Deliberation, Representation, and the Epistemic Function of Parliamentary Assemblies: a

Burkean Argument in Favor of Descriptive Representation

Hélène LANDEMORE

Yale University, Connecticut
helene.landemore@yale.edu

"Deliberation, Representation, and the Epistemic Function of Parliamentary Assemblies:
a Burkean Argument in Favor of Descriptive Representation"

Hélène Landemore

Edmund Burke famously defended a conception of political representation according to which representatives should act independently from their constituents, using their judgment to make decisions about the general good, including when this implies going against their constituents' interests and preferences. This approach of representatives as independent agents or "trustees" is traditionally contrasted with the view of representatives as the "delegates" of the people, according to which representatives are in charge of defending specific interests and sticking to the letter of their mandate when deliberating or voting in the assembly.

Overlapping this trustee-delegate or independence-mandate distinction, one finds what Hanna Pitkin has characterized as the opposition between formalistic representation and descriptive representation (Pitkin 1967). Formalistic representation aptly characterizes Burkean representation, in which representatives represent the people in virtue of having been elected to do so. Since this formal authorization is all that matters, representatives are considered as representing their constituents regardless of the economic, social and other differences between them and their constituents and even as they ignore their constituents' express interests. As a result, on a Burkean approach, it does not matter if the Parliament counts only old propertied white males, as long as those

can be assumed to rise above their class, gender, and other interests to apply impartial and reasoned judgments to policy matters. By contrast, descriptive representation corresponds to the view that representative assemblies should be, as John Adams famously required, like "an exact portrait, in miniature, of the people at large."[1] The assumption behind that conception of the representative assembly as scaled-down mirror-image of the people is that if representatives are sufficiently like the represented, they are more likely to fulfill the mandate with which they have been entrusted. Descriptive representation practically means that an elected assembly should reflect the statistical composition of the population (50% of women, the same percentage of ethnic and religious minorities as rest of the population, and so on and so forth).

One could emphasize other dimensions of the tension at the heart of the concept of representation. The contemporary literature on political representation has by now considerably complicated the picture drawn by Pitkin, adding multiple dimensions to the concept (e.g., Mansbridge 2003), distinguishing between different types of representatives—including judges, bureaucrats, and other non elected officials and institutions (e.g., Richardson 2002; Cohen and Rogers 1995)—and suggesting the necessity of accounts adjusted to the empirical reality of changing practices (e.g., Hardin 2004).[2] In this paper, however, I go back to the classical and limited opposition sketched above between representatives as trustees or delegates and representation as formalistic and descriptive, where representatives are understood as elected officials meant to deliberate on behalf of the people in national assemblies. I go back to that early debate in order to revisit some aspects of the contrast in a light that I hope to be new, suggestive,

---

[1] REF.
[2] For an overview of those debates see the article "Political Representation" in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/political-representation/

and of possible import for contemporary debates, particularly that opposing a "politics of ideas" to a "politics of presence" (Phillips 1995).

In this paper I would like to suggest that it is possible to tread a middle-ground between Edmund Burke and John Adams by defending the view of the representative assembly as miniature portrait of the people on grounds that I believe to be largely Burkean. To put it more specifically, I propose a defense of descriptive representation compatible with the view of representatives as trustees rather than delegates. Let me explain. For Burke, the goal of an assembly of representatives is to perform what can be described as an "epistemic" task, that of finding out, or at least approximating, the best possible answer to political problems. The "best possible answer" is here defined as partly independent of the constituents' expressed preferences. For Burke this epistemic task was more likely to be successfully performed if the representatives were smart, educated men taken from the socio-economic elites.

I will argue, however, that there are good reasons to believe that the epistemic task is more likely to be successfully performed if the assembly is more alike, as John Adams wanted, "a miniature portrait" of the people. The advantage of an assembly of representatives mirroring the composition of the larger group is that it is more likely to contain a key ingredient of epistemically successful deliberation, namely cognitive diversity (roughly, the existence of multiple ways to interpret problems and see the world). The idea is still, as Burke had it, that representatives should enter deliberation as autonomous and reflective beings, that is as trustees rather than delegates. But the assumption is that, in an assembly mirroring the diversity of the larger group, such

trustees will use their judgment using a wide range of perspectives and interpretive models that the homogeneous elites favored by Burke are likely to be lacking.

