

Beyond the Empirical-Normative Divide: The Democratic Theory of Jane Mansbridge

Melissa S. Williams, *University of Toronto*

Jane Mansbridge's intellectual career is marked by field-shifting contributions to democratic theory, feminist scholarship, political science methodology, and the empirical study of social movements and direct democracy. Her work has fundamentally challenged existing paradigms in both normative political theory and empirical political science and launched new lines of scholarly inquiry on the most basic questions of democratic equality, deliberation, collective action, and political representation. Her three best-known books—*Beyond Adversary Democracy* (1980), *Why We Lost the ERA* (1986) and *Beyond Self-Interest* (1990a)—have become part of the political science canon and remain staples on graduate course syllabi decades after their publication. The importance of Mansbridge's work has been recognized by her colleagues through a trifecta of major APSA awards: the Gladys M. Kammerer Award (1987), the Victoria Schuck Award (1988), and, most recently, the James Madison Award and Lecture (2011).

Mansbridge, who is now the Adams Professor of Political Leadership and Democratic Values at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, began her life as a scholar at Wellesley College. For her graduate training, she went to Harvard University, where she completed an MA in medieval history

Melissa S. Williams is a professor of political science and founding director of the Centre for Ethics at the University of Toronto. She can be reached at melissa.williams@utoronto.ca.



2012–2013 APSA President
Jane Mansbridge

Adams Professor of Political Leadership and Democratic Values, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

followed by a PhD in political science. Her doctoral dissertation, *Brandeis and Sutherland: Apostles of Individualism* (1970), showed that even though these two justices represented the extreme left and the extreme right of constitutional thinking on the Supreme Court, the range of their approaches and their politics were strikingly similar, reflecting the narrowness of the social pool from which justices were selected. A National Science Foundation postdoctoral fellowship

enabled her to launch her research on *Beyond Adversary Democracy* immediately after completing her doctorate, research she continued during her first academic appointment at the University of Chicago. She later taught for many years at Northwestern University before returning to Harvard in 1996. Her career has been punctuated by prestigious research fellowships at the Institute for Policy Studies, the Institute for Advanced Studies, and the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, among others. Mansbridge was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1994.

The feminist idea that “the personal is political” plays on several registers throughout Mansbridge's work. First, Mansbridge's experiences as a political activist generated some of the defining topics of her own research. The “we” in *Why We Lost the ERA* included the feminist organizations in which she had played an active role since her days in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she was one of the founding members of the Women's Center in 1971. Her interest in participatory democracy arose from the experiments in radical democracy that suffused the left in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Mansbridge was in the thick of these movements. “In those days,” she says, “Cambridge was a hotbed of participatory democracy. There were bicycle co-ops, legal co-ops, food co-ops, and so on. I took part in the women's movement, which was on the far left in the Boston area, [and was] very involved in participatory democracy” (Rouyer 2010, 141).

The creative tension between scholarship and activism has intensified the challenges of Mansbridge's research while also stimulating its deepest insights. When we study deeply contested political issues, she notes, "analysis ... is a political act, and one must, as a political being as well as a scholar, take responsibility for it" (1986, xi). Mansbridge's work as an activist gave her an insider's view of movement and participatory politics and helped sharpen her skills in participant observation as a research method. At the same time, it brought home the challenges of balancing scholarship and activism, in this case leading her to the conclusion that she could not, as she had originally planned, use her own Women's Center as a case study in *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (Mansbridge 1986, ix; Rouyer 2010, 142). Instead, she conducted her case studies for that book on a traditional town hall meeting in rural Vermont ("Selby") and the participatory workplace of an urban crisis center ("Helpline"). While her selection of the crisis center was guided by her contemporary experience in participatory organizations, her choice of town meeting democracy was rooted in an older experience. "I grew up in a town in Connecticut that had a town meeting, and community government was the kind of government I was accustomed to.... That was the way we made decisions, and it was 'direct democracy'—as I realized, it seems, after a doctorate in political science (*laughing*).... But I was surprised that no one had carefully studied town meetings in depth as a modern form, however attenuated, of Athenian democracy" (Rouyer 2010, 144–45).

The idea that "the personal is political" informs Mansbridge's work in ways that go well beyond case selection, however. It is central to her theoretical frameworks and methods of inquiry that the meaning of political ideas resides not only in canonical texts or the statements of political elites and activists, but also in their practical function in the discourse of ordinary citizens, what Mansbridge calls "everyday talk." "In everyday talk and action [ordinary people] test new and old ideas against their daily realities, make small moves ... that try to put some version of an idea into effect, and talk the ideas over with friends, sifting the usable from the unusable.... In their micronegotiations and private conversations, [they] influence the ideas and symbols available

to the political process not only aggregatively, by favoring one side or another in a vote or in a public opinion survey, but also substantively, through their practice" (Mansbridge 1999a, 214). By studying the ways in which ordinary people use ideas in practice, we gain empirical knowledge about the power and limits of ideas in politics.

Understanding how ordinary people use political ideas is equally important for normative theory. Mansbridge's interviews for *Beyond Adversary Democracy* revealed agents who "made heroic efforts to live up to their ideals, reformulating them as they discovered their limitations through painful experience" (1980, xii). By listening closely to citizens' own accounts of the ideals they were trying to live up to and the challenges they confronted in doing so, Mansbridge uncovered deep gaps in democratic theory's account of the importance of political equality (understood as equal power, or equal influence over outcomes) for democratic legitimacy. As she states in the preface of that work, "[p]olitical theorists have not ordinarily paid much attention to the way ordinary people think about normative issues. My experience writing this book has convinced me that this is a mistake.... [F]ield studies of what happens to various ideals when people try to live by them could prove useful in clarifying a wide range of normative questions" (1980, xii).

