

# The Potential for Deliberative Democratic Civic Education

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## ABSTRACT

The values of aggregative democracy have dominated much of civic education as its values reflect the realities of the American political system. We argue that deliberative democratic theory better addresses the moral and epistemological demands of democracy when compared to aggregative democracy. It better attends to protecting citizens' autonomy to participate in civic life and is able to accommodate the diverse experiences and viewpoints of the American public. We conclude by examining how deliberative democracy provides a new lens on civic education practices. It calls for attention to be given to the process of the exchange of reasons among students and also allows students to critically examine the current democratic process to determine in what ways it is or is not living up to deliberative democratic ideals.

**Q**UESTIONS CONCERNING EDUCATION for autonomy, education for democracy, and the relationship between these two have been much examined by philosophers. Less examined, however, is how answers to these questions play out, or ought to, in classrooms and schools under the rubric of civics education. For the most part, civics education has implicitly been driven by a liberal conception of citizenship: developing in students an understanding of the rights (and duties, in some conceptions) of citizenship that are necessary to ensure that the individual has a wide latitude to determine what constitutes the good life and pursue that life. The prevailing view has been that civics education should remain neutral with respect to alternative conceptions of the good life, at least those sufficiently “non-controversial” (Gutmann, 1999).

In this article, we explicate two prominent conceptions of democracy and their associated conceptions of autonomy, both encompassed by the broad liberal conception of citizenship just described, and then illustrate how their differences underwrite different approaches to civics education.<sup>1</sup> In particular, we compare an aggregative view of democracy with a deliberative democratic view. We provide several reasons why deliberative democracy is the better of the two conceptions and, accordingly, creates a better foundation on which to build civics education. We then elaborate the approach to civics education this conception supports.<sup>2</sup>

## The Superiority of Deliberative Democratic Theory

Contemporary democratic theory rests on two fundamental premises, one moral and one epistemic. Morally, human beings should be respected as autonomous agents, enabled to live life “from the inside” (Kymlicka, 1989, p. 13; also see Gutmann, 1999, particularly Chapter 1; Callen, 1997; Brighouse, 2000; Galston, 1995). Epistemically, social life is marked by uncertainty and vastly varied experiences such that disagreement, including moral

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disagreement, between groups and individuals is one of its permanent features. Thus, communal decisions that bind all members of the community despite their differences are best justified in terms of procedures that accommodate both of these moral and epistemic features.

Democracy involves both a negative and a positive obligation to respect autonomy. On the negative side, associated with political liberty, people should be impeded as little as possible in achieving a life made of their free choices. On the positive side, associated with political equality, people should be provided with meaningful opportunities to develop and exercise their autonomy. Proponents of an aggregative view of democracy diverge from those with a deliberative view on how to flesh out the general commitment to autonomy in a democracy, particularly regarding how closely we should identify autonomy with the capacity to participate effectively in democratic forums.

Deliberative democratic theory pays special attention to the social context within which people live autonomous lives. Although autonomy is a concept associated with the individual, it is lived out in various communities, including the political community. The idea of autonomy leads deliberative democrats to focus on two important ideals. The first is mutual respect (Gutmann, 1999). By asking people to engage in deliberations with others, deliberative democracy requires participants to acknowledge the autonomy of others and the accompanying right to hold moral positions on public issues that may differ from their own. The second ideal associated with autonomy in deliberative democracy is that democratic forums should promote inclusive and fair participation. Therefore, deliberative democracy asks participants to consider the question of the degree to which democratic forums and democratic society accommodate inclusive and fair participation.

Deliberative democracy requires participants to respect one another's autonomy by engaging in good-faith critical dialogue that includes a willingness to revise their initially preferred policies and practices as a result of deliberation. The matters about which people deliberate have cognitive epistemic status because deliberative democracy asks citizens to provide evidence and arguments to support their positions within a deliberation, and that reasoning supports the goal of the entire process, which is to reach conclusions that are the most warranted and should thus be accepted as reasonable (though not necessarily correct) by all concerned. In deliberative theory, the moral value of autonomy is grounded in democracy in that it is the accepted autonomy of each citizen that calls upon everyone to value and respect the moral opinions of others by engaging in deliberation with them. Democratic procedures are constrained in democracy's own name by being grounded in the requirement of fair and inclusive conditions of participation.

The deliberative conception of democratic decision making differs significantly from the conception associated with aggregative democracy (e.g., Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Democratic decision making consists of tallying citizens' preferences to produce collective decisions, typically by voting. (Chambers, 2003, for instance, referred to the aggregative view as "voting-centric.")

