

# Recovering an Ideal: Impartiality as Democratic Listening

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## **Abstract**

Civic republicans and social contract theorists have suffered a significant casualty. A pillar of their moral framework – impartiality - has all but crumbled under the assault of feminist scholars. Feminists assert that impartiality has been used as a specious tool that advances status quo agendas of exclusion, marginalization, and suppression of minority voices. Insights from Iris Marion Young and Carole Pateman are especially helpful when considering the ill use of impartiality. Yet, while fruitful at pointing to the pernicious effects of this moral ideal, feminist theorists neglect impartiality's advantageous aspects. They limit impartiality by confining it to a neutral "view from nowhere" that is a prerequisite moral characteristic to political expression. This narrow conception is useful in helping to undermine civic republicanism and social contract theory, but it also removes a singular weapon from the feminist arsenal. Rather than solely a preconditioned moral viewpoint, I contend that impartiality is an essential quality of democratic listening. Using the work of Susan Bickford, I argue that equal (impartial) weighing and considering is imperative to the process of incorporating all moral agents into the political realm. The purpose of this paper is to recast the very meaning of impartiality by connecting it to the quality of democratic listening. When understood in this way impartiality can help address the very problems of exclusion that feminists raise.

This paper seeks to revive the merits of impartiality amidst theoretical assault. Feminist scholars over the past three decades have elucidated the misuse of impartiality in the western political traditions of social contract theory and civic republicanism. On the feminist account, most boldly declared by Iris Marion Young and Carole Pateman, these two political traditions have used the ideal of impartiality to exclude women and other minority voices from the public realm. This argument has been widely accepted by the scholarly community. Yet, while the feminist critique of impartiality is persuasive, it only applies under certain theoretical and political conditions. First, impartiality must be mistakenly understood as objectivity and second, political participation must be understood only in terms of expression. When impartiality is appropriately understood as something distinct from objectivity, impartiality not only stops being exclusionary, it transforms into an inclusive ideal. Likewise, when political participation includes listening as well as expression, impartiality, as an ideal, works to accommodate marginalized voices in the public realm. We do not live in the hypothetical conditions that make the feminist argument operative on theoretical or political terms. In fact, impartiality is different than objectivity and contemporary western regimes are liberal and social democracies that validate the political activities of expression and listening. Thus when properly contextualized in democratic conditions, impartiality emerges as the central ideal that can help address the very problems of exclusion that feminists raise.

The paper will be organized into four sections. First, I will clarify the meaning of impartiality. Impartiality is not objectivity. One of the most common misunderstandings about impartiality in political thought and colloquial parlance is that it means objectivity. A clarification of meaning demonstrates that impartiality is not a disembodied, distanced,

objective view from nowhere. In fact it is not objective at all. Rather, impartiality is an embodied form of active perspective taking. Following the tradition of Kant and Arendt, I submit that impartiality is the effort to understand and incorporate others' subjective views. Yet, my definition goes beyond Kant and Arendt to include listening as the core impartial activity. Where they encourage the "imagination to go visiting" (Arendt 1982, 43), I suggest that the imagination is not enough. We must take other perspectives into account through active listening.

Second, I will review the feminist critique of impartiality. This section of the paper will specifically address the work of Carole Pateman and Iris Marion Young. Pateman's work on impartiality addresses social contract theory and specifically criticizes Hobbes, Locke, and Rawls. Her work addresses how women have been excluded from the "fraternal social contract" because in this theoretical tradition the public sphere is associated with impartiality, reason, universality, and men, while the private sphere is associated with partiality, emotion, affection, and women. Thus the dominant norm of impartiality acts as a barrier to women and other minorities who are marginalized because of assumed partiality. On another track, Iris Marion Young contends that Rousseau's republicanism created a notion of the general will that has also been exclusionary. Each citizen in the Rousseauian society individually prescribes the general will in an impartial manner. Thus, those that are not impartial as a precondition to their denomination of the general will must not be included. Together Pateman and Young provide the most pointed critique of impartiality from the feminist literature. These critiques are well developed and generally accepted in political theory, but in the end they are counterproductive. In an effort to

deconstruct a male dominated public regime, feminist scholars have dismissed ideals that are imperative to their inclusive political project.