Close attention to the micro-level intersection of the personal and the political also yields insights into key structural and institutional features of democratic politics. Mansbridge was among the first political scientists to highlight the fact that differences in rates of political participation across the lines of class, race and gender can be traced in part to the way in which participation is institutionalized. While other important studies, such as Verba, Nie and Kim's influential *Participation and Political Equality* (1978), relied on survey data to demonstrate unequal participation rates, Mansbridge's fine-grained observation and interviews revealed patterns of inequality that would not have been evident otherwise. For example, participation in Selby's town meeting was higher among residents in the village core than in outlying areas; other differences in participation tracked differences in age, class, length of residence, and education. Although women in Selby attended meetings at roughly the

same rate as men, they spoke much less frequently (1980, chap. 9). At Helpline, members with working-class backgrounds had lower confidence in their verbal skills and were viewed both by themselves and by other as having less power in the organization (1980, 199–206). The costs and benefits of political participation weigh unequally on different groups of citizens, and this generates political inequality. Mansbridge's detailed attention to the personal experience of political participation brought out clearly that these inequalities have psychological and socio-cultural as well as material dimensions. Her insights into the impact of social differences on the dynamics and outcomes of political deliberation were the first contribution to what has since become a significant critical strand in theoretical debates over deliberative democracy (see, e.g., Mansbridge 1990b).

Mansbridge's use of interview and participant observation techniques of research are constitutive of her larger views of theory-building and theory-testing in both empirical political science and normative political theory. For empirical political science, if the evidence from ground-level actors contradicts key assumptions of our theoretical models, we must either provide a structural or system-level explanation of the gap, or we must revise our theories. For normative political theory, a gap between idealized norms and the normative judgments of ordinary people often reveals theoretical problems that have yet to be worked out. In her essay, "Practice-Thought-Practice," Mansbridge writes, "Theory is usually silent when theorists fail to see what does not fit. Observations from practice give us clues on how to fill in the silence." Filling in theoretical gaps can, in turn, help to guide changes in practice through, *inter alia*, theoretically attentive institutional design (2002, 175). Although interviews are only one among many of the empirical methods Mansbridge has deployed in her work, they have been a touchstone for her theoretical work throughout her career. In her forthcoming book, *Everyday Feminism*, she relies on interviews with 50 low-income women to explore the impact of the feminist movement on gender relations in the wider society, including nonactivists who do not describe themselves as "feminists." Asked why she conducted the interviews for this study, she responds, "To keep a certain freshness of

spirit. From time to time, when an unresolved question poses a problem for me, I feel the need to go and talk with people at the heart of the problem. . . . Speaking with these women has considerably influenced my views about deliberation” (Rouyer 2010, 155).

Mansbridge’s research methods span an astonishing range of approaches to the study of politics, a factor which has been key to her extraordinary impact across the subfields of political science. While she is often identified primarily as a political theorist, she uses a diverse array of methodological techniques in empirical political science, including the interview and participant-observation methods already noted, survey research and multivariate analysis (e.g., Mansbridge 1980, 1986), content and longitudinal analysis (e.g., Mansbridge and Flaster 2007), in addition to textual interpretation, the history of ideas, and conceptual analysis informed by contemporary political philosophy and feminist theory. This plurality of approaches has been central to the originality of her research and her avoidance of the traps of methodological orthodoxy that periodically capture the discipline. For Mansbridge, different methodological approaches are tools by which to gain analytic clarity about enduring problems of political order and generalizable patterns of political action. The most potent tools in our analytical toolbox, however, often operate through simplifying assumptions that shine a bright light on one dimension of political life at the cost of throwing other dimensions into shadow. As with so many things, these tools’ strength is also their weakness. “The trick is to use the techniques that require simplification without at the same time forgetting the ways in which one’s simplifications may lead one astray” (Mansbridge 1995b, 152).

Mastery of the discipline’s leading theoretical and methodological approaches enables Mansbridge to address colleagues’ work in their own disciplinary languages and to pinpoint the problems they have not solved. This is one reason for her unmatched capacity to join important debates across the discipline. Another reason, equally important, is a spirit of critical open-mindedness, humane generosity, humor, and warmth that makes colleagues eager to engage with her. Research, for Mansbridge, is a collaborative endeavor in which all its

participants, scholars and research subjects alike, are valued contributors. In one study, Mansbridge and colleagues invited professional facilitators of experiments in deliberative democracy to code a series of tapes of deliberative sessions according to their judgments of “good” and “bad” deliberative moments. They then compared the facilitators’ coding to the normative criteria of good deliberation that have emerged in the theoretical literature, finding that facilitators’ standards of judgment brought out dimensions of deliberative quality that theorists had elided or overlooked (Mansbridge et al. 2006). Facilitators were simultaneously research collaborators (as coders and knowledge-bearers) and research subjects (as having a particular role position in deliberative practice). The project’s structure captures the ethos of Mansbridge’s research as a whole: an ethos of reciprocal learning and egalitarian respect that guides her to listen as attentively to those who take positions opposed to her own as to those with whom she agrees and to pose questions that are as profoundly challenging to her allies as to her opponents. These qualities have made her a treasured mentor and friend, as well as a deeply respected colleague, across the generations and subfields of a scholarly community she has done so much to forge.

ADVERSARY AND UNITARY DEMOCRACY

What sort of equality does democratic legitimacy require? This question lay at the heart of Mansbridge’s project in *Beyond Adversary Democracy* and grew directly out of the dilemmas she witnessed in the women’s movement. While she shared these organizations’ commitment to equality, she found she could not agree with the view commonly expressed by their members that domination and inequality were avoidable products of the capitalist system and of individuals’ lust for power. Inequality, she believed, would emerge in any social system, whatever its ideology. The key questions were how people committed to equality could find ways to cope with the forms of inequality that exist, how they could manage those inequalities through thoughtful institutional design, and how they could avoid the internal conflicts that plagued so many organizations when inequalities that flowed from larger structural factors were blamed, sometimes unfairly,

on the power lust of individuals (1980, vi–vii).

