The Difference Approach to Democratic Deliberation

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The challenges to democratic discourse in pluralistic societies are significant. Ensuring citizens listen to others and actually take alternative viewpoints into consideration is necessary for deliberative models of democracy to deliver on the democratic promise of equal consideration. Recent accounts of how to ensure fair communicative practices have focused on the importance of fostering empathy among citizens. Sharon Krause, Michael Morrell, and Michael Frazer, for example, argue that empathy in the form of perspective-taking as well as feelings of empathic concern among citizens can make deliberation more inclusive. For them, the path to meaningful engagement between citizens goes through empathy.

As I discuss elsewhere, the empathy approach struggles from practical challenges including our inability to achieve empathic understanding or feel empathic concern for those who are most different from us (Scudder). These practical limits make empathy an unlikely resource in democratic practice. Furthermore, empathy fails as an ideal or goal towards which to aim in deliberation. By focusing on commonalities, the empathy approach distracts us from the challenges to ensuring fair discussion and reaching agreement in the absence of common perspectives, experiences, or interests. Empathy represents a premature and illusory consensus that undermines the very possibility of some eventual agreement by diverting our energy from the need to enter into discourse in the first place (Scudder).

Appealing to commonalities – whether real, imagined, or artificially imposed – papers over the division and disagreement that exist between citizens. Though this is a charge that some have leveled against deliberation as a whole, I maintain that the deliberative model is not inherently inhospitable to the recognition of disagreement and respect for differences among citizens. In fact, according to Jürgen Habermas, the need for discourse only arises after an initial

disagreement interrupts ongoing communicative action. I maintain that deliberative democracy can bring about legitimate political decisions while also recognizing, accommodating, and protecting differences among citizens (White & Farr 2011). But an orientation of greater openness towards difference is not automatic on the part of citizens, and it cannot be achieved through appeals to empathy. Once achieved, however, such an orientation can foster successful deliberation and address many of the concerns that lead critics to abandon the deliberative model.

In this paper, I develop an alternative approach for improving democratic discourse that I believe better reflects the ideals of deliberation. Specifically, I explore the ways that feelings of difference (and not real or imagined commonalities) can help citizens become more dialogically open, in other words more attentive and receptive listeners. Before developing my "difference approach," I compare two classic accounts of the function of difference in democratic theory (those of Chantal Mouffe and Iris Young). Expanding on these, my difference approach points to a previously unarticulated way that differences can serve as a resource in democratic deliberation. Using Heidegger's concept of "the clearing," I show that difference can serve as a useful resource in promoting listening and 'uptake' in democratic encounters.

1. Democracy and Difference

The difference approach to deliberation that I propose as an alterative to the empathy approach has its roots in a tradition of democratic theory that takes seriously the presence of difference in contemporary liberal democracies. The importance of difference in democracy has been noted since the critical turn against deliberative democracy and its perceived overemphasis on consensus, unity, and agreement. As John Dryzek explains, "Difference democrats are those who stress the need for democratic politics to concern itself first and foremost with the recognition of the legitimacy and validity of the particular perspectives of historically-oppressed

segments of the population" (2000, 57). Opposite difference democrats are critics who claim "that a politics of difference produces only division" (Young 1997, 393). Difference democrats resist this line of thinking, pointing out that social group differentiation exists whether or not we pay attention to it. Whereas attention to difference does not cause division, an inattention to such difference renders us unable to account for or even notice "continuing patterns of privilege, disadvantage, and exclusion that structure opportunity and capacity in modern societies" (Young 1997, 388-389).

Although difference democrats do not make up "a self-consciously unified school of thought," their positions can be understood in relation to two main claims regarding the relationship between difference and democracy (Dryzek 2000, 57). The first claim concerns the fact of difference in contemporary democratic polities. Due to differences in perspectives, values, and interests, consensus is impossible; decisions will always result in remainders. Difference is an unavoidable fact of politics and therefore can only be ignored with damaging and exclusionary effects. In this view, democracy always takes place within a context of difference and disagreement. The democratic potential of deliberation is bounded by difference. The second claim regards the *value* of difference, or the argument that difference is not only a fact of political life, but it can also serve as a resource for deliberation. Those who point to difference as a resource help us to see it as a potential *facilitator* of legitimate decisions. In this view, the democratic potential of deliberation is fostered by difference.