Generally speaking, the aggregative conception gives little attention to the communicative process by which democratic decision making should proceed. In its philosophical forms, the moral value of autonomy identifies what it is for humans to live well and is independent of its role in democracy. Democratic procedures are constrained in the interest of protecting autonomy. Epistemically, the cognitive status of the objects of democratic decision making need not differ from deliberative theory, but the epistemic process through which democratic decisions are reached does.

In its nonphilosophical forms, which better capture how democratic decision making actually occurs in the United States, the aggregative conception sees democratic decision making as *strategic* rather than *deliberative*; it is a process whereby individuals and groups attempt to win assent to their previously settled views (preferences) using whatever rhetorical strategies prove effective, including advertising, sound bites, issue framing, and so on. No moral obligation to respect others' autonomy exists beyond what the formal rules and regulations of a *modus vivendi* require. Epistemically, this form of aggregative democracy tends toward an "emotive" conception of democratic decision making (House & Howe, 1999). The idea of subjecting initial preferences to *reasoned* evaluation and being open to revising them if justified is precluded on epistemic grounds; for preferences are underpinned by values, and values are not the kind of things for which people can provide reasoned justification or criticism.

What we are calling the philosophical and nonphilosophical forms of the aggregative conception of democracy differ in both their moral and their epistemic premises (which are related). Nonetheless, because each seriously neglects the moral evaluation of communicative processes that underlie democratic decisions, each is subject to two general criticisms that the deliberative conception of democracy is designed to avoid. First, basing decisions on the outcome of aggregated preferences while holding these largely immune from criticism and revision serves to entrench preexisting unjust distributions of goods such as income, education, health care, and employment, as well as to stunt effectiveness in the democratic process (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Second, such unjust distributions preclude the possibility of "effective participation" in the democratic process on the part of many citizens. Effective participation on the part of the citizenry is a prerequisite of a robust democracy, which by definition enables its citizens to live life autonomously through and as a consequence of their participation in "conscious social reproduction" (Gutmann, 1999).

In our view, the deliberative conception of democracy is superior to the aggregative conception on the basis of the considerations just adduced. A thoroughgoing defense of this view would require much more than the sketch we have provided, but that it is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, we now consider how certain aspects of civics education might change for the better when considered through the lens of deliberative democratic theory.

## Imagining Deliberative Civics Education

Taking deliberative democratic theory seriously when considering civics education allows us to reframe certain practices already

prevalent in civics education and provides new perspectives on their importance. We first consider the way that deliberative democracy's approach to the moral premise of democracy affects the civics classroom. We do this by examining the role of moral controversies in civics education and the practices surrounding holding and espousing one's own moral viewpoints on political issues. We then discuss how autonomy viewed through the lens of deliberative democracy leads to mutual respect within a citizenry (and classroom) and critical examination of the existing democratic system, the practices that accompany it, and the context in which it functions.

#### DELIBERATIVE CIVICS EDUCATION AND CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Deliberative democracy addresses the epistemic issues of democracy by recognizing and bringing into the public sphere the moral and social differences that exist within society. Because of this, it is important to deliberative civics education that teachers make moral controversies a key aspect. We agree with Gutmann (1999) and others who argue that it is impossible to avoid moral content in education and, even if it were possible, such an education would be undesirable.

We acknowledge that incorporating moral controversy in the civics classroom may not be an easy or comfortable task for teachers, but it is important. Civics teachers should consider their district's policy about teaching controversial or sensitive issues in the classroom. The variation of policies and the wording of such policies illustrate varying levels of receptivity within schools districts, and some of these may need revision to permit deliberative civics education. Consider the following excerpt from the policy of our large local districts:

*Administrators and teachers shall admit controversial issues to the school program only when the problems are obviously real and understandable to the students and when they are relevant to the established curriculum for the grade and subject of the class. (Denver Public Schools, 2011)*

The wording of this policy, which allows admittance of controversial issues only in certain instances, is likely to give teachers pause when they are considering discussing controversial issues in the civics classroom. While the curriculum may be written in a way that makes controversial issues relevant for use in the classroom,<sup>3</sup> the policy is written in such a way that that option is prevented. For purposes of comparison, consider this policy, from a school district near the one mentioned above:

*Controversy arising from such differences [in underlying values, beliefs, and interests] is inherent in a pluralistic society. An important function of public education is to provide students with an understanding of how controversial issues are dealt with in a democracy. This includes the opportunity to learn about the issues, problems, and concerns of contemporary society, to form opinions, and to participate in discussion of these issues and expression of opinion in the classroom. (Jeffco Public Schools, 2011)*

This policy is more reflective of how deliberative democracy views the epistemic premise of democracy. It acknowledges a pluralistic society and the role of schools in addressing pluralism. Although other aspects of this policy are similar to the previous one, this wording invites teachers to bring controversial issues into the classroom.

