will draw from the virtues of these individually deliberatively deficient devices but guard in various ways against their vices. Sometimes associations that are internally non-deliberative and homogeneous will, for that very reason, be able to assert a coherent public position and sharpen a public debate. Sometimes particular stages or sequences in a political process will embody a useful division of labour, with relatively open deliberations at the beginning narrowing to a focus as the point of decision is reached. Sometimes arguments made in one part of

the system will be tested in another part. Such mechanisms enable a good deliberative system to be self-correcting.

Here are three examples of how partisanship may appear to undermine deliberation at a micro level but not at a systems level:

- The British House of Commons engages in partisan heckling that violates many standards of good deliberation. Yet that very culture of heckling provides incentives to poke holes in the reasoning of a Government that otherwise makes all the major decisions and rules by strict and overriding majority. It may also function to frame and sharpen broader public deliberations.
- Some politically partisan media are of very low deliberative quality, but in conjunction with other media of equally low deliberative quality bring out information and perspectives that television stations or newspapers aiming at the middle of the road do not raise or address.
- Activist interactions in social movement enclaves are often highly partisan, closed to opposing ideas, and disrespectful of opponents. Yet the intensity of interaction and even the exclusion of opposing ideas in such enclaves create the fertile, protected hothouses sometimes necessary to generate counter-hegemonic ideas. These ideas then may play powerful roles in the broader deliberative system, substantively improving an eventual democratic decision.

A systemic approach can also illuminate how partisanship that is functional in one part of the system becomes dysfunctional when it spreads to another part of the system that requires other virtues. For example, the attitudes and practices of campaigning – emphasizing the sharp differences with opponents, refusing to find common ground or look for ways to compromise, and concentrating on defeating rather than cooperating with opponents – are not deliberative but may be appropriate, even necessary, in a campaign. Yet as campaigns become ‘permanent’ and their practices come to dominate the institutions of governing, they can overpower the deliberative practices that promote desirable change, thus creating a bias in the system in favour of the status quo (Gutmann and Thompson 2010).

To clarify the systemic approach for democracies, we need to consider the boundaries of the system, the functions within the system, and the standards by which the system should be evaluated.

Boundaries of the system

What are the boundaries of a deliberative system? In our current analysis, these boundaries define a decision-making arena that is at least loosely

democratic. It is of course possible to think about a deliberative system independently of democracy. Authoritarian regimes have deliberation. Much deliberation goes on within the Catholic Church. Scientific communities could perhaps be said to have deliberative systems. But because we focus here on deliberative *democratic* systems, we begin with systems that are broadly defined by the norms, practices, and institutions of democracy.

As a first cut, we adopt here an institutional approach in which the deliberative system is conceptualized and evaluated as it functions within the boundaries of nation states, supranational states, international decision-making bodies, and the international institutions with which the nation states and supranational states are linked. Our analysis applies to all governmental and non-governmental institutions, including governance networks and the informal friendship networks that link individuals and groups discursively on matters of common concern.

One can define the boundaries of a deliberative system either institutionally or by reference to a particular issue. Both demarcations, however, include societal decisions. This important dimension added by the systemic approach has often been excluded from deliberative analysis. Informal discussion can contribute to an eventual state decision and to broad societal decisions, such as the decision not to settle a particular matter through the state. Such societal decisions in our understanding are emergent rather than definite. They are binding only in a loose social sense. As decisions by accretion (Mansbridge 1986), they have no clear-cut point at which an observer can say that a decision has been taken. Yet when the majority of a society or a subgroup changes its norms and practices, bringing to bear social sanctions on those who deviate from the new norms and practices, it seems fair to say that in a general way that majority has taken a decision, especially when the change has been accompanied by extensive discussion of the pros and cons of such a change. Thus the widespread societal conclusion that discrimination in hiring by race and gender is unjust is reasonably described as a collective decision, resulting in part from certain binding state decisions but also in large part from hundreds or millions of individual and institutional decisions based on widespread collective discussion and interaction. The lack of a clear decisional point in such emergent decisions provides one more reason why looking only at a part of a system can cause one to miss significant phenomena that affect deliberation. New emergent discourses change over time the way that people conceptualize problems – from explicit social agreements not to engage genital cutting in Africa (Mackie forthcoming) to accepting the idea of sustainable development. We conceive of such discursive interactions as part of the deliberative system.

Other decisions with significant societal effects, for example by corporations to end sweatshop conditions, are not necessarily binding in the legal sense but when they derive from or affect the arguments surfaced in broad societal deliberation, they are part of the deliberative system. Sometimes exclusion from the state generates a livelier discourse, as when environmental activists, excluded from the neo-corporatist German state from the late 1960s to the mid 1980s, generated some of the most profound green critiques of political economy at a distance from the state (Dryzek *et al.* 2003; see also Dryzek 2010a: 170–6). Including societal discussions and emergent decisions in a deliberative system does not, however, mean including all talk. Our criteria for inclusion in a deliberative system are that the discussions in question involve matters of common concern and have a practical orientation. By a practical orientation we mean the discussion is not purely theoretical but involves an element of the question ‘what is to be done?’.