Difference democrats tend to agree that the recognition of differences is important regardless of whether it serves the productive purposes that some contend it does. The protection and respect for difference is never seen as purely instrumental. Such respect has an inherent value even if it is not instrumental in improving deliberation. The distinction between the fact

and value of difference is not often made explicitly in the literature; these two claims often appear side by side. Despite the apparent connection between the fact and value of difference, for analytic purposes it is helpful to distinguish these two claims. In this section, I aim to show the specificity of claims that go beyond recognizing the fact of difference and actually articulate the ways in which difference can be seen as a resource in democratic deliberation.

1.i Fact of Difference

I offer John Rawls's treatment of difference in *Political Liberalism* as the paradigmatic case of taking difference to be a mere *fact* of modernity. He discusses the fact of pluralism as a defining condition of modern liberal democracies. Rawls goes on to design his preferred democratic decision-making and deliberative procedures with the fact of difference in mind, specifically so as to minimize the disruptive effects that differences will have on democratic decision-making. For Rawls, the fact of difference is something to be controlled, stabilized, and ultimately overcome.

Radical democrat Chantal Mouffe criticizes Rawls's view of difference. Mouffe explains that the main forms of liberal pluralism generally start by "stressing what they call the 'the fact of pluralism' and then proceed to find procedures to deal with differences whose objective is actually to make those differences irrelevant and to relegate pluralism to the sphere of the private" (1996, 246). In contrast to Rawls, she refuses "the objective of unanimity and homogeneity which is always revealed as fictitious and based on acts of exclusion" (1996, 246).

Like Rawls, Mouffe seeks to incorporate the fact of difference into her understanding of democracy. Yet she clearly goes beyond Rawls's understanding of difference as an obstacle to overcome insofar as she gives a "positive status to differences" (1996, 246). Mouffe understands difference as permeating all aspects of political life. There is no way around it. In light of the fact

of difference, Mouffe "rejects the very possibility of a nonexclusive public sphere of rational argumentation where a non-coercive consensus could be attained…such a rejection constitutes an important guarantee that the dynamics of the democratic process will be kept alive" (1996, 255). We cannot transcend our differences in order to reach a common understanding. The fact of difference is all-pervasive and may actually preclude the kind of communicative engagement that deliberative democrats seek.

Despite Mouffe's criticism of Rawls for trading in the currency of difference as mere fact, Mouffe herself does not make a claim regarding the value of difference *qua* difference. Instead, Mouffe speaks primarily in terms of the fact of difference, only her understanding of the fact of difference requires something far more radical than Rawls allows. I would contend that Mouffe's position allows not for the value of difference, but the inevitability of difference. Differences cannot be overcome and are here to stay. Any effort to overcome or even minimize the presence of difference and disagreement is an exercise in futility with damaging effects. Rather than on the value of differences, Mouffe focuses primarily on the inescapability of difference and the dangers of trying to transcend them. The fact of difference cannot be circumscribed or tamed and it especially cannot be relegated to a pre-political sphere. Democracy becomes a question of how we might engage with one another in the presence of irreconcilable differences.

For Mouffe it is not that difference carries independent value for democratic politics. Rather it is the acceptance of difference that carries the radical democratic potential she wants to capture. "Instead of trying to erase the traces of power and exclusion" which would be impossible given the fact of difference, "democratic politics requires bringing them to the fore, making them visible so that they can enter the terrain of contestation" (1996, 255). Difference and disagreement are inevitable. An alternative to the politics of difference could only be

brought about through exclusionary and homogenizing practices. Therefore it is the *acceptance of the fact of difference,* and the inevitability of difference, that must be enhanced and celebrated.

Mouffe differs greatly from Rawls whose consideration of the "mere fact of difference" leads him to try to transcend it. Unlike Rawls, Mouffe wants us to relish our differences in light of the fact that overcoming them is impossible. She is not, however, as difference-positive as those who claim that differences can actually improve democratic deliberation. In Mouffe's view, agreement is always deferred in the presence of difference and resulting disagreements. Through this reading of the fact of difference, difference can be seen as an impediment to legitimate decision-making.