Of course, the Western tradition of modern political theory and its heirs in 20th-century political science had developed a robust answer to the foundational question of what sort of equality political legitimacy requires and how democratic institutions can be structured to secure it. The answer, which Mansbridge calls “adversary democracy,” has deep roots in the early modern period and particularly in Hobbes’s idea that rational egoism and asocial individualism form the core of human nature. Over the next two centuries, Hobbes’s grounding of legitimate political order in the self-interest of equal individuals took on a democratic form both in political theory and in the development of political institutions. While Locke rejected Hobbes’s idea of an absolute sovereign, he accepted the premise that a “contrariety of interests” would inevitably produce conflict and defended majority rule as the only justifiable way to produce decisions under conditions of conflict. Madisonian democracy, resting on the theory of factions, accepted the inevitability of conflicts of group self-interest and sought to design political institutions so as to yield effective decisions without risk of stalemate or breakdown. Beginning with Arthur Bentley (1908), and taken to new heights of theoretical sophistication by Schumpeter (1942), the idea that democratic politics could best be understood in terms of the mobilization of self-interest in the competition for political power took hold of the emerging discipline of political science. By the time Mansbridge began her work, it was the reigning paradigm of politics.

In the normative theory of adversary democracy, the legitimacy-conferring standard of equality is the equal protection of interests rooted in the equal value of each individual as a bearer of interests. Institutionally, democratic equality is secured by giving each individual an equally weighted vote, combined with an equal opportunity to organize with others to make demands on the political system. Politicians, whose self-interest is in being reelected, respond to pressures by brokering policies that satisfy the greatest number of voters’ interests. Ideally, the system-level outcome of this process is public policy that aggregates social interests in a balanced way (Mansbridge 1980, 17). Although adversary democracy’s ideal

of equality has never been realized in any actually existing national polity, it constitutes a coherent ideal of democratic legitimacy so long as one accepts the principle of self-interest as the basis of political motivation.

Adversary democracy's hegemony as a paradigm of politics displaced a much older understanding of democracy, and with it an alternative account of political motivation. Mansbridge traces this alternative, which she called "unitary democracy," to classical Athens and its face-to-face assemblies, where decisions were reached not primarily through the adding-up of votes and majority rule, but by citizens reasoning together about the common good. This model of democracy was much closer than the adversary model to the face-to-face participatory democracy that Mansbridge had observed in Selby and at Helpline. The equality it embodied was not equal power in the form of equally weighted votes, but equal status grounded in respect for each member as a part of the community and a con-

tributor to its common good. "Rereading Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* two years into my study," she notes, "I was arrested by the Greek maxim, 'Friendship is equality.' The maxim captured perfectly the link between equality and solidarity that I had seen in these collectives" (1980, ix; see also Mansbridge 1976). Because the term "unitary" imperfectly captures these ideals of friendship and has unwanted implications of homogeneity, Mansbridge says, she has never been wholly comfortable with it, but it was less unwieldy than the alternatives.

Because the term "unitary" imperfectly captures these ideals of friendship and has unwanted implications of homogeneity, Mansbridge says, she has never been wholly comfortable with it, but it was less unwieldy than the alternatives.

the diagram, reflecting their judgment of inequalities of power within the organization. The revelation came when she asked whether these committed egalitarians were troubled by this inequality, and both she and they were surprised to discover that they were not. When she pressed them to explain why not, what emerged was that unequal power was acceptable because they trusted one another to do what was best for the organization as a whole, given that they all shared the same commitments (Mansbridge 1980, 183–84; Rouyer 2010, 142–44).

This exercise generated the central insight of the book: Adversary democracy's assumption that equal power is necessary to secure the equal protection of interests is not valid in circumstances of common interests. When interests are common, there is no gap between the interests of power-holders and those of other citizens. In these contexts, equal political power is not necessary to secure legitimacy. Trust in power-holders does require a background respect for the equal

status of all members, and one of the virtues of formal political equality is that it signals this respect. But equal power is not a necessary condition of equal respect, and other ways of achieving equal respect, such as breaking down status hierarchies, may be more important than political equality. When interests do conflict, power needs to be distributed more equally among members to ensure the equal protection of their interests.

In reality, there are no situations of perfectly common or perfectly conflicting interests. Rather, these can be arrayed on a spectrum. Small-scale democracy is more favorable to common interests than large-scale democracy, but each has both unitary and adversary features. Nor is one form of democracy normatively superior to the other; each has its own criterion of democratic equality, and each is prone to distinctive violations of egalitarian norms. The practices of unitary democracy, such as face-to-face assembly and consensus decision making, can generate oppressive pressures to conformity.

Speech-centered forms of decision making can render less powerful those who, for class, gender, or cultural reasons, are less comfortable speaking in public or less skilled in dominant forms of discourse. In adversary democracy, an equal vote can readily be mistaken for equal power in political decisions, falsely legitimizing a system that fails to protect interests equally. The challenge is to understand the characteristic practices of adversary and unitary democracy—equally weighted votes, majority rule, face-to-face deliberation, consensus decision making—as means, not ends, toward democratic legitimacy. Institutional innovation should aim at developing individual and collective capacities to identify and act on common interests, while promoting the proportional protection of interests when they conflict.