The first section lays out the key argument connecting the epistemic properties of deliberation and the cognitive diversity of a deliberating group. The second section illustrates the argument with the stylized deliberations of jurors in the movie "12 Angry Men." The third section derives normative implications for the role of representatives, suggesting that the function of representative assemblies should be conceptualized as that of reproducing on the scale at which democratic deliberation is feasible the cognitive diversity of the larger group.

1. *Cognitive Diversity as Key-Component of the Epistemic Properties of Deliberation*

Deliberative theories of democracy have known what could be termed an epistemic turn in recent years. Initially dominated by Rawls' paradigm of "public reason," which proclaimed epistemic abstinence, deliberative theories of democracy now include a concern for the substance and quality of democratic decisions, sometimes explicitly conceptualized in terms of "procedure-independent standard of correctness" (Cohen 1986; Estlund 1997 and 2008, Talisse 2009). Epistemic deliberative theories emphasize the instrumental properties of deliberation—the fact that it may and should get us to the "right" answer—by contrast with its intrinsic properties—the fact that democratic deliberative procedures embody values such as equality, fairness, or dignity. The epistemic turn in democratic theory does not introduce new concepts in political theory, but simply applies epistemic considerations traditionally associated with antidemocratic positions to the justification of democracy itself.

In the following I take the validity of the epistemic approach to democracy for granted. Considering the value of deliberation and representation, I focus on their instrumental property in helping us figuring out the best possible answer to a given collective problem. While I do not deny that deliberation and representation may have non-instrumental virtues, this paper focuses exclusively on their instrumental, epistemic properties. I will not spend much time on the definition of the procedure-independent standard of correctness by which the quality of deliberative outcomes may be assessed. One may want to call it "the general good" with Burke, or the "common good" or the "general will" with Rousseau, or even "truth" with recent epistemic democrats (e.g., Estlund 2008) but these are semantic niceties. All the reader needs to accept for an epistemic approach to make sense is the idea that there are better and worse answers to at least some political questions and that the point of the deliberation taking place in the assembly is to find out what they are (see Estlund 2008 for a systematic defense).

This epistemic reading allows me to develop an original case for descriptive representation on the basis of a connection between the kind of diversity that characterizes a miniature portrait of the people and the conditions that make deliberation among representatives epistemically reliable. I have argued elsewhere (Landemore 2007 and forthcoming) that one of the reasons why decision-making about political matters should be democratic, that is inclusive, rather than reserved to the select few, is because numbers tend to increase the presence of a crucial ingredient of group competence, namely cognitive diversity.[3] Cognitive diversity is, roughly, the existence within a group

---

[3] Hélène Landemore, "Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many" (Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University 2007); "Democratic Reason: the Mechanisms of Collective Intelligence in Politics" in Hélène Landemore and Jon Elster (eds), *Collective Wisdom: Principles and Mechanisms*, currently under review with Cambridge University Press.

of different ways to see the world, interpret problems, and make predictions in it. Differences in the way people see the world can stem from various things, from genetics to education to life-experience. Cognitive diversity is distinct though likely correlated with gender, economic, and sociological diversity. What is important for us is that cognitive diversity has been shown to be a crucial factor in the problem-solving abilities of groups. Specifically the presence of cognitive diversity in a group matters more than the average individual ability of its members for their collective competence in solving certain types of problems (Page's "Diversity Trumps Ability Theorem") (Page 2007: Chapter Six).[4]

This thesis has implications for the concept of representation. To the extent that representation is an institutional device necessary to render democratic deliberation feasible in mass society and if deliberation among those representatives is valued for its epistemic, in this case problem-solving properties, the selection of representatives should limit the number of individuals involved in actual deliberations while preserving the potential for efficient problem-solving that is contained in the larger group, that it its cognitive diversity.