1.ii Difference as a Resource

Young moves beyond the fact of difference to identify the value that differences themselves bring to deliberation. For her, the "inclusion of differentiated groups is important not only as a means of demonstrating equal respect and to ensure that all legitimate interests in the polity receive expression, though these are fundamental reasons for democratic inclusion" (2001, 115). Whereas Mouffe believes that differences undermine the ideal of deliberation, which should therefore be abandoned, Young argues that democratic deliberation is actually improved by the presence of difference. In an important move, Young defines difference in terms of perspectives. Defining differences as perspectives enables Young to make the claim that differences actually facilitate deliberation rather than merely setting the basic parameters or requirements of deliberation (per Rawls) or ultimately undermining our deliberative ends in the first place (per Mouffe).

According to Young, inclusion of difference in democracy serves two primary functions to facilitate deliberation: "First, it motivates participants in political debate to transform their

claims from mere expressions of self-regarding interest to appeals to justice. Second, it maximizes the social knowledge available to a democratic public, such that citizens are more likely to make just and wise decisions" (2001, 115). By piecing together a variety of diverse social perspectives, we are able to get a more complete view of our shared world. Differences enrich democratic deliberation by providing more information and differing perspectives, improving the epistemic validity of our decisions. Audre Lorde speaks to this view of difference serving a certain informational or epistemic function when she writes that encountering those who are different from ourselves "enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being." (1984, 111-112).

In such an account of the value of difference in democratic communication, Young focuses primarily on the effect that difference has on democratic *inputs*. "Pooling the situated knowledge of all social positions can produce" an "objective understanding of the society…" (Young 2001, 117). For Young this objective understanding does not come from bracketing and excluding "differences, but by communicating the experiences and perspectives conditioned by them to one another" (2001, 83). The communication of differences fosters "objectivity" in this sense by correcting biases that occur when we only consider one point of view. The sharing of differences increases "the store of social knowledge available to participants" (Young 2001, 83).

In her discussion of difference as a resource in democratic communication, Young begins to hint at the power of difference to democratize uptake as well as input, in other words to make citizens (and not just the procedures of deliberation) more receptive. Beyond the informational value of increasing the pool of social knowledge available to citizens in deliberation, Young

gestures as a third feature of dialogue across difference that makes it a valuable resource for making just decision:

> Confrontation with different perspectives, interests, and cultural meanings teaches individuals the partiality of their own, and to them their own experience as perspectival. Listening to those differently situated than myself and my close associates teaches me how my situation looks to them, what relation they think I stand to them (1997, 403).

Again, we see the claim that difference serves as a resource by pluralizing the input or information available in deliberation. But with this third feature, Young further claims that difference may have an effect on listeners as well, making them more receptive to others. In the remainder of this paper, I develop this line of thinking. Before we can understand the potential of difference to augment and improve democratic deliberation, we must have an account of the importance of listening. Only then can we revisit the ways in the difference approach can function as a more democratic alternative to the empathy approach.

2. Listening

Though difference democrats including Mouffe and Young have varying accounts of the fact and value of difference, they share a tendency to focus primarily on difference as it relates to democratizing "input," (i.e. incorporating marginalized voices and pluralizing the types of communication permitted in political debate). The presence of dissenting opinions and minority voices makes democracy more inclusive in a literal sense. But how can we ensure that these opinions and voices are included in a meaningful way? In other words, how can we ensure that minority voices and perspectives are heard and considered?

In presenting the difference approach as an alternative to the empathy approach, I intend to explore a relatively underdeveloped branch of the politics of difference. Specifically, I focus on ways that difference can help people become more receptive to their fellow citizens,

democratizing *uptake* as well as *input* in deliberative settings. But the potential of difference to improve discourse is only visible if we understand citizens in their role as listeners as well as speakers. Only after accounting for the importance of listening in democratic theory, especially deliberative democracy, can we fully understand the value of difference as a resource for making democratic deliberation more inclusive.

Procedures of listening are often ignored in theories of democratic deliberation. Those democratic theorists who do attend to the importance of listening often do so within the context of agonistic democracy. Susan Bickford, for example, explores the importance of listening within an "understanding of politics that stresses its conflictual and contentious character" (1996, 2). As she recognizes, "those who take conflict seriously tend not to stress interaction, while those who value interaction tend to underestimate the presence and persistence of conflict." (Bickford 1996, 5). Admirably, Bickford tries to bring the value of democratic discourse into a framework of agonistic democracy by highlighting the importance of listening. She explains her work as aiming to "theorize democratic communicative interaction that depends not on the possibility of consensus but on the presence of listening" (Bickford 1996, 18).