Of course, bringing controversial issues into the classroom is not a new notion (see Hess, 2009). However, when looking at the practice through the lens of deliberative democracy, we can see new purposes in bringing controversial issues into the civics classroom. For example, the *Civic Mission of Schools Report* (Carnegie Corporation of New York & CIRCLE, 2003) advocates for the discussion of controversial issues in the classroom because it is likely to lead to "greater interest in politics, improved critical thinking and communications skills, more civic knowledge, and more interest in discussing public affairs out of school" (p. 6). While all of these are laudable, terms like *civic knowledge* and *critical thinking and communication skills* tend to be murky. Seeing deliberation as part of education allows us to better understand what should emerge from discussion of controversial issues in the classroom. The following portions of the paper examine the practice of deliberation to identify what civic knowledge and skills might be developed by deliberative civics education.

#### THE DELIBERATIVE PROCESS IN CIVICS EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DELIBERATIVE SKILLS

Before entering into deliberation in the classroom, students should be prompted to come to a reasoned understanding of their own moral convictions about controversial issues as part of understanding how deliberation addresses the epistemic premise of democracy. Students may enter the classroom with a variety of experiences and degrees of familiarity with respect to the controversial issue. For some students, the issue will be familiar and they will have engaged with it in various ways outside class, whether through discussions within family or other social institutions. Other students may not have given serious thought to the issue because they felt no need to address it. Deliberative civics education values the engagement of the first group and encourages those students to continue the process of thinking through their own perspective. For the second group, deliberative civics education should prompt the students to consider the issue. Such students likely have some position on the issue, even if it is not yet well developed. Deliberative democracy asks students to identify the reasons for that position, even if the sole reason at the start of the deliberation is simply that it is what their parents have said about the issue. Only by identifying their own reasons for a position on an issue can students engage in deliberation. Morals and values may lie at the heart of deliberation, and this process helps students come to understand that these are at the same time reasoned positions and can be discussed.

This may appear to limit deliberation in ways that disadvantage those who hold beliefs that are not supported by others as legitimate. Hess (2009) illustrated this when she noted that some teachers do not teach a controversial issue because they deny that controversy exists. A teacher may clearly see a correct side to the

controversy, and therefore may choose not to bring the issue into the classroom for deliberation, as she would rather teach her understanding of the “correct” position on the issue. In this situation, and in light of deliberative democracy, both teachers and students can develop an understanding of their own reasoning and what it means to have reasons.

Talis (2009), in a defense of his version of deliberative democracy, described a universally shared folk epistemology that undergirds deliberation. Reasonable people share certain characteristics with respect to the ideas of truth and knowledge, or at least how we treat them in everyday living, without committing to any particular and more precise epistemological framework. If we believe that such a folk epistemology is accurate, we also have both an understanding of what it means to hold a reasoned belief and a rationale for attempting to understand the reasoning behind our own moral convictions as well as the convictions of others.

As the first tenet of folk epistemology, Talis said that all people would agree that “to believe some proposition, *p*, is to hold that *p* is true” (p. 87). In other words, we would all consider it odd to say that we believe *p*, but we do not believe that *p* is true. His point is that we assume a person who believes a proposition—and in the case of deliberation, a moral proposition—also believes that it is the case. This is not to deny that beliefs can vary in degree (in that we believe certain things more strongly or surely than we do others). This is not a difficult concept for students to grasp. They understand that they do not intentionally hold beliefs that they see as false.

The second tenet of folk epistemology provides that “to hold that *p* is true is generally to hold that the best reasons support *p*” (p. 87). To put it another way, our folk epistemology says that our beliefs are reason-responsive. Because this is folk epistemology, it does not dictate what the best reasons for a belief should be. It simply states that we would consider it odd for someone to say, “I believe *p* even though I have better reasons for thinking *x* is truer than *p*.”

