

Christian Kock and Lisa Villadsen (eds.). *Rhetorical Citizenship and Public Deliberation*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State Press 2012, 341 pp., 84.95\$ ISBN 978-0-271-05387-5.

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1. Introduction

Public talk in different institutional settings has always been a central element of politics, and the study of rhetoric has traditionally dealt with this topic. In the last few decades, however, thought on political discourse has been heavily influenced by theories of deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy has not only become one of the most active areas of study in political philosophy and democratic theory (see Hansen, this volume, chapter 1), but the ideas have also, as this book clearly shows, travelled far outside these fields of study.

The studies of rhetoric and deliberative democracy both focus on the discursive element in politics and have many things in common. Nonetheless, they have until recently mostly been studied separately. A significant reason for this is simply that democratic theorists traditionally have taken a fairly negative stance toward rhetoric. Political philosophers starting with Plato have regarded rhetoric as a manipulative tool used in order to win personal gain, rather than as instrument used to find out what is good for society. According to Habermas (1981), we should separate communicative from strategic forms of interaction. Rhetoric is generally associated with the latter, where the actors are more interested in achieving the individual

goals they bring to the situation than reaching a mutual understanding through deliberative interaction.

Of late, a growing number of scholars are, nevertheless, challenging the strict division between rhetoric and deliberation. They challenge the normative idea that public deliberation ought to remain a rhetoric-free zone, arguing that we need to achieve a better understanding of how rhetoric is related to public deliberation, rather than consider it damaging to public deliberation per se (Bohman, 1996; Young, 2000; Chambers, 2009).

This book aims to bring together the views on discursive politics from deliberative democracy and rhetoric. It introduces the concept of rhetorical citizenship as a practical approach to political discourse, an approach that offers a new perspective on public deliberation and citizens becoming empowered through rhetorical exercises. The main focus of the book lies on public deliberation involving citizens and on why discourse is not only prefatory to real action but also can be constitutive of civic engagement. Combining the concepts of deliberation and rhetoric with an explicitly practical approach is a welcome development, since this discussion has had an overtly theoretical and normative overtone for too long.

I think it is important to acknowledge that I write this review from the viewpoint of a political scientist and a scholar working on deliberative democracy. This will undeniably be reflected in many of the comments I have regarding this very interdisciplinary work with its many different views on public deliberation and on issues concerning discursive participation.

2. Overview

The book is divided into three sections, and the essays in each section are linked by an over-arching theme presented in the short introduction at the beginning of each section. As there are 18 chapters altogether, I will introduce only a few from each section shortly. The chapters in the first section trace the ancestry, the emergence and the growth of ideas of rhetorical citizenship and deliberative democracy in theory and in practice. In the first chapter, Kasper Möller Hansen first shows how the idea of deliberation was conceived within the republican democratic tradition, and then how it was later revitalized when democratic theory took a “deliberative

turn” in the beginning of the 1990s. In the third chapter, William Keith and Paula Cossart compare the development of rhetorical citizenship and public deliberation in France and the United States in the period from 1870s to 1940s. They find that a common problem for public discourse in both countries was the large gap between citizen deliberation and effective public decision-making. Even when the electorate has chosen to engage in public discourse, it has had difficulties in translating this commitment into political action and power. Moreover, people are likely to engage in rhetorical citizenship when they are angry with a specific issue or injustice, but not in the ‘boring’ day-to-day issues.