It seems to me that a simple and sure way to ensure maximum cognitive diversity is simply to mirror the composition of the larger group. This conclusion suggests the superiority of a conception of representation as "descriptive," provided this conception is decoupled from the view that representatives should act as the "delegates" of their constituents. The point is indeed to have a cognitively diverse group, but not necessarily a group where people who think a certain way only defends the interests of those who they

---

[4] "Diversity Trumps Ability Theorem" in Scott Page, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups*, Firms, Schools, and Societies, Princeton U. Press, 2007, p. 131-174 .

resemble or who have elected them. On such a mixed approach, it is valuable to have all kinds of people in the assembly beyond old propertied White males, not because these other individuals are more likely to defend the interests of young non propertied, non White and non males (although they might do that as well) but because they are likely to see the world through very different lenses and bring to the table very different arguments, ideas, and interpretations. And this kind of difference is a good thing for the collective problem-solving competence of the group.

Before I make the epistemic case in favor of this "Burkean descriptive representation," let me illustrate the way cognitive diversity is supposed to enhance group competence in problem-solving.

2. *The role of cognitive diversity in deliberative problem-solving*

Problem-solving aptly describe a lot of what the deliberation among representatives in national assemblies are supposed to achieve, whether these assemblies are trying to fix the national health care system, come up with ways to regulate bankers' compensations, or deal with environmental issues. Rather than focus on controversial and generally overly complex examples of actual political deliberations, however, let me try to convey the force of the epistemic argument for deliberation among cognitively diverse representatives by dissecting a stylized example of deliberation borrowed from the film "Twelve Angry Men." This fiction is doubly convenient, first because the film nicely condenses and organizes deliberative steps that, in real life deliberations, are never so analytically distinct and so clearly articulated. Second, the procedure-independent standard of correctness in the case of jury deliberations is intuitive and non-controversial,

at least more intuitive and less controversial than the standard of a just health care system, just bankers' compensation levels and even ecological policies. Whatever conclusions a criminal jury may reach, there is a fact of the matter by which we can in theory assess the epistemic quality of the deliberation: the defendant is either guilty or not guilty.

As you may remember, "12 angry men" takes place in a room where 12 jurors are supposed to come up with a unanimous verdict on the guilt or non-guilt of a young Puerto Rican accused of murdering his adoptive father. At the beginning of the movie, 11 jurors are convinced the defendant is guilty, based on aggravating testimonies. One brave dissenting juror—number 8, played by the actor Henry Fonda—manages to persuade the other 11 jurors to reconsider the guilty sentence they are about to pass without much further discussion. Asking the other jurors to "talk it out" before making up their mind, juror number 8 takes the group on a long deliberative journey, which ultimately ends in unanimous acquittal. "Twelve Angry Men" nicely illustrates the kind of group competence that can emerge from deliberation among people of very unequal individual cognitive abilities but also of sufficiently different ones. Juror number 8, even though he is arguably the smarter juror of all, would have been unable on his own to demonstrate that the sentence was beyond reasonable doubt. A group of 12 jurors thinking just like him would have been similarly stuck. Only by harnessing the individual abilities and the cognitive differences between the members of the group could the jury ultimately deliver a verdict closer to the truth.

The film nicely illustrates how individual contributions vary and complement each other: juror number 5, a young man from a violent slum, notices that the suspect

could not possibly have stabbed his victim with a switch-blade. The perspective of juror number 5 is not only unique (no other juror was acquainted with the proper way to use a switch-blade), it is crucial to the progress of the group's reasoning, putting in doubt the validity of a key eye-witness report. Juror number 9, an old man, then questions the plausibility of the time it took another key witness (an invalid) to limp across his room and reach the door just in time to cross the murderer's path as he fled the building. He too contributes to changing the collective perspective on the way the crime took place. One of the hardest jurors to convince, a stock broker left unmoved by any of the other arguments, finally has to admit that a near-sighted woman is not credible when she pretends to have seen the murderer from her apartment across the street, through the windows of a passing subway, while she was lying in bed, most likely without her glasses. The deliberation process in this scenario nicely idealizes real-life deliberative processes in which participants contribute a perspective, an argument, an idea, or a piece of information and the group can reach a conclusion that no individual by himself could have reached.