This is an important idea for students to grasp as part of deliberative civics education. Even if the reason underlying a student’s moral belief is that his parents said so or that she read a celebrity’s opinion on the issue, that student should recognize that these are reasons for belief (however nascent or refutable these reasons may be). Similarly, students can recognize from folk epistemology that some reasons supersede others and that they themselves adjust their beliefs when confronted with more persuasive reasons. Even young students recognize that they have reasons to believe certain people more than others and that some reasons are more persuasive than others. All of this does not dictate, however, the framework that a student uses to determine what makes one reason more persuasive than another.

This is the beginning of the students’ development of a framework for understanding the reasons for their own beliefs and what is morally persuasive within their moral framework. As students develop an understanding of the reasons underlying their own beliefs regarding controversial issues, they also learn how to share those beliefs with others. Through their examination of their own beliefs, they come to understand that people can hold a variety

of moral beliefs and that they are all underpinned by some set of reasons. This provides a foundation for developing deliberative dispositions.

One key deliberative disposition is listening to others. If students gain an understanding of folk epistemology, they will have motivation to listen to others’ reasons for beliefs. This is because students who understand folk epistemology understand that their own beliefs are subject to change when challenged by good enough reasons. If they desire to believe those things that have the best reasons, if they understand why they believe what they do on a particular issue, and if they acknowledge that new reasons can change their beliefs, they should have a willingness to listen to the reasons others have for their beliefs.

In the same way, students will develop the disposition to share their beliefs and the reasons underpinning those beliefs with others. They see themselves as holding reasoned beliefs and believing that they have the potential to influence others, who also hold reason-responsive beliefs. This is important because it provides clarity of the guidelines that civics teachers follow for these types of activities in their classrooms.

Consider for example the Colorado Academic Standards for Social Studies (Colorado Department of Education, 2009). Listed among the competencies for high school students is the following:

*Decision making involves researching an issue, listening to multiple perspectives, and weighing potential consequences of alternative actions. For example, citizens study the issues before voting. (p. 97)*

What does it mean to listen to multiple perspectives? If listening means more than being exposed to an aural stimulus, in what ways should the students engage with these multiple perspectives? What role should students’ own perspectives play in this process? Should students be the source of (at least some of) the multiple perspectives?

A deliberative democratic lens provides insight into these questions. Listening to multiple perspectives is not done for mere exposure, but because students understand that others have reasoned beliefs that may influence their own reason-responsive beliefs. Students understand their own framework for weighing the reasons provided by others, and this provides a way for students to engage with what they hear from these other perspectives. They understand their own perspectives in a way that allows them to determine whether what they are hearing requires them to adjust their own beliefs. Also, because teachers recognize that students hold reasoned positions (though with varying quality of reason), teachers can see students as the source of at least some of the perspectives that should be present in the classroom.

This process of identifying one’s own reasons for holding a position on an issue together with sharing that position with and listening to others can contribute to the development and expansion of public reason. Deliberation becomes a common framework for reasoning. Rawls (1997) and Gutmann and Thompson (1996) each conceive of public reason as providing boundaries around what ideas can be brought to a deliberation. Citizens present their rationales for positions on moral issues in terms that are acceptable to all. Conversely, arguments based on reasons that are not

accessible to all citizens, such as those stemming from religious convictions, are excluded. Using public reason to draw boundaries around deliberation in schools has been criticized, rightly, in our view, for placing too great a restriction on deliberation and for favoring the reasons of the majority (Kunzman, 2006). By having students share their reasons with others during the education stage, and by using the framework above to understand the process, we see a path to expanded public reason. Students would be encouraged to share their own reasons for holding a belief without the restriction that it be considered generally acceptable by all. As students engage in this process, their frameworks for evaluating reasons are shaped by one another, with the potential that the concept of public reason itself would not remain static and outside of the deliberative process but instead also be shaped by the sharing of reasons.

We recognize that asking students to share their reasons for holding certain beliefs entails more risk for some students than for others. Like all deliberative spaces, classrooms are likely to be safer for some students than others. Young (1996) illustrated this in her critique of deliberative democracy when she notes that certain forms of discourse, such as storytelling and greeting, may not be considered acceptable in certain environments. Students who are not familiar with the more accepted forms of discourse may not feel safe or competent to share their views. However, if safe public spaces for deliberation are ever likely to come into existence, this change will begin with the civics classroom. It is there that people have the opportunity to create and experience a safety that allows everyone to share beliefs.<sup>4</sup> Equally important, it is a place where students can be challenged to consider others' reasons and thereby expand their own reasoning. If teachers succeed in creating safe spaces, they also provide spaces for potentially impactful views that would otherwise go unexpressed. Reluctance to share beliefs may be justified, and this should be recognized, but this underscores the importance of the context within which deliberation occurs and its fairness and inclusivity.