Building on Bickford's prioritization of listening, I want to explore the ways in which consensus or, more accurately, mutual-understanding itself relies on the presence of listening. In other words, Bickford incorporates democratic communication into agonistic democratic theory. In almost a mirror image, I seek to provide an account of the importance of listening to be used within the framework of deliberative democracy, which still maintains the potential of communication to lead to legitimate democratic decision.

In deliberative democracy, inclusion and equal consideration is a central ideal. But inclusion is often defined according to voices and speech. Not as much attention is paid toward

ensuring that the included voices will be *heard* and actually *listened to*. As Nancy Love points

out in her book *Musical Democracy,* deliberative democracy "privileges speaking over listening

and performers over audiences" (2006, 82). This preference for speaking over listening is highly

problematic insofar as equal and democratic communication can only occur between "a speaker

and a listener" and not simply "two speakers" (Schweickart 1996, 317, as quoted by Love).

Accounting for the listening component of deliberative procedures is crucial if we are to achieve

the legitimate outcomes that deliberative democrats seek.

The difficulties of observing improvements to listening and openness have led to an

unfortunate inattention to such an important concept. As anyone who has led a seminar or

discussion section knows, engagement-as-speech is infinitely easier to observe and quantify. I

would argue that because of the relative ease with which we can identify procedures that are

inclusive of speech rather than listening, the former is often the preferred measure of or proxy for

healthy deliberation. The inclusion of all relevant and willing speakers is certainly a necessary

condition for deliberation; but it is not a sufficient one. Speakers must also have an attentive

audience.

Even "silence" which is readily observable, and perhaps the most obvious condition for

and correlate of democratic listening and openness, is just as likely to signify withdrawal from

discourse as it is meaningful engagement (Bickford 153). And the transformation of opinion is a

similarly unsuitable measure of engagement and listening. For example, I may attentively engage

with a neo-Nazi without being swayed by his position.

One possible approach to judging the level of engagement would be to measure

participants' ability to recall someone's opinion. While this may be a good start in terms of

measuring an individual's listening skills or short-term memory, it will not necessarily give us a

sense of the extent to which participants gave serious consideration to others' opinions. The challenges political scientists and theorists face in identifying good listening practices is problematic insofar as it has led to the anemic investigation into the important question of improving listening in deliberation.

In light of these challenges, we might be advised to turn to Diana Mutz's *Hearing the Other Side.* Despite its title, Mutz's *Hearing the Other Side,* employs a basic threshold of "hearing," which boils down to mere exposure to alternative viewpoints. Mutz avoids the question of receptivity or listening and her approach betrays a continued focus on deliberation-as-speech. Rather than studying hearing, listening, or engagement, Mutz studies the impact of exposure to different opinions. Could such exposure prove a fruitful stand-in or proxy measure for listening?

According to Mutz, "cross-cutting exposure" occurs in "cross-cutting networks" wherein "members of one's social network hold views different from one's own" (Mutz 2006, 101). A network will bring about cross-cutting exposure to the extent that "political discussions with non-like-minded others are taking place within these networks" (Mutz 2006, 102). Mutz uses the *presence* of opposing voices as a proxy for actually *hearing* the other side. But she does not discuss or evaluate the quality of these discussions. Again, her operationalization of deliberation or "hearing the other side" is the *presence* of opposing voices without any mention of *hearing.* Here, again, we see the recurring focus on speech over listening.

Importantly, Mutz finds that exposure to opposing views can actually bring about a withdrawal from politics. She identifies a trade-off between diversity and engagement, explaining that the most engaged are those surrounded by like-minded people. And those surrounded by people with opposing political beliefs are actually less likely to be engaged

politically. We might conclude that some sort of uptake or reception must be occurring along side the exposure insofar as she is able to trace effects on citizens from the *presence* of opposing views in their networks. But again, Mutz does not discuss the quality of the uptake or describe how it could be measured, let alone improved.

Although Mutz's account of the effects of exposure to cross-cutting views is an important contribution to the study of democratic deliberation, she is unable to give an account of the quality of exposure. Perhaps Mutz's observed effect of exposure to cross-cutting views leading to a general disengagement from politics could be alleviated or better understood if we had an account of what sustained and engaged listening in the presence of disagreement and diverse opinions should look like.

But because of the difficulty we have guaranteeing or even measuring the listening or receptivity among individuals in discourse, this important theme has been all but ignored in theories of democratic deliberation. In our attempt to improve procedures of deliberation, a marked focus has been on procedures of deliberation-as-speech. One of the implications of this oversight is that we miss the duality of the ideal of inclusion; being able to speak is as important as being heard.