Deliberative systems include, roughly speaking, four main arenas: the binding decisions of the state (both in the law itself and its implementation); activities directly related to preparing for those binding decisions; informal talk related to those binding decisions;² and arenas of formal or informal talk related to decisions on issues of common concern that are not intended for binding decisions by the state.³

When Jürgen Habermas (1996) employed the spatial metaphor of centre/periphery – the centre being the place of binding decisions (will-formation) and the periphery being the place of less formal deliberation (opinion-formation) – his deliberative system took the modern nation state as its subject and made the legislature its centre. Many subsequent scholars have done the same, conceiving of the deliberative system as ‘rings’ around the state.⁴ By contrast, our understanding of deliberative systems includes both informal decisions by accretion and binding decisions that take place outside the state. It goes beyond the boundaries of the nation state to include international, transnational, and supranational institutions, and extends as well to societal and institutional (e.g. corporate) decisions that do not involve the state. We take the state and its legislatures as the ultimate decision-makers in a polity, but not as the centre to which everything

² This kind of talk is often described as informal ‘*political*’ talk (Searing *et al.* 2007), talk about ‘*politics*’ (Neblo 2010), talk about ‘*public issues*’ (Chambers, Chapter 3 in this volume; Jacobs *et al.* 2009), or ‘private talk that is recognizably *political*’ (Parkinson, Chapter 7, this volume), our emphases.

³ The definition of ‘common concern’ in these non-state arenas is contested. Mansbridge (1999) defined it as encompassing ‘issues the public ought to discuss’, thus making the contest at its heart explicit.

⁴ E.g. Searing (2007), Hendriks (2006a), and to some degree Neblo (2010).

is aimed in the polity's deliberative system. It is true that, to the degree that any given constitution and set of international agreements permit, the state can in theory make binding decisions in all issue areas. We also recognize the state's central role in solving human collective action problems by making and implementing binding decisions with a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Moreover, the state has a unique role to play in constituting deliberative systems. Liberal-democratic constitutional states create spaces of deliberation within political institutions such as legislatures and courts. They also enable deliberation within society by protecting free speech and association. They encourage deliberation by underwriting institutions in which deliberation is itself constitutive, such as universities and scientific research establishments. But even though states play a central and often constitutive role in deliberative systems, not all efficacious and important parts in the system lead to the state. The state is not the terminus of all deliberation. For example, our institutional demarcation of the deliberative system includes societal decisions, many of which have only a very indirect impact on state legislation.

A map of nodes in the deliberative system would reveal many nodes, with multiple forms of communication among them. Those nodes would include nation state bodies at different levels of government and with their different legislative houses, administrative agencies, the military, and the staffs of all of these, international bodies at different levels and their staffs, multinational corporations and local businesses, epistemic communities, foundations, political parties and factions within those parties, party campaigns and other partisan forums, religious bodies, schools, universities with their departments, fields, and disciplinary associations, unions, interest groups, voluntary associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) both ad hoc and longstanding, social movements with both their enclaves and their broader participation, the media including the Internet, blogs, social media, interactive media, books, magazines, newspapers, film, and television, informal talk among politically active or less active individuals whether powerful or marginalized, and forms of subjugated and local knowledge that rarely surface for access by others without some opening in the deliberative system.

Functions of the deliberative system

In the systemic approach, we assess institutions according to how well they perform the functions necessary to promote the goals of the system. Theorists disagree about the goals of deliberation within a democracy, and thus they may not agree about the most important functions of a deliberative system. However, we believe that the system approach can accommodate a

variety of functions and goals, and its value does not depend on resolving these disagreements. For our purposes, three functions that are relatively non-controversial in their most general articulation can serve to illustrate how a system approach can be applied. We identify epistemic, ethical, and democratic functions.

The *epistemic* function of a deliberative system is to produce preferences, opinions, and decisions that are appropriately informed by facts and logic and are the outcome of substantive and meaningful consideration of relevant reasons. A healthy deliberative system is one in which relevant considerations are brought forth from all corners, aired, discussed, and appropriately weighed. Locations in which this weighing occurs may or may not manifest publicity, although the absence of publicity often limits deliberative capacity. Because the topics of these deliberations are issues of common concern, epistemically well-grounded preferences, opinions, and decisions must be informed by, and take into consideration, the preferences and opinions of fellow citizens.

In addition to the epistemic reasons for listening to what others have to say, there are also ethical reasons. A primary *ethical* function of the system is to promote mutual respect among citizens. Prudentially, mutual respect helps keep the deliberative system running. It serves as the lubricant of effective communication. Ethically, mutual respect among human beings is a good in itself. Mutual respect is also an ethical requirement among democratic citizens. The moral basis for mutual respect in democracy is grounded on the idea that citizens should be treated ‘not merely as objects of legislation, as passive subjects to be ruled, but as autonomous agents who take part in the governance of their society, directly or through their representatives’ (Gutmann and Thompson 2004).