Similarly, asking students to share their reasons and in turn consider other people's reasons may be seen as threatening to certain ways of life. Parents might resist their children being exposed to (and asked to consider seriously) the beliefs of others and the reasons behind those beliefs. This is perhaps nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the case of *Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education* (1987). In this case, parents asked to have their children exempted from the school's reading curriculum, which was selected to meet the mandates of Tennessee to teach the values and virtues of citizenship, because the curriculum exposed students to ideas that were contrary to the parents' religious beliefs. We can easily imagine that if parents are threatened by their children being exposed to other ideas in readings, they would strenuously object to having their students engage in deliberation about the values and ideas in the readings. We also easily find those parents' objections misguided.

If the parents' objections are based on the idea that values should be shaped by institutions other than school, such as the family and religion, the objection does not hold. Schools and the civics education that occurs within them cannot be value neutral.

Although a civics education based on aggregative democracy may claim to be value neutral, a network of values undergirds it. As discussed earlier, interpretations of autonomy, which are value laden, lie at the core of the purportedly value-neutral curriculum. For example, aggregative democracy interprets the value of equality as the equal opportunity to participate in the aggregative democratic process through voting, regardless of how meaningful the choices are. Deliberative democracy would argue that such an interpretation of equality is meaningless without considering the context and process that led to the choices presented to the voter.

If the parents believe that the only values that should be present in schools are those that are noncontroversial or that are universally shared, they again are in an untenable position. It is difficult to identify a set of universal values or virtues that have any depth. We grant that there is a high probability that everyone would agree on the importance of values like freedom and equality or virtues such as patience—so long as their meanings remain vague. As soon as people interpret these concepts or apply them, they become controversial. Freedom has limits, but where should the limits be drawn? Are there situations where people should willingly restrict their own freedom for the benefit of others? Does equality require treating all people equally such that we should not prohibit a five-year-old from driving? If a five-year-old should not drive, what are valid grounds for treating people differently? At what point does patience become a vice because it has turned into neglect or inaction? These questions illustrate how even values that are shared are likely shared only in a thin sense and not in a way that is meaningful to civics education.

The inability to purge education, and particularly civics education, of moral content makes it reasonable to expect students to share their opinions and to listen to others' opinions. The alternative is to do away with common education and instead have parents educate or choose an education that aligns with their moral beliefs. However, even the most insular groups have some amount of diversity in beliefs. We grant that this minimal diversity may be less objectionable to parents, but keeping moral controversy out of civics education thrusts us back to aggregative democracy, in which moral views are not seen as subject to reason.

In the philosophical form of aggregative democracy, the position one holds on a particular controversial issue and why such a position is held is not the concern of the democratic process. It could be acknowledged that controversial issues exist, but asking students to examine and revise their own perspectives as part of civics education would not be of key importance. Because the ability to determine and pursue one's own conception of the good life is an individual right that exists independently from the functioning of democracy, civics education need not bring these controversial issues into the classroom except insofar as knowledge of alternative conceptions of the good life might contribute to students' autonomy.

In the nonphilosophical form of aggregative democracy, which views democracy as largely a strategic enterprise, less attention is paid to the questions of why one holds certain positions and more to how to ensure that a person's interests are protected within the civic arena. The emphasis is on such things as debating,

coalition building, and strategic maneuvering, not on opening one's beliefs (preferences) up for critical scrutiny. Consider again the excerpt from the Colorado Academic Standards for Social Studies (Colorado Department of Education, 2009):

*Decision making involves researching an issue, listening to multiple perspectives, and weighing potential consequences of alternative actions. For example, citizens study the issues before voting.*

Interpreting this from the perspective of aggregative democracy yields a different outcome than does examination from the perspective of deliberative democracy. The research a student performs and the rationale for listening to multiple perspectives shift to a more self-interested perspective. Students may research issues solely for the purpose of buttressing their own arguments, not considering that other perspectives may be legitimately held. Students might listen to multiple perspectives in order to form the strategy to best discredit those other perspectives. While this is somewhat of a caricature of the aggregative position, it does meaningfully reflect what can happen when the democratic process is viewed not as a forum where people's perspectives are shaped through interactions with one another but rather as a place where one's only role is that of advocate for one's own perceived best interests.