In the third section of the paper I argue that the feminist critique of impartiality only applies when two conditions are in place: 1) impartiality is improperly understood as a distanced, disembodied form of objectivity; 2) politics is understood strictly in a frame of contract liberalism or Rousseauian republicanism where the sole political activity is expressive in nature. When political participation is understood in terms of expression only, impartiality can easily become a moral characteristic that is a precondition for political participation. If an individual is not able to express them self “impartially” they can simply be excluded from participating. As Pateman and Young argue, on liberal and Rousseauian terms, the ideal became a tool for exclusion by the existing power regime, which in modern western states has been predominately male and white. What they are less attentive to are the democratic elements that have cut across these tendencies. The primary addition democracy brings to the table is communication, which is not only expressive in nature but also values listening. The dominant trend in western society over the past 200 years is for regimes and culture to become more democratic. Today we do not live in a Lockean or Rousseauian world (actual and theoretical). We live in a much more democratic one. Hence, while the critique of impartiality applies in particular circumstances and particular theoretical moments, it does not apply in contemporary democratic societies. In contemporary democratic societies impartiality is a redemptive ideal for politics, not an exclusionary one.

In the fourth section of the paper, I complete the circle and advocate a democratic politics that values both expression and listening and elevates impartiality, properly

understood, as a central ideal. Listening is the mechanism through which impartiality is practiced. The more perspectives one integrates into their own, the more impartial they become. Perspective incorporation only occurs through the listening process. Impartiality, under this new orientation, is the foundational ideal that promotes the inclusive politics that feminists promote. Instead of a prerequisite cognitive characteristic that can be used as a veneer for excluding others, impartiality as democratic listening demands engagement from political participants. The ideal is realized through action. It is important to keep in mind that impartiality as an ideal can only direct action and full attainment cannot be expected. Thinking in binary terms of either being impartial or not is mistaken. One can become more impartial or less so, depending on their degree of listening and incorporation of other's views.

### **Section I – Defining Impartiality**

Impartiality as a concept of political thought has a perplexing history. Contributing to the confusion surrounding impartiality is the fact that it is a notoriously difficult concept to define. Impartiality is mistakenly understood at once as an Archimedean view from nowhere and a universal view from everywhere. These viewpoints are different, and so are the means to achieve them.

The Archimedean view from nowhere is meant to disembodiment an individual and allow them a perspective that is objective and neutral. This process is a matter of distancing one from their particular position, sentiment, and subjectivity. In political thought, this view was most clearly expressed by John Rawls in his original landmark work, *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1971). Rawls obtains what he calls the “Archimedean point” by

assuming certain general guidelines and agreements that create an “original position” (Rawls 1971, 263). By accepting these assumptions about general desires he states that, “we can achieve the requisite independence from existing circumstances” (Rawls 1971, 263). The idea then, is to create a schema that distances those from the present circumstances. This principle originates from the tale of Archimedes, in which he proclaimed that he could move the whole earth with a lever if he was given a strong place to stand. Notice that the place where Archimedes would stand is outside of this world. In order to use a lever, one would need distance, which would give the appropriate leverage to lift the world from its place. Likewise, Rawls Archimedean point is attempting a view from a distance or a “view from nowhere” (Nagel 1986). This Archimedean view from nowhere is best understood as objectivity.

The reason objectivity gets confused with impartiality is that they are both ideals that seek to remove prejudice and bias. My contention is that they are doing it by very different means and thus the concepts are very different from one another.

Impartiality, in contrast to objectivity, moves closer to other political subjects not farther away. Instead of creating distance to appropriately view the entire system, impartiality is an attempt to get inside of the mind of others. This line of thought descends from Kant. It is an ideal that attempts to take a view from everywhere. By everywhere, it is meant that it attempts to understand the perspective of all other rational beings. For Kant a moral act is one that has universal application. “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become universal law” (Kant 1981, 30). While this has similarity with Rawls’s account, the process whereby one acts impartially is much different.