This moral basis is not controversial, although how mutual respect should be interpreted in practice may be. It is more contestable than the epistemic function of simply improving informational quality and learning about others’ preferences, opinions, and decisions. Theorists and citizens alike disagree about what mutual respect means, what constitutes its successful achievement and how weighty it is compared with other considerations. We stress mutual respect, however, because, even more than other ethical considerations, it is *intrinsically* a part of deliberation. To deliberate with another is to understand the other as a self-authoring source of reasons and claims. To fail to grant to another the moral status of authorship is, in effect, to remove oneself from the possibility of deliberative influence. By the same token, being open to being moved by the words of another is to respect the other as a source of reasons, claims, and perspectives. Other goods are closely linked with mutual respect. Mutual respect, for example, implies non-domination, because relationships of

domination have already short-circuited mutual respect and, with this, deliberative influence.

A final function of deliberation, not completely separable from the first two, is to promote an inclusive political process on terms of equality. We call this the *democratic* function. The inclusion of multiple and plural voices, interests, concerns, and claims on the basis of feasible equality is not simply an ethic added to democratic deliberation; it is the central element of what makes deliberative democratic processes democratic. Who gets to be at the table affects the scope and content of the deliberation. For those excluded, no deliberative democratic legitimacy is generated. In short, a well-functioning democratic deliberative system must not systematically exclude any citizens from the process without strong justification that could be reasonably accepted by all citizens, including the excluded. On the positive side, it ought also actively to promote and facilitate inclusion and the equal opportunities to participate in the system.⁵

The successful realization of all three of these functions promotes the legitimacy of democratic decision-making by ensuring reasonably sound decisions in the context of mutual respect among citizens and an inclusive process of collective choice. Legitimacy in this strong sense maximizes the chances that people who share a common fate will agree, willingly, to the terms of their common cooperation. Of course, these different functions can come into conflict within any democratically deliberative system. There will be controversy over about their relative weights. Some deliberative democrats will assign, for example, much higher priority to mutual respect than to the aim of producing epistemically sound decisions.

Normatively, we endorse all three overarching functions, recognizing their potential conflicts and expecting that many conflicts will have to be worked out through deliberation on a provisional basis in any given context. A systemic approach allows for a nuanced application of these functions, recognizing that some will be more important than others in different parts of the system.

As our preceding discussion and some of our cases below illustrate, a systemic approach complicates the question of standards. What might be considered low quality or undemocratic deliberation in an individual instance might from a systems perspective contribute to an overall healthy deliberation. For example, not every group that participates in the democratic deliberation of the whole society need be internally fully democratic. The purposes of institutions and their functions in collective decisions will often dictate differing internal constraints on

⁵ See Goodin (2007). Including affected interests may involve formal representation and new political rights (Bohman, Chapter 4, this volume).

deliberation, such as instructions to juries about rules of evidence, blind peer review, limitations on amendments to a bill that has gone through its final reading, or closed-door negotiations on sensitive matters. Judging the quality of the whole system on the basis of the functions and goals one specifies for the system does not require that those functions be fully realized in all the parts. This two-tier approach to evaluation will become clearer as we move through three examples of a systemic analysis of deliberation.

Many practitioners in the field of deliberative democracy are in the process of examining the conditions that promote or impede the performance of these epistemic, ethical and inclusive functions, at the same time that theorists are investigating the appropriate standards for deliberation that promote these functions.⁶ On the most abstract level, we argue simply that high quality deliberation promotes these functions effectively; low quality deliberation fails to do so as effectively. The question becomes more complex when we try to specify the conditions more concretely. For example, we might agree that sound epistemic grounding for decisions is one important function of the deliberative system but disagree about what conditions of deliberation produce epistemically sound decisions. Therefore in addition to the three larger functions we would also need a template to evaluate the conditions that support the various functions of good deliberation. This is, however, not a project that we will take up here. We turn instead to three examples that illustrate the deliberative approach.

Three systemic analyses

Experts

Any democratic system – indeed any decision-making entity of even the slightest complexity – must rely on experts at all levels within the system. Even a highly participatory workplace of only forty people, in which members spend as much as a seventh of their time in collective decision-making, relies on a division of labour in which some members of the collective develop expertise on which the others depend. In democracies of any size, however, controversy arises over where and when experts are appropriate and how expert deliberations can be connected to final policy decisions or the polity's more general direction. Only a systemic approach to deliberation can make this question tractable.

⁶ See Mansbridge *et al.* (2010) on the evolution from 'classic' standards of deliberation to more contemporary ones.

A deliberative systemic approach allows us to appreciate the division of labour within which experts operate and, for problems that arise, devise remedies that draw upon the many different stages and loci in the full deliberative process. We can then judge sequences of stages and loci on their systemic capacity to draw from the rewards of expertise while reducing the potential deliberative costs of bias, disrespect and non-inclusion. The following analysis looks at these costs, each linked to one of the functions of a deliberative democratic system, then suggests systemic ways to reduce those costs.