Similarly, the aggregative view of democracy does not concern itself with the development of public reason. People have the right to believe what they will and little concern need be paid in the democratic process to developing commonalities or to having one's critical thinking process challenged. Citizens' perspectives can remain private, and people need not concern themselves with the rationales behind positions except, again, as a strategic matter.<sup>5</sup>

#### DEVELOPING DELIBERATIVE CHARACTER

The epistemic premise of democracy points to the development of deliberative skills. In this section, we look to the moral premise of democracy and consider how the connection between deliberative democracy, civics education, and autonomy in the classroom leads to understanding deliberative character. Amy Gutmann is a leading deliberative theorist who has probably done more to ground education in democracy than any philosopher but Dewey (in whose tradition she locates her project). Gutmann (1999) identified two general features that are constitutive of democratic character—the kind of character suited to deliberative democracy—both of which are necessary and neither of which is sufficient alone: character and moral reasoning. *Character* refers to dispositions and habits acquired through inculcation, and *moral reasoning* refers to logical and interpretive skills. Gutmann wrote:

*Deliberative citizens are committed, at least partly through the inculcation of habit, of living up to the routine demands of democratic life, at the same time they are committed to questioning those demands whenever they appear to threaten the foundational ideals of democratic sovereignty, such as respect for persons. The willingness and ability to deliberate set morally serious people apart from sophists, who use clever argument to elevate their own interests into self-righteous*

*causes, and traditionalists, who invoke established authority to subordinate their own reason to unjust causes. (1999, p. 52)*

Gutmann is quite explicit that her conception of democratic character is not morally neutral toward autonomy.<sup>6</sup> Here she differs from other philosophers critical of deliberative democracy's implications for civics education, who hold that teaching children to be autonomous has no place in public schools (e.g., Galston, 1989) or that it does but should be facilitated (children should be taught the requisite skills to exercise if they choose) rather than promoted (children should not be expected or required to embrace autonomy or think autonomously) (e.g., Brighouse, 2000). We are in fundamental disagreement with the view that teaching children to be autonomous has no place in the public schools, and we find the idea of facilitating but not promoting autonomy incoherent. Autonomy is associated with habits of mind that must be developed and practiced over time. It would require very stilted conversations, indeed, if teachers went through the motions of asking for and giving reasons but remained noncommittal as to the value of such an undertaking.

There are two core ideas that anchor the connection between civics education and autonomy. Deliberative democracy does not keep the idea of autonomy external to the democratic process but rather makes it internal by requiring that the autonomy of others be given important consideration. As a result, civics education needs to demand of its students mutual respect as part of deliberative character. Civics education must also attend to the conditions under which all can exercise autonomy. Therefore, students are called upon to examine the degree to which all have the opportunity to participate in the democratic process. This involves not only examining the conditions surrounding deliberation but also examining the democratic process as it exists from within and identifying ways in which it permits or constrains people's autonomy.

If the civics education classroom is to teach mutual respect, we must first identify what that includes. On this, we find it helpful to consider Gutmann and Thompson's (1996) concept of reciprocity. A key component of reciprocity is that people recognize the moral status of others in a deliberation (and in politics). This means that students must learn to view others in deliberation as engaging in a legitimate exchange of moral viewpoints rather than as expressing a "purely strategic, economic or political view" (p. 86). Similarly, students must learn themselves that such behavior is not acceptable as part of the deliberative process.

At first glance, this appears naive. The real world of politics fits much better with the aggregative conception than with the deliberative conception of democracy. In civics education, shouldn't students learn how to function in the political world as it really works? The answer to this is yes and no. Civics education provides a unique opportunity not only to learn about the political process but also to examine it through the lens of mutual respect and autonomy. Deliberative democracy is, after all, a normative political theory, developed in large part as an alternative to aggregative democracy, and one that is much more faithful to the ideal of democracy.

As students go through the process of identifying their own beliefs and exchanging positions with others, they will also have the opportunity to learn that the way such exchanges are structured can impact the end results of deliberative process. Sunstein (2000) has shown that a deliberative group of people with compatible mindsets is likely to become more extreme in its positions as a result of deliberation. He illustrates how the composition of deliberative groups can impact the impact of deliberations on participants. Power can clearly impact the deliberative process (Shapiro, 1999). The deliberative process is not immune from strategic behavior (Simon, 1999). These are legitimate criticisms of deliberation, but they are also criticisms that can be addressed, at least in part, by thinking about civics education through a deliberative lens.