In her lectures on Kant, Arendt described the distinction this way, “You see that impartiality is obtained by taking the viewpoints of others into account; impartiality is not the result of some higher standpoint that would then actually settle the dispute by being altogether above the melee” (Arendt 1982, 42). Impartiality is thus an attempt to understand the subjective reality of other rational beings with whom one shares the world. On Kant and Arendt’s account this process entails that “one trains one’s imagination to go visiting” (Arendt 1982, 43). Through imagination one can situate them self inside the subjective experience of another human being. This practice must be pursued until one has visited as many viewpoints as possible. The ideal would be that all particular, subjective viewpoints are taken into account. Thus the moral act is universalizable by account of its incorporation of views through imagination.

With this distinction of objectivity and impartiality clearly before us, I add my contribution to impartiality. I agree with Kant and Arendt, that impartiality is the process of actively integrating the viewpoints of others. Yet, even when refined in this way impartiality can easily be co-opted to advantage those who have the appearance of incorporating multiple viewpoints in their public dialogue. The problem of exclusion, while slightly ameliorated, still persists because relegating impartiality to the imagination is relegating it to cognitive ability. Thus, I propose to alter the meaning of impartiality slightly. One must actively take on the viewpoints of others through listening, not through the imagination. One is much better situated to apprehend what it is like to be in a marginalized political position when that marginalized person communicates that position. Impartiality is enacted through the listening and incorporation of that view.

## Section II – The Feminist Critique of Impartiality

The analysis of impartiality by feminist theorists has focused on two dominant traditions within western political thought. Both social contract theory and civic republicanism are accused of disingenuously promoting the ideal of impartiality. Feminists assert that these two traditions, and those who subscribe to them, intentionally use the ideal of impartiality to exclude women and other minority voices. This section will detail the feminist critique of impartiality as it applies to social contract theory and civic republicanism.

Social contract theory spans theorists as distant as Thomas Hobbes and John Rawls and has played a central role in the theoretical and practical tradition of liberalism. According to feminists, the central problem of contract theory is that the only legitimate moral subject is an impartially reasoning individual. In her essay “The Impracticality of Impartiality”, Marilyn Friedman summarizes what is meant by an impartial reasoner:

“According to the well-known Rawlsian contractual model for determining basic principles of justice, normative reasoners are: first, to suppress knowledge of their own subjective particulars; second, to suppose themselves possessed of all necessary general knowledge about persons and society; and, third, to abide certain motivational constraints, most notably, mutual disinterest and lack of envy (Friedman 1989, 648).”

This summary of Rawls is accurate and does much to illuminate what an impartial reasoner ought to look like in the social contract tradition. Yet, why would this account be problematic for feminists and other minority voices? As Carole Pateman explains, “Political theorists present the familiar account of the creation of civil society as a universal realm that includes everyone... There is silence about the part of the story which reveals that the social contract is a fraternal pact that constitutes civil society as a patriarchal or masculine order” (Pateman 1989, 33). The elevation of a reasonable individual that contracts for



peace, property, or justice is done at the expense of those that are seen as unable to reason in an impartial manner. In Feminist's case it is women, but many minority voices have been excluded from the contract because they are assumed to not be impartial enough.

In sum, the problem lies in the fact that becoming an impartial reasoner is seen as a prerequisite to political acts of will in the social contract tradition. The most important political act in the contractarian tradition is consenting to the social contract. In order to express consent according to principles of justice, an individual must possess the characteristics of the impartial reasoner. Those that do not possess these characteristics are not included in the social contract. Thus, the "The fraternal social contract creates a new, modern patriarchal order that is presented as divided into two spheres: civil society or the universal sphere of freedom, equality, individualism, reason, contract and impartial law – the realm of men or 'individuals'; and the private world of particularity, natural subjection, ties of blood, emotion, love and sexual passion – the world of women, in which men also rule" (Pateman 1989, 43).

The other problematic theoretical tradition, which holds impartiality as a central ideal, is civic republicanism. Rousseau is the theorist responsible for creating the paradigm of the general will and the ideal of the civic public (Young 1990, 108). The distinctive feature of the general will for Rousseau is that "the general will studies only the common interest" (Rousseau 1968, 72). If thinking in terms of the common interest is the condition of participation in the public sphere, again it can be used as an exclusionary device. Similar to Pateman, Young highlights, "The will to unity expressed by this ideal of impartial and universal reason generates an oppressive opposition between reason and desire or affectivity" (Young 1985, 382). This pressure to express the common interest in an

impartial manner again made impartiality a prerequisite moral characteristic that generated exclusion. It resulted in “the expulsion and confinement of everything that would threaten to invade the polity with differentiation: the specificity of women’s bodies and desire, differences of race and culture, the variability and heterogeneity of needs, the goals and desires of individuals, the ambiguity and changeability of feeling” (Young 1990, 111).