Epistemically, delegation to experts can promote citizen ignorance, with highly negative consequences for the deliberative system as a whole. In addition, experts themselves can be biased. The world in which they communicate can be deeply self-referential. Policy experts may orient themselves primarily towards their professional discipline, following technically attractive models that once put into practice produce detrimental results for the polity. Subtle or crass self-interest, whether in the academic or private sector, can affect their conceptions of or policy recommendations for the public good. Their own experience may be far narrower than they realize. Experts are particularly likely to ignore the experience of marginalized groups. In 1955, Cook County Hospital had to decide whether to expand its central facility or build a second facility in another area. The hospital's deliberative process involved experts on issues that ranged from parking to the costs and benefits of gathering advanced medical equipment in one place versus siting in proximity to underserved populations through a second branch. Based on extensive expert deliberation, the hospital decided to build a second branch. That decision, however, met with significant opposition from spokesmen for the Chicago African American community, because creating a branch of the racially integrated public hospital in the chosen area would undermine a proposed campaign to force private hospitals in that area to integrate. The experts had never even considered this issue (Banfield 1961).

Delegation to experts threatens the ethical function when it produces expert disrespect for citizen contributions and even for citizens themselves as a result of the sheer complexity and importance of some policy decisions. Particularly when faced with life and death decisions, experts sometimes need deliberative protection from the ignorance, emotional volatility, and myopia of the non-expert. Yet that protection can generate deliberative disdain among the experts, which then provokes a reciprocal disdain of experts on the part of citizens.

The democratic problem of inclusion in expert rule is simply that the exclusion of non-experts from decisions threatens the foundation of democracy itself as rule by the people. Even when the people set the ends while

the experts in theory address only the means (Christiano, Chapter 2), the process of discussing, experimenting with, and implementing the means often clarifies and poses new problems for the ends. Excluding non-experts from the processes of deliberating over the means undermines the public's goal-setting role in a democracy.

A systemic approach to deliberation can help by stepping back from any individual instance of deliberation in which non-experts are excluded to evaluate the place of that individual instance in the larger deliberative system. The standard approach to the problem of experts looks primarily at the legitimacy of the delegation and the relation of the final decision to citizen preferences. A systemic approach also looks at the division of labour in deliberation, at deliberative stages and forms of recursive and redundant non-expert input, at processes designed to surface the knowledge of disadvantaged and subordinate groups, at participatory innovations designed to make citizens into experts, and at the role of many forms of trusted proxies. Expertise within a system need not be constructed as a hierarchy: in some circumstances citizens can divide and distribute their labours, so that many contribute their expertise to common decisions at differing points in decision processes. In other circumstances, when otherwise competent experts are not adept at explaining the reasons for their decisions to non-experts, the system as a whole requires some agents with the capacity to translate expert conclusions into recommendations that citizens can understand.

A systemic approach also draws attention to the way that expert authority is itself often conditionally earned through deliberative means and within specialized deliberative communities. Thus experts are often subject to deliberative accountability through networks of their peers (Goodin 2003a). In such circumstances we may trust experts because we can ask them to explain and to justify their advice or decisions, if not to us directly then to a group of their peers who in turn have earned their credentials in a deliberatively trustworthy manner. Yet the entire peer network may itself be biased. In a good deliberative system, expert authority must be deliberatively generated and evaluated with safeguards against systemic bias (Warren 1996).

Deliberative stages include the selection of experts and the appropriate delegation of authority to them, the expert deliberation itself, and the processes of retrospective analysis and consent. Improvements in expert-citizen deliberative interaction can come in any of these stages. The disconnect between citizens and experts can be bridged by improving the efficacy of multiple chains of intelligibility in which 'translators' make sense of expert considerations for citizens and vice versa (Christiano, Chapter 2). Partisan adversary processes can provide a form of trusted proxy when

citizens can rightly trust political parties through reputation and parties both select their own experts and hold them accountable.⁷

Participatory innovations allow citizens to develop their own expertise and provide channels through which the citizens' own expertise can influence policy (Smith 2009). For example, as the primary group that collects wood, Nepalese rural women have expertise in identifying disturbed locations in the forest. When new participatory political practices allow these women to add their expertise more directly to the deliberative system that produces policy decisions, they help correct the errors that professional experts make in understanding local forestry practices and possibilities (Agarwal 2010).

In an important recent development, democratic polities have begun to create new forms of trusted proxy by inserting in the deliberative system relatively randomly selected citizen bodies in which the citizens themselves become experts in an issue and then serve as trusted proxies to other citizens (MacKenzie and Warren, Chapter 5). Robert Dahl (1970) once suggested a third house of the US congress made up of randomly selected citizens, based on the ancient Athenian model of the lot, precisely in order to provide greater citizen input into complex decisions that required more expertise than citizens could usually acquire. Dahl did not expect his third house actually to be created. But now, forty years later, we are seeing a proliferation of groups, ranging in size from six to several hundred, that look much like Dahl's model. They are typically selected through nearly random processes, and provided the time and resources to develop greater expertise on an issue. They can then provide to their fellow citizens a more expert, deliberated, and informed version of what other citizens might think if they too became more expert on the issue. The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly is perhaps the most well known of such groups (Warren and Pearse 2008). This relatively randomly selected body of citizens was charged with choosing an electoral system for the province that would then be put before the citizenry as a whole in a referendum. The Citizens' Assembly required that its citizen members become informal experts on electoral systems over the many weekends that it met in the course of a year. Some provisions in establishing that assembly, such as its screen against members with material or pressure-group interests in the issue, its balanced materials, and its non-partisan sponsorship, increased citizen trust in this relatively expert proxy group and gave citizens a second-order reason to trust its conclusions when the first-order reasons for and against the different choices required expertise beyond the grasp of most citizens.

