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Chaired by Irène Renfer, Université de Genève, Switzerland

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Speech

**Processes of direct democracy as generators of postconventional moral culture.
Radicalizing Jürgen Habermas' theory of deliberative democracy with Lawrence
Kohlberg's developmental psychology**

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Introduction

[Slide: Title]

Ladies and gentlemen!

Thank you for the kind introduction and even more so for the invitation to this conference.

While the presentations before mine addressed issues related to processes of direct democracy in specific geographic and historic contexts, mine is of theoretical nature. Exploring the concept of postconventional moral culture, I hope to provide a framework, which allows you to analyze and understand some important aspects concerning the processes of direct democracy and politics in general.

As the first part of the title of my presentation suggests –

Processes of direct democracy as generators of postconventional moral culture –

I argue that processes of direct democracy are a powerful method to create positive political culture. My first line of thought is that political culture can be better understood when it is seen in the light of Kohlberg's thinking on moral psychology.

My second line of thought is that processes of direct democracy are an effective method to create postconventional moral culture. Processes of direct democracy can be derived from Kohlberg's pedagogical methods. From this point of view, processes of direct democracy no longer appear as a mere complement or substitute for parliamentary decision-making processes, but as a unique means of political socialization and learning.

This presentation is based on my ongoing Ph.D.-research project. Due to time restrictions, I have to simplify my argumentation considerably. In my paper for this conference, I have outlined the core of Kohlberg's psychology of individual moral reasoning. Assuming that you are familiar with my paper, I will focus now on questions of moral and political culture and then relate this concept to processes of direct democracy. I shall present my thoughts as follows:

[Slide: Table of contents]

- First, I will situate the notion of political and moral culture in the theory of deliberative democracy.
- In the second part, I will provide descriptions for the six stages of moral culture.
- To address the dynamics between the six stages, I will talk in the third part about moral learning.
- This will lead me to the fourth part, in which I will show how processes of direct democracy can be understood as generators of postconventional moral culture.
- In the conclusion, I summarize my arguments and highlight my contributions to the debates of political culture and processes of direct democracy.

[Slide: 1. Political and moral culture in deliberative democracy (1/2)]

1 Political and moral culture in deliberative democracy

Let me start with locating and defining a few terms. The slide shows two classic conceptualizations of deliberative democracy: the two-track model and the centre-periphery model. The basic concept for both is the same: one part is rather informal – the first track consisting of arenas of public life or the periphery, which harbors the civil society. The other part is of formal nature: the second track of official arenas of lawmaking or the center where the institution complex is located.

Deliberations take place within these parts, and more importantly: between the two parts. Different theories focus on and favor different kinds of deliberations, on the slide, I have mentioned

- deliberations involving representative mechanisms,
- processes of direct democracy,
- other forms of non-violent deliberations such as round-tables and

- dramatic upheavals.

I hope all is clear up to now. Let us turn now to the red part of the picture: Political culture.

[Slide: 1. Political and moral culture in deliberative democracy (2/2)]

For the moment being, I define political culture, with reference to Jürgen Habermas, as a netting of mentalities, which is silently present in the hearts and heads of the citizens and office holders. It forms the basis for spontaneous associations of unorganized political actors in order to initiate deliberations of issues so far neglected by the institutionalized political arena. However, due to political culture, the initiation of new deliberations is not only motivated by self-interest, but also by the willingness of public use of reason and the readiness for solidarity.

While this definition contains a number of important aspects, it sounds rather idealistic and gives no hints on how such a political culture could be produced. To differentiate political culture, and to prepare a practical grasp of it, I suggest that political culture can be analytically differentiated into

- moral culture
- ethical aspects and
- pragmatic aspects.

Moral culture refers to the normative aspect of any political issue and focus on the question of how co-existence with the other can be regulated while taking the interest of all into consideration. The ethical aspect refers to the notion of good life of an individual or of a group. Central to the ethical aspect are the choices made for the formation of a specific identity of an individual or a group. The pragmatic aspect refers to empirical considerations, such as geographical, sociological, economical or technological issues.