In sum, social contract theory required that the legitimate political actor be an impartial reasoner. Civic republicanism idealized thinking in terms of impartially assessing the common interest. Together these traditions promoted impartiality as a moral precondition of public and political participation. By so doing the ideal was used as a tool to exclude those who were assumed to be incapable of impartial reasoning. The ideal was conveniently utilized by white men who controlled systems of power through ostensibly open ideals that in truth were highly exclusive. On these terms, I take this critique to be legitimate. I agree with the feminists that the ideal of impartial reason was used to exclude those voices that are integral to a vibrant, differentiated polity. My contention, to which I will now turn, is that this understanding of impartiality depends on a particular definition of impartiality and a limited understanding of politics.

### **Section III – A Response to the Feminist Critique**

As demonstrated in section one, impartiality has many connotations. In the critique of social contract theory, feminist theorists such as Friedman, Pateman, and Benhabib are targeting an ideal of objectivity, not impartiality. In Friedman’s discussion of Rawls, the orientation is to distance oneself from their own subjective experience. One gets the sense that Rawls is not advising us to take on the perspective of subjective others, but to see how

those subjective others interact with the larger system. Hence, it is necessary to have a “general knowledge about persons and society” (Friedman 1989, 648) and not a particular knowledge from the vantage point of all citizens. One must gain this distant perspective in order to “determine the basic rules of justice” (Friedman 1989, 648). In both instances, the impartial reasoner on this account is not taking on the perspectives of other co-citizens, but rather she is distancing herself from them in order to reach the Archimedean point. This form of impartiality is actually objectivity. For social contract theory from Hobbes to Rawls the impartial reasoner is actually an objective reasoner: “The moral self is viewed as disembodied and disembodied” (Benhabib 1985, 405). Impartiality, properly understood, is not disembodied at all, nor is it an attempt to gain a distanced vantage point. Impartiality is about lived subjective viewpoints and ones ability to incorporate those viewpoints into ones paradigm.

For Iris Marion Young, the critique stays the same, but the adversary differs. In her assessment of Rousseau’s general will, Young emphasizes the will to unity that is expressed. In similar nature to the public/private divide, “moral reason that seeks impartiality tries to reduce the plurality of moral subjects and situations to a unity by demanding that moral judgment be detached, dispassionate, and universal” (Young 1990, 103). Throughout Young’s writings there is no distinction made between the objective reasoner and the impartial reasoner. Yet, all of her descriptions connote a viewpoint that stands at a distance and observes from an Archimedean point. In her most explicit critique of impartiality, she describes it in these terms:

“The impartial reasoner is detached: reason abstracts from the particular experiences and histories that constitute a situation. The impartial reasoner must also be dispassionate, abstracting from feelings, desires, interests, and commitments that he or she may have regarding the situation or that others may have. The

impartial reasoner is, finally, a universal reasoner. The moral point of view abstracts from the partiality of affiliation, of social or group perspective, that constitutes concrete subjects” (Young 1990, 100).

What Young describes here is vastly different than the impartial reasoner that Kant and Arendt portray. What she describes is an objective reasoner not an impartial one.

In the remainder of this response to the feminist critique of impartiality, I will demonstrate that politics as understood by the founding social contract theorists and civic republicans is solely an expressive activity. This is the second condition that must be in place for the feminist critique to survive. I will do this by examining the work of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau.

Before moving on to examine the role of expression in the work of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, it is necessary to explain why I chose these thinkers among the many contract theorists and civic republicans. First, I look to these theorists because they are widely agreed upon as the founding figures of social contract theory. Volumes have been written concerning their meaning, but it is necessary to go to the source in order to understand the initial framework of political participation. Second, Carole Pateman directs her contentions at Hobbes and Locke and Iris Young directs her critique at Rousseau. I hope that by examining the primary authors we might glean information that these feminist theorists originally critiqued. Lastly, a word on Rousseau - he is undoubtedly a social contract theorist, but in this paper he has been characterized as a civic republican. He is both. In Young’s critique of civic republicanism, she names Rousseau responsible for setting up the “paradigm for the ideal of the civic republic” (Young 1990, 108). It is for these reasons that I direct my thoughts to the original thinkers in these traditions.