⁷ On the deliberative functions of parties, see White and Ypi (2011).

Certainly, the introduction of such bodies may have other systemic effects. Inserting the Citizens' Assembly into the British Columbia deliberation on electoral processes destabilized the previous deliberative dominance of the political parties, including the Green Party, which had made a particular electoral reform (not chosen by the Citizens' Assembly) one of the major planks in its political platform. A similar partial displacement of existing advocacy groups occurred, as mentioned earlier, when the British government introduced randomized deliberative forums into the health service debate (Parkinson 2006a). Any introduction of randomized deliberative entities, such as citizen juries or deliberative polls, into a deliberative system has the potential for undermining an existing equilibrium by creating new citizen 'experts' and trusted proxies, and thus disadvantaging political parties and advocacy groups that had previously invested considerable political and social capital in creating deliberative trust (Papadopoulos, Chapter 6). Sometimes this displacement is exactly what the system as a whole needs; sometimes it can undermine the epistemic, ethical, and democratic functions of the whole.

Political parties and interest group associations can also make experts to some extent accountable to ordinary citizens by embedding the experts in larger groups whose members share common aims. Experts on the political Right contest the knowledge of experts on the political Left and vice versa. NGOs develop their own expertise and act as intermediaries between partisan and unaffiliated experts and citizens. NGOs can also create channels of input from citizens to experts on the nature of the problems to be solved.

These different ways of connecting experts with citizens can improve the deliberative system in its epistemic function by bringing in more – and more diverse – knowledge, in its ethical function by reducing the lack of respect between experts and citizens, and in its democratic function by including the perspectives and interests of more citizens. They thereby serve to promote the normative legitimacy of the system overall.

Pressure and protest

Jürgen Habermas famously described deliberation as ideally containing only the 'forceless force of the better argument' (Habermas 1975: 108). Very generally, most conceptions of deliberation attempt to distinguish deliberative interaction from other non-deliberative forms of action in which coercion, pressure, or strategic payoffs are the dominant force rather than reason-giving and persuasion on the basis of relevant considerations.⁸

⁸ For the related practice of bargaining and its role in deliberative democracy, see e.g. Mansbridge *et al.* (2010) and Gutmann and Thompson (1996: 57–8, 69–75).

Behind all these conceptions is the intuition that being pressured into doing something and being persuaded into it are different. Deliberation is about persuasion, not pressure. A full systemic theory of deliberation would require an elaborated defence of where to draw the line between pressure and persuasion, particularly in light of the standard for democratic deliberation that only the force of the better argument should prevail. Although we do not do that here, we suggest the contours of such a defence.

Non-deliberative pressure comes in many forms. Two of the most difficult for deliberative theory involve money and protest. Both paying people to agree with you and disrupting normal activity until you get your way appear to violate the very core of deliberative persuasion. But money and protest can be effective political tools to advance important social and political causes. A deliberative system approach allows us to step back and ask how this expenditure of money (e.g. in campaign advertisements) or that protest (e.g. an anti-immigrant demonstration or a Greenpeace action) enhances or detracts from the deliberative system.

To illustrate this approach, we will take a closer look at protest. Protest often appears to violate several standards of deliberation. When protest explicitly or implicitly threatens sanctions or imposes costs, it acts as a form of coercion.⁹ The slogans protestors use to excite enthusiasm and convey a dramatic message also often undermine epistemic subtlety. Finally, protest sometimes involves levels of disruption and contestation that reduce mutual respect and full inclusion. A forum attempting to engage in the respectful mutual exchange of considerations for or against a policy may, for example, be disrupted by picketers, hecklers, and individuals engaged in shouting down the speakers so that they cannot be heard (Estlund 2001). Could such apparently anti-deliberative behaviours ever enhance the deliberative system? From a systemic perspective, the answer sometimes will be yes. Protest contributes to the deliberative system most clearly as a remedial force introduced to correct or publicize a failure or weakness in fulfilling any or all of its key functions (Fung 2005). Protest can facilitate and promote the circulation of useful information; it can facilitate and promote ethically respectful interactions among citizens;

⁹ For a definition of coercion as the threat of sanction or the use of force, see Mansbridge *et al.* (2010). However, note that in a systemic perspective what *counts* as coercion may depend on the relation of an individual act to the larger context in which it takes place. For example, a public relations campaign by a corporation to promote anti-union 'right to work' laws may seem or be non-coercive by itself, but may become coercive if it takes place in a context in which other people are engaging in intimidation of union members in other parts of the system. More generally, the normative force of a concept in one part of a system varies depending on what else is happening in other parts of a system.

and it can begin to correct inequalities in access to influence by bringing more voices and interests into the decision-making processes.

