Democracy as Public Deliberation and the Psychology of Epistemological World Views and Moral Reasoning: A Philosophical Reflection

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The four articles in this special issue on democracy and citizenship highlight the fundamental importance of the internal capabilities and sentiments of democratic citizens as necessary conditions for participation in public deliberation. The articles uncover and examine the complex and nuanced interrelationship between moral reasoning schema and capacity, moral behavior, political participation, affect, imagination, and epistemological world views (beliefs, understandings, personal epistemologies), as well as their potential development through transformative, inquiry-based, dialogical pedagogical approaches.

In *"'Good' Americans and 'Bad' Americans: Personal Epistemology, Moral Reasoning, and Citizenship"* Lori Olafson found that there exist significant differences between war resisters' and veterans' epistemological beliefs, moral reasoning, moral behavior, and views of citizenship.[1] War resisters general had a relativist epistemological worldview and displayed post-conventional moral reasoning; they also displayed a justice-oriented to citizenship. Veterans, on the other hand, displayed a more dualist epistemology and conventional moral reasoning, and they were more likely to be personally responsible orientation to citizenship.

In *"Conflict, Affect and the Political: On Disagreement as Democratic Capacity"* Claudia Ruitenberg articulates a theoretical framework for deliberative democracy which highlights the centrality of political disagreement, as well as the

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[1] Olafson, Lori. "Good" Americans and "Bad" Americans: Personal Epistemology, Moral Reasoning, and Citizenship." *In Factis Pax* 4(1) (2010): 11-39.

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affective and imaginative dimensions of reason and political identity; the argument is based upon the work of Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière, and Cornelius Castoriadis. She argues that the capacity of social imagination and the mobilization of one's affective passions connected to identification with alternative imagined social futures are essential for democracy. Finally, she argues that informal learning opportunities to experience the solidarity, anger, excitement and other feelings that accompany political identification are needed.[2]

In **"*Teachers' Epistemological Stances and Citizenship Education*"** Gregory Schraw, Lori Olafson, Michelle Vander Veldt, and Jennifer Ponder explore the relationship between differences among teachers' epistemological and ontological world views and change in knowledge and beliefs.[3] They found that there was a movement in the change of belief toward relativism. They also found a significant increase in civic knowledge and a justice oriented view of citizenship between the beginning and end of the course. An action research project and classroom discussions were important mechanisms for change. Their findings support the conclusion that civic education can promote learning and self-awareness regarding epistemological and ontological beliefs.

In *"Epistemic Understanding and Sound Reasoning Skills that Underlie Effective Democratic Engagement"* Michael Weinstock thoughtfully reviews research that demonstrates the importance of skills of argument and epistemic understandings for reasoning in the context of democratic public deliberation.[4] He highlights studies on juror reasoning that have found significant differences in the quality of arguments as well as the capability to consider alternative points of view in the reasoning of jurors. Epistemic worldviews have been found to explain differences in juror reasoning skill, including the capacity to identify argument fallacies. These findings suggest that the capacity for argument and epistemic development are central to effective citizenship education.

I believe these articles significantly advance our understanding of these capabilities and sentiments, thereby making a valuable contribution to the theory and practice of democratic public deliberation and democratic and peace education. While I do not have the space to provide a detailed analysis of the articles, I can place the exploration of personal epistemology into the larger philosophical framework of democracy as both a political and ethical theory and practice and comment on the significance of the theoretical and empirical findings of these articles as whole for the theory of democracy and democratic education.

There are at least three fundamental elements of democracy: equality, fairness,

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[2] Ruitenberg, Claudia "Conflict, Affect and the Political: On Disagreement as Democratic Capacity" *In Factis Pax* 4(1) (2010): 40-55.
[3] Schraw, Gregory, Lori Olafson, Michelle Vander Veldt, and Jennifer Ponder. "Teachers' Epistemological Stances and Citizenship Education" *In Factis Pax* 4(1) (2010): 78-107.
[4] Weinstock, Michael "Epistemic Understanding and Sound Reasoning Skills that Underlie Effective Democratic Engagement." *In Factis Pax* 4(1) (2010): 56-77.

and deliberation.[5] At the core of democracy is a fundamental belief in moral equality, a belief that *all* human beings possess an equal inherent dignity or worth. Its logic runs as follows: if we are morally equal, then we also possess rights, inviolable claims to the actual enjoyment of particular social goods guaranteed by the society. Democracy can be understood as a system of rights.[6] The two basic rights of a democracy are: the freedom to conceive and pursue one's own conception of the good life (consistent with the equal rights of others), often referred to as negative liberty, and political self-determination, often referred to as positive liberty. The right to self-determination entails the basic notion of government by consent, which involves the right to political and legal equality and concomitant rights, such as rights to freedom of expression, association, due process, etc. As moral equals, all citizens of a liberal democracy have an inviolable claim to have their interests represented in the political process.

A necessary condition for political self-determination is the existence of public spaces of freedom; wherein public deliberation can openly and freely occurs.[7] Freedom as self-determination (as distinct from personal freedom) can only exist in the context of public spaces of freedom. In turn, an acknowledgement of human diversity entails the recognition of a plurality of points of view within any given human community. The *polis* is a site of plurality, and thus public spaces of freedom must be structured in terms of the requirements of fairness.[8]

From the perspective of democracy (as not only a form of government but as a way of life, an ethic that entails identifiable values and principles), fairness entails two basic principles: impartial treatment (respect for persons) and inclusion. Impartial treatment requires that each individual possesses a right to equal consideration of their interests and a right to equal participation, mandating that the public space be free of repression and discrimination. Inclusion requires that all persons are recognized as moral equals, regardless of difference, and that all persons have *equal standing* (membership) in the moral community. There is a strong tendency in the human experience to encounter

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[5] Robert Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, revised edition ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987); Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State*, *Charles R. Walgreen Foundation Lectures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); Henry Shue, *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980)..