The main point regarding these three theorists is that each one described political activity exclusively as a mode of expression. The scope of participation broadened in the subsequent work of each theorist, but remained limited to expression. Where Hobbes limited political participation to the original formation of contract, Rousseau envisioned ongoing expression through the general will. Yet, while they differ in degree, the essence of political participation remains the same.

The Hobbessian state of nature is “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes 1985, 186). Those that exist in this state desire nothing more than to escape their present fate. While reason is a critical element in forming the social contract, passion plays a large role in motivating individuals to give up their rights for peace. According to Harvey Mansfield, “A man consents properly, that is almost unreservedly, to government only after he has placed himself imaginatively in the state of nature, and then allowed his passions to overwhelm his opinions” (Mansfield 1971, 100). Fear overcomes individuals in the state of nature and moves them to the one political event of their lifetime in the formation of the Leviathan.

The social contract on this account is an act of collective consent to give up almost all rights in order to create a government that will provide security. Individuals that are party to the agreement do not agree to ongoing popular governance, but to be ruled over. “Fear and its subordinate passions generate consent, and consent means consent to *be governed*” (Mansfield 1971, 100). In his analysis of Hobbes, Mansfield goes even further to say that the very act of expressing consent was not intended to be political. Rather “Consent is opinion reduced to passions and reconstructed to lack all political implications; it is synthesized opinion, purified of politics” (Mansfield 1971, 101). This helpful analysis

demonstrates that for Hobbes politics is a severely limited sphere. He not only reduces it to a single moment of consent to form a government, he wishes that one expressive moment to be as apolitical as possible. Hobbes wants to root out opinion and unnecessary discussion. He wants the communication to go one way in the form of a consenting vote to form an overwhelming power.

Similar to Hobbes, Locke also sees the original political act as one of social compact. He states, “Nothing can make any man so (a member of the commonwealth), but his actually entering into it by positive engagement, and express promise and compact” (Locke 2003, 324). The distinction between Hobbes and Locke is a matter of degree. Where Hobbes goes to great lengths to make the social contract the only political act and even then strips it of most of its political dimensions, Locke makes his agreement positive and active. The initial political act is one of expressing a promise that obligates the citizen to a number of responsibilities within the society. His consent is ongoing and acts as a check against over aggression from fellow citizens and the government. Whereas a Hobbesian citizen loses all rights besides self-protection, the Lockean citizen retains rights to property, liberty, and life (Locke 2003, 304).

The government that is formed in Locke’s social contract is a neutral umpire that must be “indifferent and the same to all parties” (Locke 2003, 304). It is formed to justly execute the rules that have been laid down to protect the property and other rights of citizens. My concern is that, in an arrangement like Locke’s, the citizens only political participation is to appeal or express a grievance to the umpire. The political act is a complaint that is expressed by a citizen or group that notifies the government that their rights have been infringed. The communication between citizens in regard to their conflict

is not considered public or political. This limits political activity to an individual expression or complaint to the government directly. The government arbitrates the situation according to laws that have already been established by the original pact and simply executes the law. While more active than Hobbes sphere of politics, it is still a fixed notion that lends to a confined notion of politics where impartiality as a personal characteristic can be used as an exclusionary tool.

In sum, for Hobbes the only political act is giving consent, an expression of permission to form a new and legitimate form of government. For Locke, consent is a positive engagement and should be viewed as more ongoing than Hobbes. Locke's notion of consent is not a single expression, but requires continual consent. Both Hobbes and Locke seek to secure a government that is a neutral referee in civil affairs. Theirs is a conception of politics that is purely expressive in terms of making a political contract. After that covenant has been made, for Hobbes, you can no longer act politically. For Locke, you must continue to express your grievances should other individuals or the state infringe upon your freedoms. The point here is that in either case political activity is an expression of consent or complaint to the state. I will now turn to Rousseau's general will.