I argue in favor of reconceiving citizens as listeners. Even if not their primary mode of participation, listening is at least as important as speaking. Refocusing on the importance of listening opens new avenues for understanding difference as a resource in democratic deliberation.

In the next section, I will show how greater attention to differences among citizens – in opinion, identity, interests, and most importantly perspectives – may have the ability to bring about improved listening. The "Difference Approach" to democratic deliberation that I propose

highlights the ways in which greater attention to differences can work on citizens in such a way as to open them up to deliberation and make them more attentive listeners. I argue that greater attention to difference has the potential to foster a more open disposition among citizens, making them more capacious listeners.

3. The Difference Approach

Taking what we have learned about the relationship between deliberation, listening, and difference, I want to propose an alternative to the "empathy approach" to making deliberation more open and inclusive (Frazer 2010, Morrell 2010, Krause 2008, c.f. Scudder). Specifically, I will outline what I call the "difference approach" to improving deliberative practices. The difference approach focuses on the productive effects of recognizing the deep differences rather than similarities or commonalities between ourselves and others. This approach conceives of citizens as listeners and explores the ways that difference can democratize uptake (or listening) as well as input. I argue that the democratic power of difference lies in its ability to alert citizens to the limits of mutual understanding and the need for improved listening in light of those limits.

Even when engaging in discourse for the sake of coming to a decision, citizens must recognize that they will never fully understand their opponents' perspective and likewise, their opponents will never understand theirs. Only once these divides are acknowledged can citizens engage truthfully and productively. Differences rather than commonalities are the more democratic resource for helping citizens cultivate greater openness and better listening practices in a deliberative setting.

To show how recognizing differences can make citizens more humble, generous, and receptive when deliberating, I use Heidegger's concept of the world-disclosive power of language. In the same way that William Connolly has appropriated elements of the highly anti-

democratic Nietzsche into his theory of agonistic democracy, I aim to reclaim aspects of Heidegger to incorporate into deliberative democracy. Of course, this appropriation must remain "critical and distrustful," so as not to overlook the striking incompatibilities of Heidegger's ideas with democracy (White 1991, 31).[1]

When compared to empathy, or *Einfühlung,* Heidegger's notion of *Lichtung*, or a lighting up, what we experience in "a clearing" in a forest, provides helpful imagery in explaining the benefits of a difference approach to deliberation. Edward B. Titchener originally coined the English word "empathy" from the German word *Einfühlung*, which means "feeling-into." Titchener took *Einfühlung* from the realm of aesthetics where the concept referred to the projection of one's own thoughts and feelings onto an inanimate aesthetic object. Titchener explained the concept with the image of a forest: "As we read about the forest, we may, as it were, *become* the explorer; we feel ourselves the gloom, the silence, the humidity, the oppression, the sense of lurking danger" (1915, 198). Becoming an explorer of the forest, we tread into dark corners, acquiring knowledge of this new and strange place. The intrepid explorer surveys, bravely throwing himself into the unknown. In contrast to the projection of *Einfühlung*, I propose an image more reticent and humble than Titchener's explorer.

In contrast, Heidegger's concept of *Lichtung,* or "the clearing," provides imagery to help explain the benefits of a difference approach to deliberation, one that highlights the limits to mutual understanding. Heidegger explains that the clearing – the space where we may encounter others, but always against a dark background – is an "open space in the midst of beings" (1971, 52). The clearing is a "happening," a continual process "that includes the conflict between

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[1] Similarly, I think that it is important to remain wary of the troubling actions Heidegger took (or failed to take) in his own life. In light of these concerns, I share White's conviction that we can employ Heidegger's contributions to political thought "only if we do not forget either the heights or the depths of his thought," including his consenting to Nazism.

concealment and unconcealment" (Heidegger 1971, 52). When we are called into "the clearing" in a linguistic encounter, we do not run forward fearlessly to explore. Instead, Heidegger explains that we must recognize that which remains forever hidden or beyond our view. Remaining patiently in the clearing of the woods rather than bounding into the dark corners of the forest, we temper our acquisitiveness. In Heidegger's clearing, we are more tentative and delayed in our exploration, as we are faced with the reality that some things will always remain shadowed and hidden from our view.