Deliberation among the jurors has, in this film, the properties that deliberative democrats like to credit deliberation with: it enlarges the pool of information and ideas, it weeds out the good arguments from the bad, and it leads the group to a rational consensus on the right answer. As far as pooling arguments and information, the film shows how deliberation brings to the surface knowledge about the proper use of a switch-blade and a contradiction between this proper use and the description by the visual witness of the way the victim was supposedly stabbed. Deliberation also reveals the true meaning of a fact that many in the group had noticed—the red marks on the sides of the nose of the woman

who claims to have witnessed the murder from her room—but did not know how to interpret or use. Here the proper interpretation of the fact was that the witness wears glasses, is most likely near-sighted, and the conclusion that this fact leads to is that the testimony cannot be trusted.

Deliberation also allowed the group to weed out the good arguments from the bad. Once they reach the conclusion that the visual witness is near-sighted, knowing that she reports having witnessed the murder while lying in bed, what is most likely: that she was, or wasn't wearing her glasses? Even the most stubborn juror has to admit that the argument that she was not wearing her glasses is stronger than the argument according to which she was wearing them.

Finally, deliberation leads to a unanimous consensus on the "better" answer, namely the decision to consider the young convict "not guilty" given the doubts raised by deliberation.

According to Lu Hong and Scott Page's results on the components of collective intelligence (Page 2007), what matters most to the quality of collective problem-solving of the type described in this example is "cognitive diversity." Cognitive diversity is the difference in the way people will approach a problem or a question.[5] In our example, cognitive diversity comes from the fact that the jurors come from different backgrounds and have different life experiences. Even their age can play a role in the way they read a situation. Cognitive diversity, however, should not be confused with diversity of values or end goals, which would actually harm the collective effort to solve a problem.

---

[5] It denotes more specifically a diversity of perspectives (the way of representing situations and problems), diversity of interpretations (the way of categorizing or partitioning perspectives), diversity of heuristics (the way of generating solutions to problems), and diversity of predictive models (the way of inferring cause and effect) (Page 2007: 7).

Although their interpretations and arguments may conflict, the jurors are all committed (more or less willingly in some cases) to the search for the true answer, or something close enough to a true answer. According to Page, under conditions of cognitive diversity as just defined, given four specific conditions, "a randomly selected collection of problem solvers outperforms a collection of the best individual problem solvers" (Page 2007: 163).[6]

The general point illustrated in the movie is that what matters for deliberation of the kind practiced by a jury and, I would argue, any group of people trying to solve a common problem is how diversely thinking the group is, rather than how right each individual is likely to be on his own. After all, initially, 11 out of 12 jurors were wrong—setting a very low threshold of average individual ability. And yet by the virtue of one initial dissenting perspective on the problem (expressed by Juror 8) which sets off a discussion about the reasons each juror has to defend a guilty verdict, different perspectives applied to the problem bring out new elements and, ultimately, the jurors are able to guide each other toward the right answer. A minimal amount of cognitive diversity, in other words, can compensate for a lot of individual incompetence.

---

[6] The four conditions are fairly reasonable. The first one requires that the problem be difficult enough, since we do not need a group to solve easy problems. The second condition requires that all problem solvers are relatively smart. In other words, the members of the group must have local optima that are not too low otherwise the group would get stuck far from the global optimum. The third condition simply assumes a diversity of local optima such that the intersection of the problem-solvers' local optima contains only the global optimum. Finally, the fourth condition requires that the initial population from which the problem solvers are picked must be large and the collection of problem solvers working together must contain more than a handful of problem solvers. This assumption ensures that the randomly picked collection of problem-solvers in the larger pool is diverse and in particular more cognitively diverse than a collection of the best of the larger pool—which would not necessarily be the case for too small a pool relative to the size of the subset of randomly chosen problem-solvers or for too small a subset of problem-solvers in absolute terms. Notice that the first part of this fourth condition can be thought of as Madison's requirement in Federalist 10 that the pool of candidates to the position of representatives be large enough. For more on this, see Page 2007: 159-162.