By engaging in a deliberation in the civics classroom, students can learn to evaluate various democratic processes, including deliberation itself, to determine whether the process respects their own autonomy and the autonomy of others. By starting education about deliberation with the formulation of one's own opinion and sharing these opinions with others, deliberative education establishes a norm for political discussion (if not the entire political process) that respects each person's autonomy by providing space for each person to share his own perspectives. As deliberation progresses to analysis and criticism of the various perspectives in the class, students can reflect on the degree to which the deliberation respected their own autonomy as well as the autonomy of others who shared their perspectives with the class.

Again, this may seem highly improbable, but the deliberative process in the civics classroom can be structured so that such thinking is encouraged. Students can be prepared to evaluate and criticize other perspectives through a process that encourages mutual respect. After engaging in deliberation, students can be asked to consider what it was about the other viewpoints that made them persuasive or unpersuasive. They can compare the reasons given by others for their positions to their own and determine the degree to which their viewpoint should change in response to these other reasons. Additionally, students should consider what other information they need from the students to properly evaluate the reasons given. This type of preparation can provide groundwork for deliberation that encourages the mutual respect that is required for deliberation.

Students can also learn to become self-evaluators of the deliberative process that they engage in. They can learn that it is appropriate to ask whether everyone had the opportunity to participate. They can learn to ask whether there were viewpoints that were not included in the deliberation that should be considered. They can continue to evaluate their own framework for critical thinking by asking why they found certain things more persuasive than others and why that was the case.

Again, teachers of civics cannot ignore the realities of our political system as it exists. Deliberative democracy allows students to see how the current democratic arrangement operates and then evaluate how well the system respects people's autonomy and their ability to participate within the system. Through the lens of autonomy and deliberative democracy, students can examine both the process and the context of our current democratic system.

Consider the typical civics education lesson of how a bill becomes a law. Students learn about how a bill is introduced and the path through the legislative bodies to the executive's desk. As they do so, the deliberative concern with autonomy would encourage them to ask why particular bills are introduced at all. In other words, whose perspectives are included in the bill that is introduced? They can examine legislative hearings and determine to what people or groups of people the legislators are listening in this process. They can consider whether hearings reflect an important part of the process or whether legislators' views are chiefly shaped by other means. They can wonder if legislative hearings and floor debates reflect the deliberative process or if they reflect strategic behavior on the part of participants. These are not new questions in civics education, but students' deliberative experiences allow them to question the degree to which these processes reflect mutual respect.

In addition to examining the democratic process, students can also examine the social context within which this democratic process occurs in order to understand why they do or do not respect autonomy. Gutmann and Thompson (1996) argued that there are certain minimum social conditions that are required for a person's participation in deliberative democracy. These include minimum standards for basic needs such as housing and health care. Society is responsible for ensuring that these minimum standards are met in order for the democratic process to maintain its legitimacy. These minimum standards are not immutable but are themselves subject to the deliberative process. Therefore, students would engage questions such as those posed by Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995) concerning the ways that resource distribution affects various types of political activities.

As an example, consider the issue of how campaigns work in the current democratic system. As part of this process, students might examine the issue of campaign finance regulations and the case of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010), the Supreme Court case that declared restrictions on independent campaign expenditures by corporations and unions unconstitutional. Under a discussion or debate that occurs without the deliberative democratic lens, students could formulate a variety of opinions concerning the outcome of the case. Some might agree with the outcome, because they value freedom and argue that restricting corporations from spending money is a restriction of freedom. Along those lines, they would argue that this value should trump other concerns about access to the political process, perhaps suggesting that there are a variety of ways for individuals and organizations to influence the political process and that singling out independent expenditures of money unfairly burdens those who happen to have that resource. Others may argue that the case was decided wrongly, those students view money as a particularly influential resource and value equality of participation above freedom to spend money to express political views.

The deliberative democratic lens would change the nature of the deliberation by asking students to explicitly consider two factors for each reason argued. The first would ask the students to think about the idea of mutual respect and seeing one another as reasonable. With respect to participating in politics, students would have to consider what processes entities such as

corporations and unions go through in forming their political opinions. While these can vary, students can compare the possible processes to their own process of opinion formation and evaluation. Does folk epistemology hold true for these entities in such a way that the political opinions expressed by them should be afforded the same assumption of reasonableness and mutual respect that we give fellow citizens? As students consider questions such as this, they would engage in a reasoning process, driven by deliberative ideals, that allows them to form their own answer.

