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Michael A. Neblo

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## Deliberative Democracy between Theory and Practice

Deliberative democrats seek to link political choices more closely to the deliberations of common citizens, rather than consigning them to speak only in the desiccated language of checks on a ballot. Sober thinkers from Plato to today, however, have argued that if we want to make good decisions, we cannot entrust them to the deliberations of common citizens. Critics argue that deliberative democracy is wildly unworkable in practice.

*Deliberative Democracy between Theory and Practice* cuts across this debate by clarifying the structure of a deliberative democratic system, and goes on to reevaluate the main empirical challenges to deliberative democracy in light of this new frame. It simultaneously reclaims the wider theory of deliberative democracy and meets the empirical critics squarely on terms that advance, rather than evade, the debate. Doing so has important implications for institutional design, the normative theory of democracy, and priorities for future research and practice.

Michael A. Neblo is an associate professor in the departments of Political Science and (by courtesy) Philosophy at the Ohio State University.

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*Ohio State University*



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*For my parents, my wife, and my daughters*

Respice, adspice, prospice.

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...

And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy,  
a remote important region in all who talk:  
though we could fool each other, we should consider –  
lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark.

For it is important that awake people be awake,  
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;  
the signals we give – yes or no, or maybe –  
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.

*William Stafford*, from “A Ritual to Read to Each Other”

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