



# Political Deliberative Process and Consensus: A Review of Objections to Liberal Democracy

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## Mini Review

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## Abstract

In contemporary times, several theories have highlighted the role of democracy in resolving public controversies, especially in the face of pluralism. Based on this scenario, this article aims to resize some of the main criticisms of liberal democracy. Therefore, initially, the essay presents the striking features of the political thought of Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls for the proper understanding of this review. Then, these characteristics are confronted with objections formulated by Chantal Mouffe, who is an advocate of a concept of agonistic democracy.

**Keywords:** Deliberative Democracy; Rationality; Consensus; Conflict

## Consensus and Deliberative Democracy: Features of Liberal Political Philosophy

Liberal political theories generally present a conception of the state based on the assumptions of neutrality and non-discrimination in the midst of social pluralism. Due to the fact that there is a latent conjuncture of moral disagreement and in the absence of an ethical doctrine capable of being accepted by all as a stable basis for public decisions, the democratic deliberative process starts to gain prominence as a legitimate legal and political order.

According to Habermas' thinking, the rule of law, qualified by the democratic regime, is not limited to acting for the protection of the negative liberties of its citizens, but also encourages the participation of members in public disputes in the most diverse themes and facilitates communicative freedoms. The democratic process guarantees the citizens' symmetrical participation and requires mutual understanding, by presenting good arguments, so that

results that are rationally acceptable to those concerned are conceived [1]. In a way, democracy ensures a procedure for the legitimate creation of law and also for the protection of citizens' self-determination.

In John Rawls' political philosophy, society is presented as a cooperative system between free and equal citizens. The diversity of worldviews is the result of a scenario of free institutions and confirms the strengthening of basic freedoms [2]. The democracy is based on a public culture of justice and on the reciprocity resulting from the public use of reason. Through public reason, citizens can obtain a minimum political base of consensus among the comprehensive doctrines and, consequently, guarantee the stability of the democratic regime. The citizen must recognize the other individual as holder of citizenship in the same terms, that is, with freedom and equality. Therefore, citizens should not be limited to the certainties and truths supported by their ethical doctrines, but should seek reasonable justifications that can be mutually accepted by other citizens. Reciprocity

has a peculiar role in political interaction, as it reflects a relationship of civic friendship. According to theoretical perspectives, the democratic scenario is founded on empathy, reciprocity, transparency and mutual understanding. Thus, citizens will act consciously and according to their civic duty of public justification.

However, this understanding seems distant from the dynamics of the multicultural scenario, which is conflicted and characterized by inequality and social exclusion, whether in already consolidated democracies or in the process of strengthening. These ideal models seem to be more detached from reality when considering the existence of extremist and intolerant social movements. For this reason, it is important to rescue any criticisms made by opposing readings, for example, Chantal Mouffe's thinking.

### Criticisms Concept of Liberal Democracy

Although several criticisms have already been made in opposition to liberal political thinking over time, three specific arguments by Mouffe should be highlighted:

#### The Adoption of an Aggregative Perspective

Politics would be responsible for instituting a commitment between the various social forces in establishing a common collective life, even if these forces are opposed and divergent. In Rawlsian thought, for example, the citizen must translate the arguments from his worldviews into politically reasonable values [3], that is, cooperation would be based on the general belief of the civic duty to offer intelligible and mutually accepted reasons, even if this implies sacrifice of your worldview. In Habermas, on the other hand, the duty to translate arguments into political language would be shared by all citizens [1].

The conflict aspect and the agonistic character, as Mouffe understands [4], must be maintained in the political sphere, as it is not for the theorist to idealize institutions that minimize the divergent values and objectives of the different social groups. For the thinker, the practices of exclusion, to a certain extent, tend to persist and the current decisions express the hegemonic conception of a social parcel at a given historical moment.

However, perhaps Mouffe should consider that, even in a context of conflict and profound fragmentation of social groups, it is impossible to ignore any degree of aggregation or implicit political agreement. After all, if no commitments were shared, society would be reduced to a scenario of constant distrust and insurrection. Such a fact would make it impossible to maintain the stability of any political regime, including a concept of agonistic democracy.

### Liberal Models Reinforce a Rationality that Starts from the Individual

The political relationship is reduced to a process of negotiation between private interests [5]. The inequalities of factual and participatory impact seem to be eliminated by the procedural and substantive precepts inserted in the deliberative process.

This aspect is perhaps the most sensitive for liberal theories: public identity seems to distance itself from shared community experiences throughout life. This approach weakens the relationships of belonging and the influence of the collective in the structuring of identities. Pollak teaches that identity transcends the individual option and represents, at the same time, the "image of oneself, for oneself and for others" [6]. In addition, social groups have a key role in shaping the political agenda and deepening public debate.

### Absolute Priority of the Right and Justice over the Good

A conception of justice cannot be earlier or even independent of the ethical values and the different worldviews that exist in a community [5]. This thesis highlights the subject's inevitable relationship with the cultural and social context. However, Rawls and Habermas try, to some extent, to demonstrate this interaction. The priority of the just over good does not aim to ignore social and cultural roots, but the construction of a political sphere to be accepted minimally by all citizens.

For Mouffe [7], democracy cannot be reduced to a policy of interests and characterized by individualism. The role of conflict and power cannot be overlooked, as the individual's emancipation will never be complete and democratic society cannot be idealized as a dream of perfect harmony and transparency. For her, the democratic character means that no social actor can attribute to himself the representation of the whole, in isolation.

### Conclusion

Liberal conceptions should not be totally rejected due to the criticisms presented above, after all, every theory is a partial portrait of reality that emphasizes certain elements to the detriment of others. However, it is essential to improve these dominant models based on such objections. The theory of democracy must consider some degree of aggregation and aim at expanding the sphere of autonomy, however, the success of the democratic project cannot be dependent on the inclination of individuals to cooperation and ideal consensus. The collective identity, the relations of belonging and the incentive for the participation of social actors must

be taken as important factors in the political deliberative process. Rationality cannot be limited to harmonizing the interests of different social groups, but must consider the possibility of expanding the influence of different political subjects so that democracy is perpetuated and, continuously, new conquests are achieved by minority groups, even if relations of oppression and subordination cannot be completely eliminated.

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