The second factor would ask the students to consider this question through the lens of access and opportunity. Students would ask in what ways the results of this decision might skew what voices are heard in the democratic process. If certain voices might be pushed to the margins, what is the appropriate response? Does it require that a different decision be reached? Are there other ways to address the issue that would respect the value of freedom and protect autonomy? If people determine that messages from these entities should be discounted in certain instances, is that enough to dilute such a group's voice and provide disincentive for money to be spent in independent political expenditures? These questions would not necessarily arise in discussions absent a framework of deliberative democracy.

Aggregative democracy does not have the same concerns about autonomy and would not require the same type of civic education outlined above. Aggregative democracy need only concern itself with the strategic activity of others. Gutmann and Thompson (1996) illustrated two approaches that civics education influenced by aggregative democracy could take. On the one hand, students might learn how to best advocate for their own positions through the use of strategy. This would reflect the idea of prudence—that many political disagreements are best resolved through bargaining and, like aggregative democracy itself, students should be concerned most with the procedures surrounding the bargaining process. We agree with Gutmann and Thompson that bargaining cannot substitute for moral reasoning, because it does not reflect what citizens owe one another as autonomous yet interdependent members of society.

Alternatively, students could be taught impartiality as an alternative to deliberation and that would be part of an education in the aggregative democracy tradition. Students would find moral claims to support their positions that are acceptable from an impersonal perspective (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). But this also fails to show mutual respect for fellow citizens because it denies the epistemic premise of democracy—that there is a diversity of reasonable beliefs. Students in this tradition would be taught to demonstrate the moral truth of their claims, thereby denying that people may have different frameworks for evaluating the content of moral claims. This perspective stifles public discourse because, after having demonstrated the moral truth of a claim, citizens will label those who disagree with this demonstration of the truth as unreasonable.

## Conclusion

As conversations about civics education continue, the theory of democracy that underlies civics education deserves attention. We

have shown how deliberative democracy attends better to the moral and epistemic premises of democracy and how viewing civics education through the lens of deliberative democracy provides new insights into civics education. The classroom practices, content standards, and school board policies discussed in this paper are the beginnings of what we believe to be an important discussion in civics education.

If deliberative democracy is to impact civics education in a meaningful way, there are many issues yet to be explored. More consideration must be given to how to balance teaching for the aspirational goals of a more deliberative democracy and the realities of our current democratic system. Scholars such as Walter Parker (2006) have done much to advance thinking about discussion in the civics classroom, but we believe that it would be fruitful to consider how an explicitly deliberative democratic theoretical perspective can add to the purposes and pedagogy related to discussion in the classroom. There are also questions related to how to prepare teachers to engage students in deliberation, particularly when they themselves may not have engaged in deliberation in their own school learning experiences. We invite others to consider whether deliberative democracy should be considered as a guide for civics instruction and, if it should, to explore these and other implications for civics education.

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## Notes

1. The general liberal framework has been challenged, of course, from various directions: postmodernist, critical, and communitarian. Although we believe the conception of civics education we advance here can accommodate or fend off these challenges, that is an argument for another place.

2. In this paper, we focus on civics education, meaning courses such as government and civics classes that are explicitly designed to prepare students to participate in political life. The illustrations in the paper are those that would be found in a civics class. This is done solely for clarity and to focus the scope of the paper. We believe deliberative democratic theory should be considered with respect to civics education in general, and should permeate how the entire educational experience prepares students for political life. The principles of deliberative democracy can be modeled through classroom norms and school governance. It should also be a consideration in general education classes as deliberation can occur across subject areas.

3. The curriculum is guided by the Colorado Academic Standards for Social Studies. Although those standards make no explicit mention of controversial issues, students are expected to “research, formulate positions, and engage in appropriate civic participation to address local, state, and national issues or policies.” (Colorado Department of Education, 2009, p. 17)

4. Training teachers to create deliberative spaces in the classroom is a formidable challenge and a discussion of the challenge is beyond the scope of this paper. See Stitzlein (2010) for a discussion of current work in this area.

5. For example, in aggregative democracy, a person need not genuinely believe in or understand an evidentiary basis for supply-side economics in order to assert that basis in the political arena to win assent to the policy of tax cuts for the wealthy.

6. Gutmann defines *moral autonomy* in a more specific and limited way than we might *autonomy*, and she rejects it as a necessary ingredient of democratic citizenship. In particular, Gutmann defines *moral autonomy* as “the desire and capacity to make moral choices based on principles generalizable among all persons” (1999, p. 59).