For example, we could imagine using pressure to force the inclusion of marginalized voices or force new reasons, facts, and information into public conversation. In such cases this pressure might make little, or even a negative, contribution to the ethical function of respectful mutual interaction. These cases pose trade-offs within the system. In any given actually existing political situation, levels of civility may have to go down in order for levels of inclusion to go up.¹⁰

Concretely, certain disruptive and only weakly civil Radical Left or Tea Party protests enhance the deliberative system if they can be reasonably understood as giving voice to a minority opinion long ignored in the public sphere, or as bringing more and better important information into the public arena. This is a big if. Figuring out the pros and cons for this and similar questions is a core undertaking of any deliberative system analysis.

A systemic analysis must be able to make these judgments and must have the analytic tools to do so. Without criteria to evaluate when non-deliberative, weakly deliberative, or even anti-deliberative behaviour nevertheless enhances the deliberative system, one risks falling into the blind spot of old style functionalism: everything can be seen as, in one way or another, contributing to the system. Thus a systemic analysis of Tea Party protests and disruptions, or of Greenpeace or labour action, requires a detailed analysis of the possible pluses and minuses with regard to the deliberative system and a weighing of the results. In regard to certain Tea Party or Radical Left examples, we might in the end want to say that although these movements brought new voices into public debate, a move that is system enhancing, these benefits were outweighed by the partisan and aggressive tenor of many of the public protests and disruptions, a context that creates a toxic atmosphere for deliberation and thus is not system enhancing over time. In this analysis much would depend on a combination of empirical and conceptual-analytic findings regarding the short-run and long-run inequalities redressed by the protesters and the short-run and long-run chilling effects of their actions upon deliberation.

Political media

Although the political media are a crucial part of the deliberative system in any modern democracy, they have not played a major role in much recent deliberative democracy theory. Many innovative deliberative initiatives

¹⁰ Sanders (1997), Young (2000), Mansbridge *et al.* (2010).

and institutions are designed to exclude or minimize the role of the media in deliberation. 'Face-to-face' means eliminating mediation. A theoretical focus on individual instances of deliberation that involve only face-to-face unmediated communication may implicitly or explicitly impugn the value of the media.

A systemic approach to deliberation sees the media as connecting many parts of the deliberative system. Few citizens in any country read the transcripts of parliamentary and committee debates or even know what other citizens in other parts of the country are saying. Citizen knowledge of debates both in government and in the public sphere comes through the media, along with the framing and perspective-setting in which all media must, by their nature, engage.

The growing proliferation of different types of political media, performing different functions within the system, makes it hard to generalize about the systemic role of the media, let alone any particular form. One source may play different roles at different times or in regard to different issues. The many roles of the media appear in the different roles media professionals craft for themselves in addition to sellers of stories: vigilant watchdogs over power, representatives of citizens and communities, knowledge translators, educators of citizens, and public advocates, among others. A rich and sophisticated literature in media studies tracks and analyses the role of media in democracy. This literature, some of which already takes a relatively systemic approach, can serve as a general guide to the role of the media in a deliberative system. Our account, accordingly, will highlight only the epistemic, ethical, and democratic functions of the media in the deliberative system.

Epistemically, any democracy needs the political media to play the role of transmitter of reliable and useful information, to help citizens interpret facts and make connections between facts, roles, and policies, and to act as watchdogs, critics, and investigators. The epistemic function of the media is strengthened through self-policing as when, for example, one news source exposes the information failures of another. Yet the systemic incentives for media are well known to have their dysfunctional sides for the deliberative system. Efforts in 'civic journalism' to align these incentives more fully with citizen democratic needs have been only partially successful.

Partisan media are the lifeblood of any deliberative system designed along adversarial lines to advance the flow of information and insight through the marketplace of competition in ideas. Theorists from John Stuart Mill to Nancy Rosenblum have made an excellent case for such partisanship.¹¹ Recently, however, the increase in partisan reporting in the US

¹¹ Rosenblum (2010); also see Muirhead (2006).

has provoked particular concern about the temptation in these media to falsify the facts and disseminate misinformation. Some partisan internet and even television commentators seem more than occasionally to have displayed a reckless disregard for the truth. A systemic approach does not imply that such reckless disregard enhances the overall deliberative system. If a particular individual purveys outright falsehoods, that one individual does not advance the epistemic goals of the deliberative system. But a systemic approach has to go beyond individuals and ask questions such as whether partisan reporting itself increases the likelihood of misinformation and fact bending. The partisan media may contain their own partial corrective for this pathology, as the other side is always looking for the false move of its adversary. Misrepresentations and falsehoods survive even in the atmosphere of heightened scrutiny that often accompanies partisan news battles.

Ethically, the news and other media greatly affect the tone of civility and respect among citizens. Certain kinds of partisan news commentary significantly raise the levels of incivility between citizens, as they did, for example, in the US in the 1900s (Schudson 1978). But it is not clear that partisanship in and of itself is uncivil or involves a lack of respect. Furthermore, at times (as noted in our discussion of protest) shrillness and disrespect may be warranted to raise awareness or get an issue on the agenda. Partisanship in itself is not in principle antithetical to the ethical function of the deliberative system.