[6] Dahl, *On Democracy*; C. B. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[7] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963).

[8] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disabliity, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006); Sen, *The Idea of Justice*.

difference in terms of inequality and identity likeness in terms of equality. Democracy requires that we respond to difference in terms of equality.[9] This response is the foundation of tolerance, which is necessary for fairness. Unfairness restricts and collapses the space of freedom, impeding authentic public deliberation.

Free and fair public deliberation requires that its participants (citizens) possess the capability to transcend their "positional confinement." For public deliberation to freely and fairly occur there is a need for citizens to able to go beyond the limitations of their own positional perspectives – to transcend their positional confinement.[10] One's observations, beliefs, and values are necessarily positional; they are structured relative to one's position. Objectivity can be defined as invariance of observation when the position of many observers is fixed. Objectivity is person invariant but position relative; to say that a view is objective is to say that there exists no variance in observation if the position of the observers is the same. Yet there exists the possibility of positional objective illusions: many observers occupying the same position standing on a ocean beach will agree that the moon appears to be larger than the sun, and that the earth is indeed flat! These observers suffer from an objective illusion. There can intersubjective agreement from the same position, however, that agreement can be based upon falsehood. Objective illusions are the basis of false consciousness: entrenched beliefs and values based in objective illusions are therefore biased-partial. In order to transcend positional confinement, and thus the threat of false consciousness, one must widen the information base; one must be exposed to different perspectives, multiple perspectives. In addition, and more fundamentally, one must subject one's own beliefs and opinions, as well as the beliefs and opinions of others to open impartial scrutiny, to public reasoning. This is the essence and importance of democratic public deliberation at the heart of democracy.

It is also important to point out that, a democratic ethic, and hence public deliberation, is also fundamental to the achievement of justice and peace between nations and peoples. There is evidence that the cosmopolitan extension of democracy's logic of equality constitutes the foundation of peace. In his prophetic essay "Perpetual Peace" (1795) Immanuel Kant argues that liberal republics will not go to war with each other, and thus the spread of liberal republicanism/liberal democracy will create, in the long run, the conditions for a perpetual peace between liberal nations.[11] This peace is based upon both the structural nature of decision-making in liberal republics, in particular the core place of open public deliberation among the citizenry, and the cultural sharing of liberal morality (moral equality, fairness, tolerance, commitment to nonviolent conflict resolution, the rule of law, open impartial scrutiny, etc.). In the last two decades this proposition has received considerable attention and a significant amount of empirical

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[9] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America* (New York: HarperPerennial, [1984] 1992).

[10] Sen, *The Idea of Justice*.

[11] Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey. (Cambridge: Hackett, [1795]1983).

evidence confirms Kant's insight.[12] It seems that liberal democracies have never fought each other, although they are as war prone toward non-liberal states as any other non-liberal state. What Kant's peace proposition suggests is that a shared political morality based upon respect for the inherent dignity of humanity and the existence of public spaces of freedom that allow for public deliberation within and between nations, creates the conditions of peace.[13]

However, participation in public deliberation requires the possession of particular capabilities and sentiments. In general, the primary capability is practical reason and the primary sentiment is sociability.[14] Practical reason refers to the complex range of cognitive and analytic abilities that allow one to discern, make, articulate, and defend one's choices and interests, as well as the capability to discern the veracity and validity of the preferences articulated by others party to the deliberation. In addition, fairness as impartial treatment and inclusion (foundational to public spaces of freedom as noted above) require sociability, the emotional sentiment, based in empathy, that enables one to recognize that one's own interests and well-being are interdependently related to the interests and well-being of others and to respond with respect and care to them. Sociability is the affective capacity necessary for tolerance and hence impartial treatment and inclusion. It is the basis of solidarity.

The articles in this special issue elaborate and examine in detail practical reason and sociability. The articles explore the complex relationship between moral reasoning, moral behavior, political participation, affect, imagination, and epistemological world views (beliefs, understandings, personal epistemologies) as necessary conditions for public deliberation. What is most intriguing philosophically is that from the perspective of the psychological literature, including the articles in this issue, practical reason maybe multidimensional, comprised of and constituted by an interdependent array of capabilities and orientations. In addition, it is very plausible that, based upon this multidimensionality, practical reason is developmental. Also, it is likely that practical reason and sociability, capability and sentiment, are highly interdependent. It seems that personal epistemological world views as orientations to the process of knowing provide a

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[12] Michael E. Brown, Lynn-Jones, Sean M.,and Miller, Steven E., ed., *Debating the Democratic Peace* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996); Michael W. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997); James Lee Ray, *Democracy and International Conflict: An Evaluation of the Democratic Peace Proposition* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995); Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[13] James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann, ed., *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).

[14] Martha Nussbaum, "Nature, Function, and Capability: Aristotle on Political Distribution," in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy -- Supplemental Volume 1988*, ed. Julia Annas and Robert H. Grimm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disabliity, Nationality, Species Membership*; Martha C. Nussbaum, "Human Functioning and Social Justice," *Political Theory* 20, no. 2 (1992); Sen, *The Idea of Justice*.

general psychological framework that orients and structures reason in general and moral reasoning in particular. These reflections lead to the following questions: What is the precise relationship between epistemological worldviews and post-conventional morality, including a justice orientation? What is the precise relationship between ontological and epistemological worldviews? What is the precise relationship between affect, social imagination, worldviews, and morality? What is the precise relationship between political action and worldviews, orientations, and affect? The articles in this special issue point us in this direction and in doing so enrich our understanding of the capabilities and sentiments necessary for democracy as public deliberation.

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