My assumption is that the moral culture is the core element of political culture, since it defines the cognitive structures, which are relevant for the ethical thinking and the perception of and the dealing with pragmatic issues. Therefore, let us have a closer look at the moral

culture.

[Slide: 2. Six stages of moral culture]

2 Six stages of moral culture

I would like to introduce this topic by referring to Kohlberg's scholarship on moral psychology. Initially Kohlberg's focus was purely individualistic, but over the course of time, it became clear that the cognitive capabilities for moral reasoning are distinct from other cognitive skills. For example, mathematical problem solving is a solely individual task, whereas moral reasoning requires interaction with others. That is why the quality of these relationships became a pivotal matter. In order to describe the quality of relationships, Kohlberg introduced the notion of moral culture, which he differentiated into collective stages. Let me give you a short description of the pre-conventional stage:

Collective Stage 1 – Moral culture of authority: Actually, Kohlberg does not provide a description for stage 1 and one might rightly argue that at this stage, there is no moral culture to be observed. Behavior is oriented towards the dominant authority; all relationships between group members are the product of (physical) coercion and vanish into thin air as soon as the authority loses ground.

Collective Stage 2 – Moral culture of exchange relationships: Stage 2 consists of a market culture – one enters into a relationship to conduct exchanges. The needs of others are a concern as far as their fulfillment gives right to satisfy one's own desires, they are processed in an ends-justifies-the-means logic. Moral culture at stage 2 is not able to capture the complexity of an individual as an end in itself.

And now the description of the conventional stages:

Collective stage 3 – Moral culture of being in good hands: it is only from this conventional stage on that substantive moral culture is generated. On stage 3, community is experienced through a network of strong relationships with other members. The community is viewed as a vehicle to pursue common goals and values, something that would not be possible on a stand-alone basis. Democracy gives the right to speak out as well as to be heard. There is a sense for collective objectives; they are derived by majority vote and respected even to the detriment of

one's own interests.

Collective stage 4 – Moral culture of stabilization and identification: On stage 4, community is more than the sum of the personal relationships – it is a value in itself. Being a member of a community implies rights and duties. Relationships with other members can now be stabilized, as they are no longer a product of affective bonds but of the rules. Democratic processes at stage 4 aim at the expression, perception and consideration of everybody's concerns so that the majority represents the general will.

Kohlberg's description of moral culture ends on stage 4. Why? There are several reasons to it, the most fundamental is the following: Kohlberg regarded, exclusively, communities. In communities, all members know each other, at least superficially. Due to their small size and simple structure, communities lack the complexity that is required to engender the necessity for postconventional moral reasoning. In other words, communities do not require and therefore do not allow for the development of postconventional moral reasoning. Hence, there is no postconventional moral culture in communities.

It is at the juncture between communities and societies that theories of deliberative democracy come into play. They provide a framework in the context of complex societies. Within the concept of collective stages, I therefore propose two additional, postconventional stages of moral culture. It should be no surprise that these are similar to the initial definition of political culture provided before.

Collective stage 5 – Moral culture of constitutional state, human versus civil rights: Moral culture at the first postconventional stage embraces the fact that individuals are members of a complex society. However, society is not a God-given thing, but the product of innumerable contributions of all members. The main contributions are respect for and the exercise of fundamental rights. Special attention must be paid to minorities, although they are perceived as minorities. This differentiating perspective is even more clearly expressed in the distinction between human rights and civil rights.

Collective stage 6 – Moral culture of universalization of cosmopolitan rights: Moral culture on stage 6 is universalizing cosmopolitan rights. From a moral point of view, no difference is made between a citizen and a non-citizen of a given society. Moral culture at stage 6 is not

defining a certain type of good life but rather the form of an egalitarian and communicative coexistence of multiple ideas of good life.

Given these stages – how does one move from one to another, preferably upwards?

[Slide: 3. Moral learning]

3 Moral learning

One of the basic assumptions of Kohlberg's theory is that development to a higher stage is the result of a learning process. Learning depends on individual factors and on the presence of external stimuli. In order to provide external stimuli, which enhance the moral development, Kohlberg has designed two pedagogical methods for school settings: dilemma discussions and just communities.