The second section is divided into three parts and deals with public deliberation as a rhetorical practice in different contemporary settings. The essays in the first part discuss discursive challenges that meet a person wishing to participate in a public debate, and the ways in which individuals and groups craft their rhetorical responses. In chapter 6, Marie Lund Klujeff argues that rhetorical forms that are considered inappropriate according to the normative ideals of public debate can nonetheless have important functions in real-world interactions. She uses an example of how provocation as a rhetorical tool can serve public deliberation by constituting an engaged and reflective audience, and creating a presence. The four essays in the second part focus on elite discourse rather than on how ordinary citizens engage in political discourse by studying how the notions of citizenship are portrayed and realized by agents in positions of power and influence. The chapters focus on issues like the co-optation of feminist discourse in rhetoric of war and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair’s rhetorical treatment of antiterrorism measures in the wake of 9/11 and the bombings in London in 2005. The third part deals with critical scope of rhetorical citizenship in a number of very different settings. In chapter 13, Tatiana Tatarchievsky follows three grassroots groups in New York and Washington D.C. that have sought to establish a space where strangers can meet to discuss public affairs and different social issues. She finds that the participants are reluctant to confront each others premises and persuasions, and that they rather find ways of avoiding conflict in order to preserve the civility of the debate. In a very different exercise, Jette Barnholdt Hansen (chapter 15) examines a song from a popular Danish Revue. She argues that the message of the song and its satirical take on the Mohammed cartoon debate in Denmark acted

as a catalyst for the understanding that common values and interests are to be found despite of all the inflammatory rhetoric.

The purpose of the third and final section is to present proposals for how to conduct or consider public deliberation in the future. The common denominator of these essays is to study how rhetorical citizenship can produce productive and dialogical discourse rather than aggravated and oppositional debates. This is perhaps most evident in Christian Kock's chapter, where he looks at the key notions from status theories and proposes to generalize and integrate some of these into a coherent scheme. With the help of this scheme, Kock shows that an underlying agreement or meta-consensus could be found even though there seems to be a strong polarization of views. This polarization can be exacerbated by the fact that debaters often misrepresent or radicalize their opponent's viewpoints. In his conclusion, Kock argues that debaters, audiences, and the news media need to understand that democracies are not helped by the fact that social disputes are portrayed as all-out clashes, at least if we hope to come to any decisions.

The section introductions are a very good way of clarifying the objective of each chapter in the book and how they are interlinked. It is a good way of tying together a diverse collection of essays and adds coherence to the narrative of the book. Given this diversity, however, I do feel that a concluding chapter would have been a welcome addition to this book as it would have helped to reader to evaluate how the results from this diverse and innovative collection of thoughts on rhetorical citizenship and public deliberation hang together.

3. Evaluation

The book is truly interdisciplinary in its approach, with an impressive range of scholarly fields represented among the authors. This results in a both diverse and meritorious treatment of the subject at hand. The reader gets an insight into a diverse range of perspectives on rhetorical citizenship and public deliberation. The need to improve our understanding of these issues is perhaps best explicated by the authors themselves.

In chapter 2, Manfred Kraus writes that the range of public deliberation has broadened. He argues that it has become harder to find generally

accepted “objective” measurements, and points out that in our modern societies “everything must be negotiated and assert itself anew each time in open debate” (p. 41). This development toward a world where truth may be contingent and situational, and can be generated by way of open debate shows the impact of discursive politics. It is also a fundamental reason for why we need to get a better understanding of how individuals engage in rhetorical citizenship. But rhetorical citizenship is not only about citizens adjusting to the new world of discursive politics; it is also about creating spaces where rhetorical citizenship can be implemented.

Rhetorical citizenship has the potential to generate new interpretations and help us find unexplored alternatives. In chapter 12, James Macdonald highlights research that show how ordinary citizens can find solutions to complex scientific problems that have been overlooked by experts. Yet, rhetorical citizenship does also have its limitations. Keith and Cossart (chapter 3) find that where citizens engage in discursive politics may be sometimes be worlds apart from where the real political decision-making takes place. And Tatarchievsky (chapter 13) found that rhetorical citizenship might be hampered by ordinary citizens reluctance to confront other peoples values and persuasions, because they do not want to undermine their social relations.

Together the large number of case studies gives a comprehensive picture of how rhetorical tools can be useful in public deliberation. They help to display the intricate relationship between public deliberation and rhetorical citizenship, but they also explain when and why different communicative modes succeed or fail.