Rousseau's conception of politics is much more participatory. Yet, while emphasizing more participation, the involvement in politics is again distinctly an act of expression. Iris Marion Young takes issue with the general will specifically. In her critique she illustrates that the general will is expressive when she states, "Normative reason reveals an impartial point of view, however, that all rational persons can adopt, which *expresses* a general will not reducible to an aggregate of particular interests. To participate in the general will as a citizen is to *express* human nobility and genuine freedom" (Young

1990, 109 Emphasis Added). A thorough look at Rousseau's politics will demonstrate that while citizens are expected to participate more, they are not asked to listen or discuss with others.

The original problem Rousseau set out to solve was how to form a governmental association between citizens that did not limit their freedom (Rousseau 1968, 72). The citizen in this agreement was to obey no one but himself, yet he was to merge his opinion with those of all the citizens involved. The answer is for all individuals to give all their rights to everyone and thereby give none of their rights to anyone. "Since each gives himself to all, he gives himself to no one; and since there is no associate over whom he does not gain the same rights as others gain over him, each man recovers the equivalent of everything he loses, and in the bargain he acquires more power to preserve what he has" (Rousseau 1968, 61). This agreement depends upon people intently studying the common interest. Citizens become the creators of the law and thereby retain the ongoing freedom that Rousseau desired. In becoming citizen legislators, they are bound to that which they themselves created, thereby retaining their freedom. The ability to study and create laws through the perception of the common interest was key to this arrangement.

"The constant will of all the members of the state is the general will; it is through it that they are citizens and free" (Rousseau 1968, 153). The distinctive aspect of the general will is how it is formed. It is not the sum of all individual private desires, but the convergence of desires for the public good. Each is to express their version of what is best for the common good and through this process the general will is formed. The point here is that each citizen is to provide his or her individual conception of the common interest and express that in the legislative process. Ascertaining the general will is not a process of



deliberation or negotiation. It is an accumulation of the expressions of individual members and Rousseau seeks to diminish communication before hand. He thus states, "From the deliberations of a people properly informed, and provided its members do not have any communication among themselves, the great number of small differences will always produce a general will and the decision will always be good" (Rousseau 1968, 73). His requirements are that the people be "properly informed" and that the citizens "do not have any communication" in order to properly express the general will. All legitimate political communication is between individuals and the sovereign. The pledge, expression of will, or pact is the political act. Anything else is either private or takes away from the viability of the sovereign.

In sum, political activity in social contract theory and civic republicanism is an act of expression. Political participation is seen as one time consent to an absolute government (Hobbes), ongoing consent to an umpire government (Locke), or continual legislative acts through the formation of a general will (Rousseau). Each of these thinkers and the political traditions that they originated diminishes the role of meaningful exchange between citizens. Opinions of citizens are seen as an impediment to legitimate sovereignty and are therefore only good for the private sphere. This understanding of political activity as expression is the source of exclusion of minority voices. The ideal of impartiality within this framework of politics is an individual characteristic required *in order to* express ones consent or vision of the common interest. If an individual is not seen as sufficiently impartial, they are not included in the public and therefore relegated to private sphere. In this frame, impartiality as an ideal has been used as a tool to exclude.

Understanding politics solely in terms of expression is the second condition upon which the feminist critique depends. If impartiality is properly understood as active perspective taking of situated individuals and politics includes listening as a legitimate practice, impartiality becomes an inclusive ideal. In an effort to recover impartiality as a valuable political ideal in contemporary conditions, I propose a form of democratic listening.

#### **Section IV – Democratic Listening**

Democratic listening is the enactment of impartiality. There is no other way to approximate the ideal without this activity. It is a norm of action, not perception. Yet, the question still remains, what is democratic listening? How does it differ from other types of political activity?

To listen is a communicative activity and thus appropriately fits into the theory of deliberative democracy. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson state that there are four characteristics that are definitive of deliberative democracy 1) democratic decisions must be justified by reason giving, 2) the reasons given “should be accessible to all the citizens to whom they are addressed,” 3) the deliberative process aims at bringing about a mutually binding political decision, 4) political decisions are seen as provisional and are open to future amendment (Gutmann and Thompson 2004, 206). With these four characteristics we can appropriately see the dimensions of democratic listening.