In dilemma discussions, students are confronted with a hypothetical moral dilemma and are asked to express their views on how the dilemma could be solved. Since groups normally consist of individuals who have developed to different stages, the students experience the strengths and weaknesses of their own moral reasoning and learn to take different perspectives. An individual starts to develop into a higher stage once he has become aware that his current moral reasoning is not fully adequate. The effectiveness of dilemma discussions has been empirically shown. However, its main weakness lays in the nature of the method: discussions are limited to verbal interaction and are mostly based on fictional examples. The crucial transfer from words to actions is not envisioned.

The objective of the second method – just communities – is to allow the practical application of moral choices. Students debate real problems derived from their school life and participate directly in the decision on how controversial issues are to be handled. Kohlberg suggests a set of institutions and procedures that establishes a just community as a small-scale democracy within a school. The main element is holding regular community meetings, which are attended by all students, teachers and administrators and in which disputed issues are debated and decided on, according to the principle of one man, one vote.

The measurement of the effectiveness of a just community is not an easy task, in particular, since it would be interesting to know how it affects the moral behavior of students outside the

school. Empirical examples show that with considerable efforts, positive effects, both on moral reasoning and behavior, can be attained.

What does that mean for us when thinking about processes of direct democracy?

[Slide: 4. Processes of direct democracy]

4 Processes of direct democracy

Evidently, we cannot inflate community meetings to societal magnitude. Nevertheless, the basic idea of including everybody in the deliberative process should be maintained, as we assume that postconventional moral culture develops only when an important part of the population has individually reached postconventional stages. When looking for solutions to this problem, it becomes clear that only processes of direct democracy meet this requirement. From a point of view of developmental psychology, they include the following features:

- Processes of direct democracy are the result of and the basis for discussions. These debates take place on all possible levels: in informal settings, in the general public and in formal political institutions. While the impact of the different debates may vary, their formal importance is the same as the only decisive moment is the ballot, in which each citizen has one vote.
- Processes of direct democracy are the adequate framework for debating and deciding on issues engendered by complex societies: matters of fundamental rights can be ruled legitimately only under the condition that everybody has a say.
- Processes of direct democracy have an equalizing effect between citizens and office holders, as everybody has an equal right to put a topic on the agenda and to vote for it.
- Actual participation in political action and deliberation make citizens aware of their more remote and indirect connections with others, the longrange and large-scale significance of what they aim at. In that sense, processes of direct democracy provoke perspective taking on a societal level.

When processes of direct democracy are applied to facilitate postconventional moral

reasoning and culture and not to produce political decisions only, the following points may be considered:

- Dilemma discussions and the just community approach show positive effects on the moral development only if they are implemented in a regular basis. The same applies to processes of direct democracy.
- The moral impact of different processes of direct democracy varies. Some instruments perpetuate a hierarchical relationship, such as: petitions, in which citizens are allowed to express their claims without any obligation of the political offices to react, and consultative ballots, which are not binding for the legislator or government; these instruments operate below postconventional stages. When citizens are allowed to initiate or stop political decisions, postconventional reasoning and culture is able to develop.

Allow me conclude:

Conclusion

I have argued that the concept of political culture can be meaningfully differentiated by incorporating Kohlberg's collective stages of moral culture. This leads to an expansion of the concept of moral culture to the postconventional level. It also leads to the insight that when issues of a complex society are to be addressed in a deliberative process, postconventional moral culture is required. Revisiting Kohlberg's pedagogical methods of dilemma discussion and just communities leads us to processes of direct democracy as a powerful means to generate postconventional moral culture.

My contributions are therefore as follows:

- Differentiation of political culture along Kohlberg's collective stages and introduction of postconventional moral culture and
- Demonstration of the importance of processes of direct democracy for the generation of postconventional moral culture.

With these contributions, I have radicalized Habermas' theory of deliberative democracy twofold: the first radicalization lies in pushing democracy to its extreme by suggesting

processes of direct democracy as important means of deliberation. The second radicalization lies in giving visibility to the psychological roots of deliberative democracy.

Thank you for your attention.

[Slide: Thank you for your attention]