Finally, the media play a significant role in democratic political inclusion. The internet holds forth the promise of democratization, but its usage today tracks the usual class patterns (Schlozman *et al.* 2010). To the extent that citizens increasingly get their political information from the Internet, the 'digital divide' will continue to undermine the deliberative function of political inclusion. In addition, the tendency of the Internet and now the media in general to segregate audiences into like-minded 'niches' prevents citizens from hearing the other side and developing mutual respect for people with whom they disagree. As many have worried, these new technologies may facilitate niche or echo-chamber communication, in which the like-minded talk only with one another (Sunstein 2003).

We should think of any particular deliberative setting as embedded in a deliberative system held together in great part through the media. For example, the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on electoral reform was designed to function in some isolation from media coverage. Although it had staff responsible for communications during its process of learning and deliberation, it lacked a budget for communicating its recommendation to the broader public (Warren and Pearse 2008). Nevertheless, here, as in a similar Citizens' Assembly in Ontario, the decisions reached in the assemblies were eventually put before the general public for debate

and then a referendum. Knowledge of what went on in the assembly, its mode of deliberation, its rationale, and the people who participated in it was communicated to the public primarily by the press (although the government provided brochures). In retrospect, the failure of the government to provide for any deliberative linkage between the minipublic and the broader public was a mistake: by default, it left responsibility for broader public deliberation to the media. There was a marked difference in the tone of the coverage in British Columbia, where the initiative won 58 per cent of the popular vote, and that in Ontario, where it received only 37 per cent. The British Columbia press was generally more favourable to very idea of a citizens assembly and spent more time (although still not much time) examining how the assembly worked and why it had been chosen to make the agenda-setting decision about the electoral system. The Ontario news media spent less time transmitting relevant information about the deliberation in this institution to the other parts of the deliberative system. Was this a systemic failure? As Parkinson (Chapter 7) points out, the media have few incentives to focus on either the actual workings of any deliberative forum or the arguments and information transmitted therein. Their viewers are not sufficiently interested in these questions for them to be 'news' or even 'human interest'. Yet the media, with their market incentives, serve as the major links to and among the citizenry within any deliberative system. This structure of incentives seems to point to a systemic failure. A systemic approach contributes to this ongoing discussion by situating these questions in the context of the epistemic, ethical, and political functions of a deliberative system in a democracy.

Defects in the deliberative system

The ideal of a deliberative system, then, is a loosely coupled group of institutions and practices that together perform the three functions we have identified – seeking truth, establishing mutual respect, and generating inclusive, egalitarian decision-making. In this section, we describe five pathologies that keep political institutional arrangements from approaching more closely the deliberative ideal in the system as whole: tight-coupling; decoupling; institutional domination; social domination; and entrenched partisanship.

One virtue of a deliberative system is that failures in one institution can be compensated for in another part. When an expert community is too beholden to some conception of disease or risk, for example, citizen organizations or journalists can bring latent experiences and etiologies to their attention (Corburn 2005; Epstein 1996; Brown 1992). But when the parts of a deliberative system are *too tightly coupled* to one another, this

self-corrective quality is lost. Think of tight coupling as the problem of group-think writ large, at institutional scale.¹² Perhaps the most familiar experiences of dramatic deliberative system failure from this pathology arise at the nation-state level when some public issue is driven by nationalism or xenophobia and those sentiments begin to drive individuals who inhabit all of the locations in a deliberative system. In the decision of the US Government to intern Japanese-Americans during World War II, for example, what we now believe to be the force of the better argument did not prevail because that argument could find no institutional point of purchase in the deliberative system of that time and place.

A second defect in the deliberative system arises when the parts of the system become *decoupled* from one another in the sense that good reasons arising from one part fail to penetrate the others. Ideally, one would expect the large parts of a deliberative system to converge over time to accept good reasons, at least provisionally, even as each part is open to different considerations in the process of converging. For example, many industrialized democracies now face difficult questions about how best to address their fiscal crises – whether to increase the tax burden, who should suffer that burden, and which public services and social welfare protections to reduce. Proposals and reasons for those proposals emanate from many parts of the deliberative system in these societies – from legislatures, expert commissions, the executive branch, the courts, foundations, universities, public opinion, and even citizen deliberations specifically structured around this topic. In the ideal, through processes of convergence, mutual influence, and mutual adjustment, each of these parts would consider reasons and proposals generated in the other parts.

It may be the case, however, that some parts are particularly resistant to arguments from other parts. Experts, legislative committees, and citizens in the public sphere, for example, may listen to reasons more broadly, while legislators who have not worked on the issue respond primarily to parochial interests – a constituency's pet project or a mobilized but extreme minority opposed to increasing taxes no matter what the costs. Another example of deliberative decoupling is the resistance of some legislators and interest groups in the US to data from the scientific community on global warming.

Third, a deliberative system also fails when one of its parts, whether deliberative or not, dominates all of the others. This problem of *institutional domination* (or in a weaker form, undue influence) appears most starkly in authoritarian societies where a state, party, or leader controls not

¹² See Janis (1982) for small group 'group-think'.

only the government but also the media and even civil-society organizations. Even in democratic systems, however, institutional domination can arise, as in Silvio Berlusconi's corporate control of major mass media outlets when he was prime minister.