Although there are many things on which this book can be commended, it is not without its faults. The anthology should certainly be praised for its interdisciplinary approach, but perhaps it could have been more explicit when it comes to explaining why the fields represented in the book are the relevant ones for this study. A study should not be interdisciplinary for interdisciplinarity’s sake. I am not saying that this is the case, but what I miss is a short elaboration on why these perspectives on rhetorical citizenship and public deliberation were chosen, and whether there are there any specific strengths or weaknesses in this particular selection of perspectives.

My main point of critique is, nevertheless, related to the concept of rhetorical citizenship and how it is handled. I think the book would have bene-

fitted from a design in which this central concept had been defined in more detail already in the introduction. It is understandable that there is going to be some differences in how a concept is understood in an anthology with a wide range of scholarly fields represented among the scholars. But as it is now, the reader has to piece together the definition for him/herself by putting together the authors' different views on rhetorical citizenship.

I also feel that the relationship between rhetorical citizenship and public deliberation is left relatively unclear. This is another reason I think the book would have benefitted from stating out more clearly the notion of rhetorical citizenship. At times, the book seems to equate rhetorical citizenship with citizen deliberation, a view that can be very problematic considering how rhetoric has traditionally been viewed among scholars of democracy with an interest in public deliberation.

The book draws heavily on the concept of deliberative democracy, but remains surprisingly silent on both the concerns and ideas scholars on democratic theory have voiced when it comes to rhetoric and its role in public deliberation. One reason why democratic theorists working on deliberation are distrustful of rhetoric is because they understand rhetorical communication as one-way or monological. It appears to entail an asymmetrical relationship between the speaker and the audience incompatible with the notion of equality inherent to deliberative democracy. Although rhetoric is unquestionably a fundamental part of any real-world public deliberations, we still need, as John Dryzek (2010, p. 327) points out, some way of sorting the defensible uses of rhetoric from the indefensible ones. Therefore, I find it surprising that there are only few references to previous work on the relationship between deliberative democracy and rhetoric.

For example, in an article titled "Rhetoric and the Public Sphere," Simone Chambers (2009) deals with many of the issues that are central to this book (An interested reader might also want to see Setälä (2009) for an expose on the relationship between rhetoric and deliberation). Chambers even develops a concept of 'deliberative rhetoric'. According to Chambers, politics cannot exist without the interest and passion displayed in rhetorical discourse, but the passion and emotions must be harnessed in such a way that they bring about reflection and sound judgment. Deliberative

rhetoric is a form of discourse that incorporates the passion and engagement rhetorical discourse, but does it in a way that engages our capacity for practical judgment. Hearers must not only be engaged by the speech, it also ought to spark active reasoning and thoughtfulness rather than unreflective triggers or gut reactions. By more explicitly acknowledging the strengths and weakness in both rhetorical and deliberative approaches, the book could have helped to develop practices and ideas on how rhetoric and deliberation could co-exist or support each other.

4. Conclusion

This anthology sets out to investigate a new approach to discursive politics, a concept termed rhetorical citizenship. Rhetorical citizenship focuses on public deliberation involving citizens and on how engaging in political discourse can be constitutive of civic engagement. The main strengths of this book lie in its variety of cases and interpretations of rhetorical citizenship. They help to illuminate both the potential and the perils of citizen engagement in discursive politics. The idea of rhetorical citizenship and its relation to public discourse is examined through a wealth of case studies, ranging from speeches made by the British Prime Minister Tony Blair to a Danish Revue dealing with the aftermath of the Mohammed cartoon controversy.

I have some reservations concerning the way the book handles the concept of rhetorical citizenship. I think this central concept should have been presented in more detail already at the beginning and I also feel that it could have been better tied to work in democratic theory, the area with perhaps the most prominent contributions when it comes to public deliberation. Overall this book bears testimony to how diverse and well traveled the different ideas on public deliberation have become of late. A reader of this book will definitely find new perspectives on discursive politics. It is also likely to inspire one to think more broadly of how discursive politics can be constitutive of civic engagement.

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