Beyond Adversary Democracy was decades ahead of its time. Before any political scientist had put the words "deliberation" and "democracy" together, it tracked the conflicts and complemen-

THE STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS OF EGALITARIAN POLITICS

tarities of discourse and interest aggregation in democratic processes and set out the normative criteria for judging both. An undisputed classic, the work was pivotal in shifting from the traditional pluralist paradigm to the deliberative paradigm that now prevails in democratic theory. Its problem-driven, empirically attentive, and normatively rich argument was a vital influence in reinvigorating political theory within the larger discipline of political science. It also laid the groundwork for the productive combination of empirical and normative approaches that has been the hallmark of Mansbridge's scholarship in the years since it was published.

The key that unlocked the book's core puzzle was an exercise she conducted with the members of Helpline. In individual sessions, she gave them small pieces of paper, one for every member of the organization, each bearing the name of a member. She asked each person to place the names on a diagram of concentric circles, in which the central circle represented the greatest power in the organization. In every case but one, people located the members in different positions on

core text in introductory political science courses as well as advanced seminars on gender and politics, social movements, and American politics. It played a crucial role in bringing the study of gender into the mainstream of political science. It was also one of the first major works to pay serious attention to the rising voices of social and religious conservatives. The social forces that mobilized in the anti-ERA movement have direct heirs in the contemporary Tea Party movement, and Mansbridge's analysis has enduring relevance for our understanding of the politics of right and left in the United States.

Like *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, the book is a study in the politics of the common good, in which the driving motivation of political actors was unquestionably a commitment to a common ideal, not narrow self-interest. Its central puzzle was how it was possible that a movement dedicated to a common interest in the protection of equal rights, a goal affirmed by a majority of citizens, could nonetheless fail. Mansbridge's answers bring out the structural constraints that confront any movement for egalitarian change. They also offer lasting lessons about the internal structures of political organizations that can lead to the failure of their missions.

The abstract ideal of equal rights is so fundamental to the self-understanding of democratic societies that to reject it is already to mark oneself as alien. Historically, the "self-evident truth" of equality has been a powerful resource for egalitarian struggles in the United States, as when woman suffragists and abolitionists invoked the Declaration of Independence to muster support for their causes. In mounting the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment in the early 1970s, the women's movement made highly effective use of this logic, gaining early passage in the Senate and garnering the support of a clear majority of the populace. This majority persisted throughout the struggle until time ran out for state ratification in 1982. Yet, as Mansbridge demonstrates through a rich array of evidence, support for the abstract principle of equal rights coexisted with enduring reluctance to contemplate radical changes in traditional gender relations, among women as well as among men. One of the key lessons of the work is that championing strong egalitarian change can generate wide-ranging social anxieties that proponents of change

must address directly, whether through counterargument or through compromise (Mansbridge 1986, chap. 3; Mansbridge and Shames 2008). Relatedly, movements for change can founder on their insensitivity to the deepest concerns of their opponents and the general public. The pro-ERA movement left many homemakers ripe for recruitment by Phyllis Schlafly through rhetoric that reinforced the declining social status of mothering and housework and by failing to take seriously the loss of some tangible benefits for homemakers that would likely result from the amendment's passage (Mansbridge 1986, chap. 9).

Movements oriented toward a public good face an inescapable dilemma in maintaining their momentum. On the one hand, they need to recruit and sustain the involvement of a committed core of activists. Because these activists are motivated by principles rather than material incentives, their participation is most effectively secured through a radical interpretation of the principles at stake and of the changes their success would bring about. On the other hand, movements need to maintain a wide popular base to press change through the democratic system. The more radical the change they project, the narrower the base of popular support they can garner. Mansbridge calls this the "iron law of involution," capturing the dynamics by which movements become increasingly ideological and insular. In meeting their core members' needs, they estrange themselves from the ordinary citizens they need to attain their goals. Because of the strong ethos of inclusiveness that suffused the ERA movement, "if any movement could have escaped the iron law of involution, this would have been the one. That it did not fully escape means that no organization based on voluntary membership is likely to do so" (Mansbridge 1986, 185).

To some degree, movements can resist these tendencies by instituting strong mechanisms of communication between central leadership and local chapters, and these were not well-developed in the ERA movement's decentralized structure. This same structure generated "decision by accretion," in which major policy choices, such as the embrace of a strong egalitarian reading of the ERA's implications for women in the military, resulted from unconscious and undebated pathways of argumentation (Mansbridge 1984;

Mansbridge 1986, chap. 8). Thus, one of Mansbridge's most important practical lessons is that movements are more likely to succeed when they deploy institutional techniques to enhance deliberation and debate within the movement, both vertically and horizontally.

SELF-INTEREST, COMMON INTERESTS, AND DEMOCRATIC DELIBERATION

Beyond Adversary Democracy's analysis of the role of self-interest in political life generated three major lines of critique of the adversary paradigm: that it was inadequate as an empirical explanation of political behavior; that it was conceptually and theoretically limited by its tendency to reduce human psychology to the motive of individual self-interest; and that it was normatively flawed because it failed to shed light on the institutional devices through which common interests can be discovered and forged or on the decision making practices that are most suited to circumstances of common interests. In 1990, just as rational choice methods became dominant in the discipline, Mansbridge engaged leading philosophers and social scientists in a deeper exploration of these themes, drawing out the potential and limits of theoretical models based on assumptions of rational self-interest (Mansbridge 1990a). Leading a wave of scholarship that sharply challenged rational choice theory in the following decade, *Beyond Self-Interest* remains a key resource.