A fourth and related pathology of the deliberative system is *social domination*. It arises when a particular social interest or social class controls or exerts undue influence over many parts of the deliberative systems. Those who possess and control wealth, for example, exercise disproportionate influence in most, if not all, capitalist democracies. From the perspective of the deliberative system, this situation is especially problematic if the effect of wealth is to shift the balance of reasons for laws and policies at multiple sites in the deliberative system – through, for example, financial support for political campaigns, private ownership of concentrated media, financial backing that tilts the ecology of secondary associations and interest groups (Walzer 2002), and even financing university-based research.

Finally, the deliberative system suffers when citizens, legislators, and administrators are so divided, by ideology, ethnicity, religion, or any other cleavage, that they will not listen to positions other than those emanating from their side. We have made clear above that not every part of the deliberative system need itself be deliberative in this respect. Zealous advocacy, protest, and partisan journalism can all contribute to the quality and depth of deliberation in the system as a whole. These political activities enhance deliberation by offering new reasons or making it more likely that old reasons are considered in an equitable way. But reaping these benefits requires an audience that itself possesses the deliberative disposition to weigh reasons and proposals. That audience might be citizens in the mass public, legislators, bureaucrats, or all three. Yet if these audiences are themselves zealously polarized or otherwise non-deliberative, the arguments fall on deaf ears or reach only the already convinced. Acts of civil disobedience contribute to deliberation by causing an audience (e.g. the public in segregation-era America) to reconsider the justice of its positions (e.g. segregation).¹³ If that audience is unreceptive to reasons because it has already made up its mind or has decided not to think more about the question, civil disobedience will not advance public deliberation.

Conclusion

From the beginning deliberative theory has had the ambition to provide a normative and empirical account of the democratic process as a whole.

¹³ See discussion of civil disobedience in Rawls (1971); Dworkin (1985).

The development of such an account has proceeded incrementally. Much of the work during the first phase focused on developing the ideal of deliberation – its meaning, justification, and responses to theoretical criticisms. Particularly important at this stage was laying out the idea of legitimacy at the core of deliberative democracy. Many theorists formulated the deliberative ideal on the foundational requirement that legitimate decisions be those that ‘everyone could accept’ or at least ‘not reasonably reject’. Above all, any conception of deliberative democracy must be organized around an ideal of political justification requiring free public reasoning of equal citizens (Cohen 1996; Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Habermas 1995). This phase emphasized what might be called ideal proceduralism as a ‘regulative’ ideal (that is, one that recognizably cannot be achieved fully in practice but sets a standard at which to aim).

A second phase – a ‘coming of age’ – saw the proliferation of empirical studies and practical applications of the theory (Bohman 1998). Ideal proceduralism had encouraged thinking of the standards for deliberative legitimacy through the image of an ideal deliberative forum. Thus in this second phase, many deliberative democrats started with this image as they tried to think about the ideal in concrete terms and seek approximations in the real world. Activists, theorists, and government officials collaborated on introducing into democratic politics many new varieties of deliberative forums, including citizens juries, consensus councils, people’s parliaments, citizens assemblies, and other relatively representative ‘minipublics’ designed to make possible deliberation within some approximation of a microcosm of the citizenry (see, e.g. Fung 2003). This practical and empirical turn opened the door for empirical political scientists to study a variety of settings in which deliberative democracy might work well or badly (Thompson 2008a). The empirical studies began to address issues such as the conditions that enable or constrain good deliberative processes.

As we have noted, however, most of these empirical studies addressed discrete instances of deliberation, investigated with little if any attention to their relationship to the system as a whole (Thompson 2008a). This limitation is understandable. The challenges of conducting research on discrete cases is formidable enough without attempting to relate the findings to deliberation in other parts of the political system, let alone to non-deliberative practices in the system. Ultimately, however, none of these deliberative processes can be studied adequately in isolation, apart from their broader, systemic context. Legislative forums, deliberative minipublics, and other communicative venues have unique and sometimes central roles in deliberative systems, but no single institution can meet all of the demands of deliberative democracy at once. It takes a study of deliberation beyond specific arenas, however important they may be, to understand

how each venue is influenced by interactions across the various parts of the deliberative system as a whole.

The literature has now reached a point that makes it possible and desirable to begin a third phase, and to try to make good on the original promise of a comprehensive account. Deliberative theory is ultimately concerned with the democratic process as a whole, and therefore with the relationships of its parts to the whole. Deliberative democracy is more than a sum of deliberative moments.

We have proposed here a systemic approach that is intended to guide the progress in this third phase of work on deliberative democracy. We have shown how an analysis of deliberative functions – epistemic, ethical, and democratic, each contributing in different ways to the legitimacy of the system – can illuminate not only the more familiar and obviously deliberative practices in a system, but also the value or disvalue of non-deliberative practices that have often been considered antithetical to deliberative democracy.

We have considered only a few of those practices as illustrations, and have not attempted at all to examine empirically the conditions under which they may promote or impede the goals of the deliberative system as a whole. Nor have we explored in detail the ways in which the various deliberative functions may interact with one another. But we have shown how the systemic approach can serve as a framework for a wide-ranging and fruitful normative and empirical study of the democratic process from a deliberative perspective.