When a citizen recognizes the deep differences that divide her from others, she may come to view her beliefs as provisional, less secure, and particular. She may also recognize her fellow citizens as worthy interlocutors bounded by the same limits as herself, and therefore delay her response, avoiding a premature dismissal, judgment, or cooptation of others' perspectives. This delayed response creates space in which to meet her interlocutors and actually consider what they say. I contend that feelings of difference are a better place to look for the dialogical openness that theories of democratic deliberation require.

Such an approach would focus on helping citizens recognize differences as well as the limits to mutual understanding created by those differences. Specifically, the difference approach I propose points to the value of recognizing the cultural, experiential, and communicative divides between ourselves and others insofar as they can attune citizens to the ways we remain closed off to others as well as the urgent need for improved listening. When I consider the opinions and perspectives of others, it is crucial to recognize that their experiences are unique and may be beyond my understanding. For example, the acknowledgment on the part of straight citizens that they may never fully understand or accurately imagine what it feels like to be discriminated against because of their sexual orientation is vital to ensuring citizens listen to the perspectives

that are actually communicated by particular others. The realization of the limits to mutual understanding in the presence of deep difference opens us more vividly to the ways in which we are inconspicuously limited in our opinions, our basic understanding of issues, or our relationship to the democratic community. This sort of opening cannot occur if we imagine only our commonalities and assume that we can know or feel how another feels. To foster greater openness, we should relish our differences instead of moving quickly beyond them for the sake of imagining commonalities.

Deliberation cannot be improved by overcoming difference. Instead, greater space must be allowed for difference. For example, in the aftermath of Trayvon Martin's death, the phrase "I am Trayvon" was popularized in public discourse. People showed their condemnation of Martin's killing as well as the trial and acquittal of George Zimmerman. Ebony Magazine, for example, printed several covers featuring famous black men wearing hoodies and posing with their sons under the title "We Are Trayvon."

Growing out of this rallying cry, however, was a counter-movement of sorts that turned the original slogan on its head. The new rallying cry was: "I am NOT Trayvon Martin." This slogan has been used by white "allies" who, like many black Americans are disturbed by the outcome of the Zimmerman trial. Claiming "I am NOT Trayvon," however, demonstrates an admission on the part of these individuals that they cannot imagine or fully understand the experience of black Americans. It is not about the rhetoric per se, but the underlying disposition that one expresses by asserting, "I am Not Trayvon." Through this, speakers demonstrate humility, rejecting the presumption of fully understanding black Americans' perspectives on events surrounding the death of Trayvon Martin. This humility creates space wherein white Americans can listen to and hear the concerns and demands of black Americans.

Focusing on difference emphasizes the importance of listening, but more importantly, listening-with-humility, given the limits to our ability to every fully understand. A realization of difference enables democratic citizens to potentially reconsider their moral or political commitments, to engage in meaningful evaluation, and begin to resist subtler aspects of power operating in political discourse.

Conclusion

Previous attempts to theorize how we might bring about a more open and receptive disposition on the part of citizen-listeners have focused on generating empathy. In contrast, I explore how difference might be used to foster more inclusive democratic practices by alerting citizens to the urgent need for improved listening. My emphasis on the importance of difference in democracy fits within a line of theoretical inquiry that takes seriously the fact and value of difference. The difference approach that I propose, however, looks at the role that difference can play in improving listening and uptake rather than pluralizing input.

Some might argue that expecting citizens to become more open in the face of deep differences is just as high a standard as the empathy approach that I seek to replace. The possibility of renewed closure in the face of differences is certainly a possibility. But while the difference approach may face the same challenges in practice as the empathy approach, as a deliberative ideal it fares much better.

Recognizing differences instead of commonalities maintains a theoretical focus on the challenges and limits to mutual understanding. The challenges to democratic discourse in a pluralistic world are significant, given that it occurs always already in the presence of disagreement. Given the magnitude of these challenges, it is crucial that citizens be aware of them. If these challenges are ignored in favor of an approach that focuses primarily on

similarities and our ability to imagine and understand another's feelings and motivations, citizens are not alerted to the vital importance of engaging in rich, complex, and sometimes difficult listening practices.

By emphasizing the problem of dialogical closure and the limits to mutual understanding, the difference approach cultivates the virtue of modesty in a citizen, helping her understand and realize the hard work of democratic decision-making and democratic listening. Even such a modest accomplishment is a marked improvement over the empathy approach.

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