Although some of her criticisms of rational choice theory converged with those of other prominent critics, Mansbridge never dismissed the usefulness of rational choice methods for problem-centered political science. Indeed, in one of the most visible debates, a leading rational choice theorist held up *Why We Lost the ERA* as an example of the contributions of rational choice theory to our empirical knowledge of politics (Fiorina 1995). In *Beyond Self-Interest*, Mansbridge and her colleagues explored the possibilities for building on rational choice theory to encompass various forms of altruism, how altruism can be distinguished from long-term self-interest, and how each of these might be modeled alongside narrow individual self-interest in mapping political motivation. As she emphasized, the primary aim of the volume was empirical, to enhance our understanding of human

behavior. Again underscoring the interconnection of empirical political science and normative political theory, however, she argued that a deeper understanding of the interaction between self-interested and altruistic motives was vitally important for normative reasons, as well:

Designing institutions when participants have both selfish and unselfish motives requires attention to variations in contexts, individuals, and the way individuals learn from institutions. The seemingly cautious strategy of designing institutions so that if there is little or no public spirit, the institutions will work anyway, will in some conditions erode whatever public spirit might otherwise exist. But the alternative strategy of assuming a high level of public spirit also entails serious risks, since public spirit may not survive when it is too strongly at odds with self-interest. Observation and experimentation should make it clearer which conditions are likely to generate each of these patterns, when changing an institution actually affects motivation, and when making motivation more public-spirited produces good rather than harmful results (1990a, *xii–xiii*).

Teasing out the relationship between self-interest and common interests in democratic processes is a challenge on multiple levels: for participants in those processes, for theorists seeking to model them, and for institutional designers seeking to enhance their democratic legitimacy. On the level of participants, a key question is how individuals learn from participation in politics. Political education is a central theme in Western political thought from Aristotle to Rousseau, Tocqueville and Mill. It is also a theme that figured in *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, where Mansbridge introduced an idea that challenges received wisdom on the theme: that what individuals learn by participating in political deliberation is not only to understand their own well-being as bound up with a larger common good, but also to develop a clearer understanding of the ways in which their interests may conflict with those of other members of the polity (Mansbridge 1980, 239, 292). As she put it more recently, “One key goal of participation is to reveal on any given issue whether one’s interests complement the interests of others in the

polity or conflict with them” (Mansbridge 1995a, 6).

The idea that an important function of democratic deliberation is to clarify conflicting as well as common interests poses a deeper challenge to prominent strands in democratic theory than might first appear. Building on the idea of public reason as articulated by Habermas and Rawls, leading theoretical accounts of deliberative democracy have sharply distinguished between processes of deliberation, the reasoned exchange of arguments aiming at consensus on a common good, and processes of aggregation such as voting, which resolve residual conflicts once deliberation’s capacity to yield agreement has been exhausted. Within these views, self-interest has no legitimate role in deliberation; reasons must appeal solely to interests and commitments that others share. Mansbridge’s argument unsettles this view. “No decision putatively for the common good,” she holds, “is normatively legitimate if created by ignoring conflicting interests.” Because agents may not be fully aware, *ex ante*, whether their interests conflict with others’, deliberation “should be judged not only by how well [it helps] to forge a common good but also by how well [it helps] clarify conflicts” (Mansbridge 2006, 107–08).

By disrupting the binary mapping of deliberation/common interests and aggregation/conflicting interests, Mansbridge’s inclusion of conflicting interests in deliberation opens up new conceptual space for modeling decision-making procedures and designing institutions. In particular, it generates new ways of thinking about the relationship between deliberation, bargaining, and negotiation. In standard deliberative theory, bargaining and negotiation are understood as nondeliberative decision-making processes. Mansbridge’s revision makes possible more nuanced distinctions among different types of negotiation, some of which are fully deliberative, some partially deliberative, and some nondeliberative. In these distinctions, the operative question is not whether interests conflict, as they invariably do in contexts where negotiation is appropriate. Rather, the crux of the difference between deliberative and nondeliberative negotiation is whether the resolution of conflict requires coercive power. What is essential about deliberation, on this view, is not that it aims at consensus on a common good, but that it

eschews the use of coercive power, relying exclusively on persuasion through mutual justification to transform agents’ positions (Mansbridge 2009b, 9–10).

Putting her collaborative understanding of theory-building into practice once again, Mansbridge recently brought together a “dream team” of deliberative theorists to explore whether they could agree that the concept of deliberation should include space for the clarification of self-interest. They did, and in “The Place of Self-Interest and the Role of Power in Deliberative Democracy,” Mansbridge and these colleagues offer a major reformulation of the deliberative ideal (Mansbridge et al., 2010). Accepting the centrality of noncoercive agreement to the normative ideal of deliberation, they develop a taxonomy of processes of communicative agreement as a further refinement of the concept of deliberative negotiation. They also explore the relationship between deliberative and non-deliberative processes to delimit the boundaries of democratically legitimate decision-making procedures. The impact of this work is already evident in citation indices. As “[d]eliberative democratic theory continues to ‘come of age’” (93), this major revision to the theory speeds its maturation considerably.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Disrupting binary distinctions has been a recurrent source of theoretical innovation in Mansbridge’s work. Of course, disrupting conceptual distinctions is praiseworthy only insofar as it improves our grasp of empirical realities or sharpens our normative and theoretical insights. We need clearly specified concepts to think well, and a signal feature of Mansbridge’s work is that her disruption of familiar categories is steadily focused on increasing the accuracy of our empirical observations, improving our theoretical and normative understanding, and generating new, precise and usable concepts that serve these primary ends.

One of the binaries Mansbridge disrupts in *Beyond Adversary Democracy* is that between representative and direct democracy. Citizens in town meetings make decisions that are binding on every member of the community, but not every citizen attends every meeting. This is unproblematic in cases of common interests, as those who are present will effectively represent the interests of those

who are absent. But when the interests of attenders and nonattenders conflict, an assembly's decisions are legitimate only to the degree that all interests gain roughly proportional representation. The idea of equal opportunity does not solve this problem, as in reality the costs and benefits of participation vary according to differences in competing obligations (such as child care), financial resources, verbal skills, and so on—all factors that tend to work against the interests of already-disadvantaged groups. Mansbridge proposes, then, that those who attend meetings should be treated as representatives of those who do not attend, enjoined to make decisions that protect the interests of all, and held accountable for those decisions. Viewed this way, the key distinction between elected legislatures and face-to-face assemblies is not whether or not they are representing citizens, but whether the representation is formal or informal. The difference between formal and informal representation, in turn, hinges on the means by which decision makers are held accountable for the equitable protection of citizens' conflicting interests (Mansbridge 1980, 249–51).