Building on Hong and Page's findings, I have argued that the gain of making deliberation properly "democratic," that is open to all rather than just a smart few, is that this openness and inclusivity automatically ensure greater cognitive diversity. In that sense, one might say, more is smarter.[7] I have suggested generalizing Scott Page's "Diversity Trumps Ability Theorem" into a "Numbers Trumps Ability Theorem," by which what matters most to the epistemic competence of a problem-solving group is not so much individual ability as the number of people in the group. Thus if twelve jury members are more cognitively diverse than just one, then 43 are even more cognitively diverse, and thus smarter, than twelve and so would be123 or 500. Of course, this assumption that cognitive diversity correlates with numbers will not always be verified but it is more plausible than the reverse assumption.[8]

3.   *Representation as a Way to Project the Cognitive Diversity of the Larger Group on a Smaller Scale*

We just saw that a more inclusive deliberation process increases the chances that the group, guided by the "forceless force" of the better arguments, eventually figures out the right answer to a given problem. A crucial problem, however, which naturally dampens the enthusiasm one might have for numbers, is a question of threshold. Deliberation

---

[7]   Notice that to the extent that (and if it is the case that) cognitive diversity is correlated with other forms of diversity, such as gender or ethnic diversity, the argument suggests that positive discrimination is not just a good thing on fairness grounds but also for epistemic reasons. I will not enter that complicated debate here but it is clearly one of the potential implications of an argument advocating the epistemic properties of cognitive diversity (for a defense of cognitive diversity as being in fact the "only" reason to support affirmative action, see the conclusions of the French sociologist Sabbagh 2003).

[8]   A complicating factor is probably the (s)election mechanism. In selecting, say, a hundred representatives, a system of proportional representation may produce more cognitive diversity than majority voting in single-member districts. This invites an epistemic comparison between alternative democratic selection mechanisms, some of which can produce more cognitive diversity with fewer additional members.

involving all members of a given group is not always feasible. In practice, past a certain numerical threshold, deliberation turns into a chaotic mess, in which case the epistemic superiority seems to go by default to deliberation involving a smaller number of people, preferably the smarter or more educated ones. This is where the institutional device of political representation comes into play. Representation allows the indirect or mediated involvement of the many in a decision taken by the few. In other words, representation makes democratic decision-making possible when numbers are too large in a mediated way.

This is not to say that representative democracy is simply the second-best of direct democracy. As many authors have argued, representation is also a way to improve on the decisions that regular citizens would take by delegating the task to more enlightened and competent citizens. A common way to look at representation—from Burke to contemporary elitist democrats after Schumpeter (1976)[9]—is thus to assume that representation selects the more capable citizens, who are then in charge of making laws and decisions on behalf of all the others. What I propose here is a novel way to look at representation: on that view, the primary function of representation is not to gather the best and brightest but merely to reproduce on the scale at which face-to-face deliberation remains feasible the cognitive diversity of the larger group. The expectation remains that the representative assembly should, among other things, come up with the best possible answers to all sorts of collective problems. But the assumption is that this epistemic

---

[9] Of course there are sensible differences between Burke and Schumpeter. On the Burkean view, the representatives are supposed to use their better judgment to make decisions about the general good and the long-term interests of citizens. On the Schumpeterian view, the representatives use their brains to maximize their chances of being re-elected by pursuing policy-goals likely to satisfy their constituents' preferences.

performance is primarily conditional on the systemic properties of the assembly (its cognitive diversity) rather than the individual abilities of its members.

　If the argument presented in section 2 is correct indeed, what matters for the epistemic reliability of deliberations among the representatives is that their group be cognitively diverse rather than made up of individually smart but cognitively homogenous people. The simplest way to ensure maximal cognitive diversity is to reproduce on a smaller scale the cognitive diversity that exists at the level of the larger group. Regardless of the best ways to ensure such an exact reproduction (lottery or random sampling seem the most obvious ways), the idea is that we should embrace a notion of representation as "descriptive" or mirror-image of the nation. On Burkean grounds, in other words, that is for the purpose of representatives using their best judgment to come up with the best possible answers to collective problems, we should embrace John Adams' conception of representation as "miniature portrait" of the people.