With reason giving, there is reason receiving. This process is inherently two-way and is dead on arrival if there is not a listener that is attentive to the reasons given. This process is similar to Susan Bickford’s description: “in listening I must actively *be with*

others. Listening as an act of concentration means that *for the moment* I make myself the background, the horizon, and the speaker the figure I concentrate on. This action is different from trying to make oneself an absence that does not impose on the other” (Bickford 1996, 23). What Bickford makes clear here is that the listener does not make her own interests disappear when a fellow citizen is talking. Instead, her perspective and the reasons given by the speaker are held in dynamic tension. Yet, in addition to this active listening to others, democratic listening is more than hearing someone well. The democratic listener will incorporate the views of fellow citizens into their own view. Reasons given will be heard not in preparation for a recrimination, but for integration.

The second aspect of deliberative democracy regards making political claims accessible. In order to make the reasons given accessible to all, the democratic listener has the responsibility to speak up when they don't fully understand the implications of a political claim. Many public justifications for a certain policy are abstract in order to encapsulate the interests of a pluralistic public. Yet, this also makes the reasons mystifying. In such a case an impartial listener will ensure that their own viewpoint and those of whom they know are incorporated in the public justifications given. Thus, listening is not only the incorporation of another's view point, but the active attunement and necessary interjections into the public dialogue.

Furthermore, democratic listening is political listening. The deliberative process ultimately leads to a binding decision. Thus, it is accountable listening. It is insufficient for the citizen to hear what has been said and subsequently dismiss oneself from the consequences upon the political community. Whereas democratic listening is inclusive and expansive as it incorporates the viewpoints of fellow citizens, it also digests and selects

with the understanding that a decision will be made. Yet, as far as this process is impartial it is not a process of assimilation, but rather a process of selective integration.

Incorporation of all views of all citizens would be as impractical as it would be unwise. One continues to hold up a critical filter that incorporates inclusive justifications and disregards dogmatic ones.

Lastly, deliberative democracy is an ongoing and open-ended process. There is always a possibility of change in the future. Democratic citizens must adjust and view this dynamic characteristic as inherent in politics. The very nature of listening is also open-ended and dynamic. The process is often risky because “listening opens up the chance that something else will happen – a different outcome” (Bickford 1996, 4). Other political traditions seek to foreclose the risks of provisionality while democracy is necessarily open because listening exposes the political process to change.

In sum, deliberative politics in modern pluralistic societies is much different than those forms political activity provided by the foundational modern political theorists Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Deliberative democracy is notable for its emphasis on reason giving, inclusivity, its decision orientation and its openness to change. All these characteristics necessarily include a component of listening. Democracy as a theory of politics includes listening as an essential political activity. Impartiality is the form of democratic listening described here. It is an active incorporation of the views of others with an understanding that a provisional decision will be made and the responsibility to speak up when legitimate voices are not heard.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to recover impartiality as a worthy political ideal in contemporary pluralistic society. Feminists persuasively argue that the political traditions of social contract theory and civic republicanism have utilized impartiality as an ideal for the exclusion of women and other minority voices. While these arguments have been extremely effective, they are incomplete. The contentions central to the feminist critique of impartiality are based on a misunderstanding of the ideal and a limited view of politics. Impartiality is not a disembodied, distanced, Archimedean viewpoint from nowhere based in cognition, rather it is an attempted view from everywhere. Impartiality is the process whereby one considers and integrates the views of other subjective agents within their own. While Kant and Arendt encourage this process to be done through the imagination, I insist that it must be done through active listening. Impartiality, properly understood, then becomes an inclusive ideal. It is appropriately situated in a democratic polity where reason giving is the primary justification for binding, but provisional decisions. Critiques of social contract theory and civic republicanism are less applicable in modern liberal and social democracies. Democratic governance values both speaking and listening. Impartiality situated as the governing moral ideal of democratic politics puts responsibility on the listener to attend to marginalized voices and incorporate them into the public realm. By reinstating impartiality as a central political ideal, democrats will not only obtain a more inclusive politics, but they will more thoroughly understand and effectively resolve the problems that modern political societies confront.

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