In the standard adversary model of political representation, the substantive representation of constituent interests is achieved through the representative's responsiveness to those interests as aggregated through the voting process and through partisan and pressure group mobilization. The representative's advocacy for these aggregated interests, motivated by the desire for reelection, is part of the further aggregation of interests in the polity's binding decisions. When we add the deliberative dimension of representation to this picture, the role of the representative shifts to encompass contributions to the clarification of "which policies are good for the polity as a whole, which policies are good for a representative's constituents, and when the interests of various groups within the polity and the constituency conflict" (Mansbridge 1999b, 634). This deliberative function, like the aggregative one, turns on representatives' having a clear understanding of constituents' interests, as conveyed through aggregative processes such as voting and polls, and through deliberative processes of communication. It also depends on constituents' having a fairly clear understanding of their interests that they can convey to their representatives.

In a major 1999 article, Mansbridge brings these features of political representation to bear on the longstanding question of "descriptive representation," that is, the question whether citizens should be represented by people who are like them. The question frequently arises in cases of marginalized groups such as women and racialized minorities, though as Mansbridge emphasizes it is also salient for other groups defined by shared experience, whether or not they share visible characteristics. She puts the question in the title of the article: "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women?" And her answer is "a contingent yes." Specifying the contexts in which descriptive representation contributes to democratic legitimacy, she shows, first, that descriptive representation can enhance substantive representation in contexts of communicative mistrust between a group constituency and out-group power-holders. This arises particularly clearly when there is a deep history of group-based domination: mistrust inhibits the free communication between constituents and representative that is necessary for the representative's understanding of constituent interests. Second, descriptive representation can enhance substantive representation in contexts when group constituencies have not yet engaged in the internal deliberation needed to clarify their own interests. In these contexts of "uncrystallized interests," descriptive representatives can look to the background experience they share with constituents for guidance on constituent interests in particular policy issues. Mansbridge's answer is contingent on contexts because descriptive representation does carry costs, such as the cost of group essentialism. It is only when, on balance, its contributions to legitimacy outweigh these costs that it is justified (Mansbridge 1999b).

The theoretical interest of descriptive representation lies not only in the possibility of justifying it normatively (a possibility that, until fairly recently, most normative theorists had rejected), but also in the ways it forces us to revise our understanding of mechanisms of accountability within a legitimate system of democratic representation. Descriptive representation in the context of uncrystallized interests unsettles the standard principal-agent model of political representation by eliminating the representative's direct

communication with and accountability to constituents as necessary conditions of legitimate representation. What does the important work in this model is the moment of *selection*: if constituents have judged well about the representative's capacity and inclination to draw on shared experience to inform positions on policy matters, sanctioning mechanisms of accountability will not add to the representative's effectiveness in representing their interests (Mansbridge 1999b; see also Mansbridge 2009a).

Mansbridge developed these insights into a new taxonomy of political representation in her 2003 *APSR* article, "Rethinking Representation." She begins from a conceptual and normative analysis of the traditional "promissory model" of representation, a principal-agent model in which the agent (representative) is held accountable to the principal (constituents) through the threat of sanctions. In this model, voters elect a representative based on his or her promises during elections, and then reward or punish the representative in the next election based on whether or not the promises were fulfilled. Without dismissing the relevance of this model, Mansbridge shows that it does not capture other empirically existing forms of representation that can be modeled theoretically and normatively. She specifies three such models of representation: "anticipatory," "gyroscopic," and "surrogate." Three important lessons from this new taxonomy stand out for our understanding of the democratic legitimacy of political representation. First, in different ways, the ideal forms of anticipatory, gyroscopic, and surrogate representation contribute to democratic legitimacy through deliberative more than aggregative processes. Second, although none of the new models of representation depends on electoral accountability as expressed in the promissory model, each can, in its idealized form, enhance the democratic legitimacy of representation as judged by aggregative and deliberative criteria. Third, we should think of the democratic legitimacy of political representation in systemic rather than dyadic terms. In more recent work, Mansbridge has further developed the idea of representation as a systemic phenomenon, selection-based rather than sanction-based models of representation, forms of deliberative accountability in political representation,

and the role of informal representatives in democratic orders (Mansbridge 2009a; Mansbridge 2011).

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Mansbridge's work for the theoretical and empirical study of political representation. Her analysis of descriptive and surrogate representation has had a tremendous impact on empirical research on the legislative representation of women and minorities. "Rethinking Representation" is currently one of the "Top 50" articles published in the *American Political Science Review*, the discipline's highest-impact journal (APSA 2012). Moreover, Mansbridge's new conceptual models of representation displace traditional principal-agent models, and with them the distinction between "delegate" and "trustee" models of representation that have prevailed in theoretical discussions of representation since Hanna Pitkin's classic work, *The Concept of Representation* (1972). Finally, Mansbridge's insights into the systemic, deliberative, and informal features of political representation provide promising bridges between democratic theory within a nation-state model and the possibilities for democratizing transnational and global political systems (see, e.g., Dryzek and Stevenson 2011).