This epistemic defense of descriptive representation subscribes to a new normative understanding of representation, which surely does not fit existing practices. If correct on a normative level, this epistemic approach would involve reconsidering the way we select our representatives and the way we look at non elected entities that claim to have a representative role. Conversely, this approach makes sense of the rising legitimacy of proposals for alternative modes of selection of the representatives and of non elected institutions that claim to represent in novel ways the will of the people.

Concerning the way we select representatives, one of the most obvious implications is to question the practice of elections, since elections are probably not the best way of ensuring the reproduction of cognitive diversity on a smaller scale (although

it is possible that, under some circumstances, elections do a good enough job). In fact, elections retain in practice an aristocratic flavor in that they involve a principle of selection on criteria that often give more chances to the more educated and/or the richest members of society, who then tend to stay in power and reproduce themselves as a class.[10] As a consequence, the individual ability of elected assemblies might be higher than average but it is unlikely that their cognitive diversity will be too.

Some authors have suggested selection by random lottery as an alternative to election (e.g., Elster 1989: 78-103) and argued that lotteries are actually in principle more democratic and representative (e.g., Mulgan 1984: 539-560, Goodwin 1992, Duxbury 1999, Stone 2007 and Sintomer 2007). Lotteries would not necessarily elevate the level of individual ability (by definition the expected individual ability of those selected would be average) but they would preserve the cognitive diversity of the group.[11]

Random sampling is another way to achieve the same end. Concerned with the selection of presidential candidates, James Fishkin has proposed to take off a random sample of the voting-age population for several days' discussion with and about the merits of different candidates and combining the conclusion of those mini populi with the outcomes of "deliberative polls" which combine small-group discussions involving large numbers of participants with random sampling of public opinion (Fishkin 1991).

---

[10] For a compelling critique of and solution to the problems of representative democracy in America, see O'Leary 2006.

[11]   On the other hand, there are problems of incentives, motivations, and accountability (since selected people's hope to be re-selected is independent of what they achieve while in power) that render lotteries as a selection mode for representatives difficult to implement. As a result, election might be just the second-best in terms of reproducing cognitive diversity. The fact that elections are periodic (every four or five years) also ensures a minimal renewal of the rulers over time (although lesser than would be the case with lotteries), which is crucial in preventing representatives from turning into a group of similarly thinking oligarchs. I make here the plausible assumption that any initially diverse group of individuals will become less diverse over time unless periodically refreshed with new members.

Theoretically at least (the idea sounds unduly time-consuming), one could image a similar process for the selection of representatives in the assembly.

The thesis presented here suggests a new legitimacy for non-elected institutions like citizens' juries or deliberative polls. Those miniature portraits of the people fulfill the epistemic function of representation by reproducing on the smaller scale at which deliberation is feasible the cognitive diversity present in the larger group. Contrary to people who denounce those micro-populi as non-elected—understand "non-representative"—one might reply that these micro-populi are in fact more representative that some elected assemblies.

4. *A few objections*

An objector might claim that, however meaningful an epistemic approach to deliberation and representation might be, problem-solving does not exhaust the tasks that representatives have to accomplish in the assembly. A lot of the discussions going on in assemblies, this objector might point out, has more to do with bargaining and the defense of particular interests. This surely speaks in favor of descriptive representation, but on the classical grounds that having an assembly that looks like a miniature portrait of the people is more likely to represent all interests equally, not on the epistemic grounds proposed here. In reply to that objection, I can only acknowledge that problem-solving is not all there is to politics and that arbitraging and compromising between competing interests is certainly a part of representatives' task. All I am saying in this paper is that if taking seriously the epistemic function of representative assemblies involves a specific conception of representation. It might be that another conception of representation is

more appropriate to account for other functions of representative assemblies. As Hanna Pitkin first argued and Jane Mansbridge recently rehearsed from a different perspective 2003), the concept of representation is multi-facetted. It might be the case that no single account can unify all the functions that representatives are supposed to fulfill. I am just content here to propose yet another way to look at representation, one that in my view hybridizes in interesting ways the classical oppositions representatives as delegates or trustees and between formal and descriptive representation.