THE DELIBERATIVE SYSTEM

As Mansbridge showed in *Why We Lost the ERA*, the tendency of social movements to become insular, homogeneous, and doctrinally narrow is the down side of the politics of ideas that develops within those movements. From the standpoint of the democratic legitimacy of a political order as a whole, however, the politics of ideas that unfolds in movement enclaves is vital. For groups that have been denied power in the public deliberative spaces of a polity, relatively closed spaces of free discussion are essential to the clarification of common group interests and the formulation of the political language through which they resist unjust structures of power. It was in such spaces that the idea that "the personal is political" led feminists to demand laws against marital rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. Political enclaves are essential not only for the sense of empowerment that they build among their members, but also as sources of the critique of power that every democracy needs. Although democratic action requires the

use of coercive power, for that power to become relatively legitimate it must also be constantly resisted (Mansbridge 1994).

The impact of the political ideas that emerge from enclave politics, however, goes far beyond their influence in shaping the state's exercise of coercive power through the rule of law. Mansbridge's seminal article, "Everyday Talk in the Deliberative System," shows how new political ideas generated by activists in political enclaves are diffused into wider social discourse (1999a; see also Mansbridge and Flaster 2007). When these ideas resonate with nonactivists, they are picked up in the "everyday talk" through which ordinary people negotiate micro-level power relations. Using examples from the feminist movement, Mansbridge shows how nonactivists use such terms as "male chauvinist" to resist traditional gender roles in the workplace and family, thus becoming, on a micro-level, "everyday activists" (Mansbridge 1999a; see also Mansbridge and Flaster 2007). Over time, the diffusion of ideas from enclaves to everyday talk generates real social change with practical consequences, although it is never filtered through official political decision-making institutions.

Mansbridge acknowledges that the change so produced may be good or bad from the standpoint of democratic commitments (Mansbridge 1999a, 221). Her central purpose in drawing attention to it is to argue for a significant revision to deliberative democratic theory. Deliberative theory recognizes the contribution of ideas generated in civil society, social movements, the media, and so on—what Habermas calls the "informal public sphere"—to deliberation in the public institutions that issue binding decisions backed by the coercive power of the state. But it does not recognize the free-standing importance of deliberative processes issuing *societal* decisions that occur over time as a majority of the members of a society adopt new norms and practices. As in the ERA movement, but on a societal scale, these are "decisions by accretion," without clear decisional points and without being consciously structured as decision-making processes (Mansbridge 1986; Mansbridge et al. 2012). Yet the societal consequences of such decisions can be every bit as important as the decisions made in formal political institutions—and sometimes more. Thus, a theory that

seeks to provide standards for judging the legitimacy or illegitimacy of a society as a whole should include "everyday talk" in its account of democratic deliberation. In doing so, Mansbridge argues, it should reconceive deliberative processes as an interactive and dynamic system in which decisions and deliberations occurring in one part affect the decisions and deliberations in one or more other parts, contributing to the overall consequences for the society as a whole.

In her most recent example of "deliberative coauthorship," Mansbridge led a group of leading deliberative theorists in developing the idea of deliberative systems and advancing deliberative theory's original ambition "to provide a normative and empirical account of the democratic process as a whole" (Mansbridge et al. 2012, 24). The aim is to move beyond the first phase of deliberative theory, which developed the normative ideal of deliberation and its connection to political legitimacy, and the second phase, which turned to the empirical study of and practical experiments in deliberative democracy. A limitation of the second phase is its focus on discrete instances of deliberation in specific institutional settings. The advantage of a systemic approach is that ideally it can map the relationship between formal and informal political spaces in generating normatively desirable (or undesirable) system-level outcomes. This important agenda-setting work promises the further advantage of enabling the analysis of deliberative processes on very large scales, both within and beyond territorial states. Mansbridge and her colleagues take the first steps toward fulfilling the agenda by specifying key functions of ideal deliberative systems—epistemic, ethical, and democratic—and signaling common system failures. Taken together, their proposals offer a rich array of theoretical and empirical questions for scholars to explore in further developing a systemic approach. Although it is not surprising that the author of *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, so influential in ushering in the first phase of deliberative theory, should also be at the forefront of its third phase, it is nonetheless an occasion for gratitude.

Looking back on Mansbridge's career to date, one can only be struck by the remarkable systematicity and coherence of her work as a whole. As with any major thinker, the evolution of her

ideas is marked by both continuity and change. Ideas present *in nuce* in *Beyond Adversary Democracy* and *Why We Lost the ERA* have developed into complex theoretical models that open new avenues of research for empirical political scientists, modelers, and normative theorists. Reflecting on her goals in writing her first book, Mansbridge remarks, "I wanted to make an "exploded diagram" of the theory of participatory democracy, like the one I was using at the time to fix my car: I wanted to put pressure on the system" (Rouyer 2010, 148–49; see also Mansbridge 1980, xii). Democratic political orders are, to a significant degree, the accumulated achievement of human ingenuity. As scholars, rather than mechanics, one of our key tasks is to make accessible to human understanding the inner workings of our political orders, but we also carry a normative responsibility to shed light on how to make these work better. By putting ceaseless pressure on the systems of thought by which we make empirical and normative sense of the democratic project, Jane Mansbridge has contributed immeasurably to this twosided, and common, task.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This essay is based in part on tributes to Jane Mansbridge submitted in support of a letter nominating her for the James Madison Award of the American Political Science Association. I wish to acknowledge that letter (drafted by Kristin Goss, Eileen McDonagh, and myself) and supporting statements as sources for this essay. Statements to which I had access included those by Brooke Ackerly, Elizabeth Anderson, Lee Ann Banaszak, Benjamin Barber, Sylvia Bashevkin, Frank Bryan, David Campbell, Joseph Carens, Susan Carroll, Joshua Cohen, Cynthia Daniels, Kathleen Dolan, Suzanne Dovi, John Dryzek, Albert William Dzur, Myra Marx Ferree, John Gastil, Robert Goodin, Janette Hartz-Karp, Mary Hawkesworth, Emily Hauptmann, Joan Huber, Nannerl O. Keohane, James Kloppenberg, Cristina Lafont, Michèle Lamont, Jennifer Lawless, Peter Levine, Jacob T. Levy, Tali Mendelberg, Tamara Metz, Barbara Norrander, Joseph Nye, Susan Olzak,

Andrew Rehfeld, Kira Sanbonmatsu, Stephanie Riger, Shauna Shames, Mary Lyndon Shanley, Carmen Sirianni, Rogers Smith, Lawrence Susskind, Carol Swain, Michele Swers, Katherine Tate, Katherine Cramer Walsh, Clyde Wilcox, Erik Olin Wright, and Philip Zelickow. I am also indebted to a recent interview of Jane Mansbridge by Muriel Rouyer (Rouyer, 2010) (translations from this interview are my own); helpful comments from Sylvia Bashevkin, Joseph Carens, David Rayside, Andrew Rehfeld, Jacob Schiff, and Mark Warren; and conversations with Jane Mansbridge. ■

REFERENCES

- American Political Science Association. 2012. "Top 50 Articles from the *American Political Science Review*." http://www.apsanet.org/content_30489.cfm (Accessed August 22, 2012).
- Bentley, Arthur. [1908] 1967. *The Process of Government*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Dryzek, John, and Hayley Stevenson. 2011. "Global Democracy and Earth System Governance." *Ecological Economics* 70: 1865–74.
- Fiorina, Morris. 1995. "Rational Choice, Empirical Contributions, and the Scientific Enterprise." *Critical Review* 9 (1–2): 85–94.
- Mansbridge, Jane. 2012. "On the Importance of Getting Things Done." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 45 (1): 1–8.
- . 2011. "Clarifying the Concept of Representation." *American Political Science Review* 105 (3): 621–30.
- . 2009a. "A 'Selection Model' of Political Representation." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 17 (4): 369–98.
- . 2009b. "Deliberative and Non-deliberative Negotiation." Harvard Kennedy School Working Paper RWP09–010. <http://ksnotes1.harvard.edu/Research/wpaper.nsf/rwp/RWP09-010> (Accessed August 22, 2012).
- . 2006. "Conflict and Self-Interest in Deliberation." In *Deliberative Democracy and Its Discontents*, ed. S. Besson and J. L. Martí, 107–32. London: Ashgate.
- . 2003. "Rethinking Representation." *American Political Science Review* 97 (4): 515–28.
- . 2002. "Practice – Thought – Practice." In Archon Fung and Eric Olin Wright, eds., *Deepening Democracy*, 175–99. New York: Verso, 2002.
- . 1999a. "Everyday Talk in the Deliberative System." In Stephen Macedo, ed., *Deliberative Politics*, 211–39. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 1999b. "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes'" *Journal of Politics* 61 (3): 627–57.
- . 1995a. "Does Participation Make Better Citizens?" *The Good Society* 5 (2): 1–7.
- . 1995b. "Rational Choice Gains by Losing." *Political Psychology* 16 (1): 137–55.
- . 1994. "Using Power/Fighting Power." *Constellations* 1 (1): 53–73.
- . 1992. "A Deliberative Theory of Interest Representation." In Mark Petracca, ed., *The Politics of Interests: Interest Groups Transformed*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- , ed. 1990a. *Beyond Self-Interest*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1990b. "Feminism and Democracy," *The American Prospect* 1: 126–39.
- . 1990c. "Self-Interest in Political Life," *Political Theory* 18 (1): 132–53.
- . 1986. *Why We Lost the ERA*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1984. "Who's In Charge Here? Gatekeeping and Accretion in the Struggle for the ERA," *Politics and Society* 13 (4): 343–82.
- . 1981. "Living with Conflict: Representation in the Theory of Adversary Democracy," *Ethics* 91 (3): 466–76.
- . 1980. *Beyond Adversary Democracy*. New York: Basic Books.
- . 1977. "Acceptable Inequalities," *British Journal of Political Science* 7 (3): 321–36.
- . 1976. "The Limits of Friendship." In *Participation in Politics: NOMOS XVI*, ed. R. Pennock and J. Chapman. 246–75. New York: Lieber-Atherton.
- . 1970. *Brandeis and Sutherland: Apostles of Individualism*. PhD diss. Harvard University.
- Mansbridge, Jane, Matthew Amengual, Janette Hartz-Karp, and John Gastil. 2006. "Norms of Deliberation: An Inductive Study." *Journal of Public Deliberation* 2 (1): 1–47.
- Mansbridge, Jane, James Bohman, Simone Chambers, Thomas Christiano, Archon Fung, John Parkinson, Dennis F. Thompson, and Mark E. Warren. 2012. "A Systemic Approach to Deliberative Democracy." In *Deliberative Systems: Deliberative Democracy at the Large Scale*, ed. J. Parkinson and J. Mansbridge, 1–26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mansbridge, Jane with James Bohman, Simone Chambers, David Estlund, Andreas Follesdal, Archon Fung, Cristina Lafont, Bernard Manin, and José Luis Martí. 2010. "The Place of Self-Interest and the Role of Power in Deliberative Democracy." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 18 (1): 64–100.
- Mansbridge, Jane, and Katherine Flaster. 2007. "The Cultural Politics of Everyday Discourse: The Case of 'Male Chauvinist.'" *Critical Sociology* 33 (4): 627–60.
- Mansbridge, Jane, and Shauna Shames. 2008. "Toward a Theory of Backlash: Dynamic Resistance and the Central Role of Power." *Politics & Gender* 4 (4): 623–33.
- Pitkin, Hanna. 1972. *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rouyer, Muriel. 2010. "Jane Mansbridge." *Raisons Politiques* (4): 135–55.
- Schumpeter, Joseph A. [1942] 1962. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Verba, Sidney, Norman H. Nie, and Jae-on Kim. 1978. *Participation and Political Equality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.