Another objector might argue that I have overemphasized the independence of representatives. Burke saw representatives as a class of elected oligarchs who did not really have to take into account their constituents' preferences. On a more democratic reading of their role (e.g., Urbinati 2006), however, representatives are supposed to take into account their constituents' interests and judgments, not act and decide entirely on their own. Between strict independence and strict mandate, one can thus see the representatives' judgment as being regularly checked against the opinion of their constituency and factoring the latter in, if only because representatives' re-election is conditional on constituents' satisfaction with what they are perceived as having accomplished while in power. I do not deny the validity of the objection. To me, however, it suggests that the kind of accountability ensured by elections might be counter-productive from an epistemic point of view. When representatives are too concerned with the short-term satisfaction of their constituents' interests, their problem-solving abilities as a group is probably harmed. There might be an unpleasant trade-off between electoral accountability and efficiency.

Another objection might point that even assuming that cognitive diversity matters more than individual ability for the problem-solving abilities of the reprsentative assembly, random sampling might lower the average ability way below the threshold necessary for group competence so that we would still be better off with a homogeneously thinking group of representatives rather than a representative group of average citizens. This objector could add that if to inject some amount of cognitive diversity in the assembly, one could keep the actual system of elections and amend it with a system of quotas ensuring the presence of various minorities. Combining election with quotas, one would presumably get the best of both worlds: the high individual abilities of Burkean elites and (some of) the cognitive diversity present in the people at large.

Let us ignore for now the optimistic assumption that elections do, in fact, select the best and brightest. It still remains unproven that the average citizen's individual abilities are below the threshold that must be met for competent problem-solving in a cognitively diverse group. In that case, there might be a strict tie between a cognitively diverse group of individuals with average individual abilities and a group of homogenously thinking people with high individual abilities, even when some amount of cognitive diversity has been injected through quotas.

Second, however, the problem is that quotas are an extremely clumsy and imperfect way to artificially create cognitive diversity. They may look like second-best to lotteries and random-sampling, but in my view they are bound to fail to achieve the same goal for two reasons. One is that quotas a priori essentialize the categories of people contributing to the cognitive diversity of an assembly, when there is in fact no way to know in advance what kind of cognitive difference is going to matter for deliberation on

a given political issue, let alone a way to know which sociological features are going to be correlated with that cognitive difference. For most political problems, we cannot know in advance which statistical property of the electorate will be relevant, that is from which category of people (workers, women, ethnic minorities, mathematicians, poker-players etc.) the right kind of thinking will come. As a result, the best solution is simply not to choose and identify in advance but, literally, leave it up to chance and the law of large numbers. Trying to predict a priori whether a black woman from working class-neighborhood or a Caucasian farmer are going to contribute to the quality of the deliberative outcome is silly at best. There may be valid reasons to embrace quotas, but cognitive diversity is not one of them.

Conclusion

I have proposed in this paper a non-orthodox normative interpretation of representation as the institutional trick that allows for democratic deliberation on a feasible scale while preserving at least some of the cognitive diversity characteristic of the group in its entirety. By so doing, I have provided a defense of descriptive representation on Burkean, grounds, arguing that a representative assembly as miniature portrait of the people maximizes the presence of a key ingredient of the assembly's epistemic reliability. Burke, however, thought that the epistemic quality of deliberations among representatives was essentially a function of the individual abilities of the representatives. He thought that an assembly of gentlemen with better education and presumably superior cognitive abilities would produce the best possible results, provided those gentlemen were free to pass judgments on their own. Following recent findings by Page, I have suggested that if we

care about the qualities of deliberation among our representatives, we might be better off with an assembly of perhaps less individually competent but more cognitively diverse people.

Besides institutional and practical implications, this conclusion has possible normative implications for contemporary debates opposing the advocates of a "politics of ideas" to those of a "politics of presence." For the advocates of a politics of ideas, accountability in relation to declared policies and programs is all that matters in evaluating the legitimacy of representatives. White men can represent black women and black women white men because what matters is the kind of "ideas" representatives are capable of defending. Ideas can be assessed through the use of reason, which is color-blind, gender-neutral, and impartial. What we should care about in selecting representatives, therefore, is to identify people with good ideas and good argumentative skills, not specific sociological traits. Advocates of a politics of presence, however, argue that the gender or ethnic composition is not a matter of indifference but is in fact a legimate matter of democratic concern. There is a degree to which only a Black woman can represent the perspective of other Black women. On the epistemic approach proposed here, however, the politics of presence cannot be separated from the politics of ideas because, as the argument has it, the best ideas are likely to emerge in a deliberative setting where the presence of the people in all its cognitive diversity is statistically ensured. On that view, it is not meaningful to say that a Black woman more aptly represents other Black women. The idea is, rather, that in a country characterized by the presence of a strong Black minority, an assembly that would lack Black women most probably fails to include as much cognitive diversity as it should, which is sure to harm

the epistemic quality of deliberative outcomes.

Bibliography

Burke, Edmund. 1968. *Reflections on the Revolution in France.* London: Penguin
    Books.

Cohen, Joshua and Joel Rogers. 1995. *Associations and Democracy. The Real Utopias
    Project*, Vol. 1 (Ed. Erik Olin Wright). London: Verso.

Dahl, Robert A. 1989. *Democracy and Its Critics.* New Haven: Yale University.

Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy.* New York: Harper: 1957.

Duxbury, Neil. 1999. *Random Justice: On Lotteries and Legal Decision-Making.*
    Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Elster, Jon. 1989. *Solomonic Judgments: studies in the limits of rationality.* Cambridge,
    New York: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences
    de l'homme.

Fishkin, James. 1991. *Democracy and Deliberation: New Directions for Democratic
Reform.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hardin, Russell. 2004. "Representing Ignorance" *Social Philosophy and Policy* (2004),
    21:76-99.

Madison, James, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay. 1987. *The Federalist Papers.* Ed.
    Isaac Kramnick. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Goodwin, Barbara. 1992. *Justice By Lottery.* Chicago: The University of Chicago
    Press.

Gould, Carol. 1996. "Diversity and Democracy: Representing Differences." In
    Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political, ed. Seyla
    Benhabib. Princeton: Princeton University: 171-186.

Landemore, Hélène. 2007. "Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and
    the Rule of the Many" (Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University).

-- "Democratic Reason: The Mechanisms of Collective Inteligence in Politics," in
    Landemore and Elster (eds), *Collective Wisdom: Principles and Mechanisms*.
    Under Review with Cambridge University Press.

Manin, Bernard. 1997. *The Principles of Representative Government.* Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press.

Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes'." *The Journal of Politics* 61: 628-57.

-- 2003. "Rethinking Representation." *American Political Science Review* 97 (4): 515-528.

Mulgan, Richard G. 1984. "Lot as a Democratic Device of Selection." *Review of Politics* 46: 539-560.

Page, Scott. 2007. *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Pennock, J. Roland and John Chapman, eds. 1968. *Representation*. New York: Atherton Press.

Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. 1967. *The Concept of Representation.* Berkeley: University of California.

Phillips, Anne. 1995. *Politics of Presence.* New York: Clarendon.

Phillips, Anne. 1998. "Democracy and Representation: Or, Why Should It Matter Who Our Representatives Are?" *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University. pp. 224-240.

Richardson, Henry. 2002. "Representative Government" in *Democratic Autonomy*, Oxford University Press, Chapter 14: 193-202.

Schumpeter, Joseph. 1976. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy.* London: Allen and Unwin.

Sintomer, Yves. 2007. *Le Pouvoir au Peuple: jury citoyens, tirage au sort, et démocratie participative.* Paris: La Découverte.

Stone, Peter. 2007. "Why Lotteries Are Just?" *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 15 (3): 276-295.

Urbinati, Nadia. 2000. "Representation as Advocacy: A Study of Democratic Deliberation: *Political Theory* 28: 258-786.