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NEW PERSPECTIVES ON DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

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NOVE PERSPEKTIVE U DELIBERATIVNOJ DEMOKRATIJI

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Integrating Agonism with Deliberation
– Realising the Benefits

Abstract: *In "Agonism as Deliberation" (Knops 2007) I suggest a reconciliation between Mouffe's agonist version of democracy, adjusted to preserve consistency, and deliberation. Here I reply to two subsequent criticisms of this project: Gürsözlü (2009) and Fives (2009). Although both hold agonism and deliberation incompatible impossible, they do so from opposing perspectives. Gürsözlü defends Mouffe's agonism as distinct and coherent on the basis of what he considers a correct understanding of her concept of hegemony. Fives argues Mouffe's approach is separate but incoherent, and should be rejected. Against these two conflicting positions, I seek to demonstrate not only that integration between agonism and democracy is possible, but that it has distinct benefits for both agonism and deliberative theory. Divested of its contradictory assertion that universal rational consensus is impossible in principle, agonism can be interpreted as theory of the moment of difference within a broader deliberative dialectic that seeks to move from more to less partial consensus. Conceived in this way, we can better appreciate how these two approaches can complement one another, in pursuing shared goals, rather than the static and unnecessary opposition offered by the two critics I address here.*

Key words: *democracy, agonism, deliberation, Mouffe, Habermas.*

In "Agonism as Deliberation" (Knops 2007) I argue that Mouffe's agonist theory of democracy implicitly relies on the concept of a universal rational consensus while explicitly denying its possibility. Mouffe's assertion that such consensus is impossible in principle is itself a universal claim, which she uses rational arguments to advance. Her agonist conception of democracy also assumes agreement on ethico-political principles, and the identification of and action against oppression (2007: 115–8). As a result, Mouffe commits a performative contradiction. Because of this her agonism is internally incoherent.

As a way round this dilemma, I suggest the theories of language Mouffe uses to ground her assertion that rational consensus is conceptually impossible are susceptible to an alternative interpretation. That alternative is compatible with the deliberative theory of democracy whose assumptions Mouffe uses them to criticise (2007: 118–25). Appreciating this similarity, I maintain, means that despite Mouffe's denial of the possibility of universal rational consensus, her substantive ambitions in proposing agonism—challenging domination, respecting diversity

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and guarding against premature and partial closure in political agreements—can be maximally retained and animated. Moreover, deliberative theorists can benefit from paying attention to the dangers signalled by agonist insights. Avoiding these problems is integral to deliberation's goal of reaching inclusive rational consensus. In this way agonism and deliberation can be seen as complementary, emphasising different elements of a shared project, rather than irrevocably opposed (2007: 125).

Two articles have since taken direct issue with this attempt to integrate Mouffe's agonism with deliberation (Gürsözlü 2009; Fives 2009). Both argue I fail to recognise the gulf between agonism and deliberation, simplifying their connection. Gürsözlü contends I misunderstand Mouffe's characterisation of her agonism as another hegemonic project. Within that project, she is entitled to talk of shared, or fixed, values or principles (Gürsözlü 2009: 359). Moreover, hegemonies arise from a political terrain characterised by power and conflict. Not only are attempts at consensus contextualised, they are also contingent and subject to challenge. This justifies Mouffe's emphasis on contestatory tactics in defence of agonist democracy, which stress conflict, defining subject-positions, allegiance to identity, persuasion and the passions. These contrast starkly, Gürsözlü contends, with a deliberative emphasis on reasoned argument aimed at neutral consensus (Gürsözlü 2009: 360–1). For Gürsözlü, a correct understanding of hegemony both justifies Mouffe's agonism as coherent, and demonstrates its distinctiveness from a deliberative approach. Any attempt to recruit it to that approach represents an attempt at hegemonic colonisation by deliberation (Gürsözlü 2009: 366–7).

Similar to Gürsözlü, Fives views Mouffe's agonism as both contextual and contestatory (Fives 2009: 975). However, unlike Gürsözlü, for Fives this does not mean her theory is coherent. The opposite: Mouffe's argument that a neutral, universal consensus reached by rational means is in principle impossible places her in performative contradiction. Her agonism is inconsistent (Fives 2009: 968). Moreover, the contextualism of her theory means it is also relativist—lacking a context-independent standard of judgement, and immoralist—it has no way of judging between 'good' and 'bad' political positions (Fives 2009: 968–70). Fives implies that this, combined with the contestatory tactics advocated by Mouffe, sets her agonism apart from deliberation. Thus any attempt to combine the two positions must ultimately favour one or the other (Fives 2009: 973–4). Fives clearly advocates universalist deliberative liberal democracy over agonism. However, due to the liberal commitment to moral neutrality, he argues that his preferred stance cannot defend itself against agonism. It must be supplemented by a perfectionist ethic in support of the deliberative virtues—the practises that deliberative theory holds are necessary for rational exchange (Fives 2009: 974–8).

Thus, although Gürsözlü and Fives both oppose integration on the grounds that agonism and deliberation are distinct due to agonism's contextualism, contingency

and contestation, they do so for opposite purposes and arrive at opposite conclusions. Gürsözlü uses it to vindicate a separate consistent agonism. Fives uses it to argue for a liberal deliberative version of democracy over an agonism he holds inconsistent, and to suggest that to do this deliberative values and practices require a universalist, perfectionist grounding. Here I explain why I think they are both wrong to argue that agonist insights cannot be integrated with deliberation in a combined as I proposed in 'Agonism as Deliberation'. This also gives me the opportunity to clarify the relationship between Mouffe's thinking and deliberative democracy that I espouse, and the benefits it has to offer.

My explanation proceeds in two phases. As a preliminary it is necessary to deal with the question of contradiction (section 3). The inconsistency of the agonist claim that universal rational consensus is impossible in principle both motivates my attempt to preserve agonist insights and opens the possibility of doing so within a deliberative frame. More positively, the principle that contradiction must be avoided provides an ethically neutral basis on which to defend deliberative principles. This renders Fives's perfectionist virtue ethics unnecessary. So a treatment of contradiction is an indispensable prelude to considering the possibility of integrating agonism and deliberation and why such a step might be useful.

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In the second phase of my reply I address these two further issues. I attempt to show how integration of agonism as a theory of the moment of difference within a broader deliberative dialectic is both possible and effective in preserving the substance of agonist goals at the same time as constructively promoting deliberation. I first outline my argument in 'Agonism as Deliberation' that the theories of language underpinning agonism and deliberation are compatible. This forms the basis of my combined model whose main features I briefly recap (section 4). I then show how, within that framework, the agonist concepts of hegemony and contextual consensus, contingency and contestation can all be recognised—indeed defined more clearly and animated—while avoiding the negative consequences of contradiction, relativity and immoralism warned against by Fives. In fact I go further to demonstrate that these insights have an important contribution to make to the realisation of goals which agonism shares with deliberation (section 5). Before any of this, however, I first need to outline the views of my critics in more detail: Gürsözlü in section 1 and Fives in section 2.

1. Gürsözlü—*Recognizing the Difference*

Essentially Gürsözlü accuses me of failing to understand Mouffe's characterisation of the political as thoroughly hegemonic. In 'Agonism as Deliberation' I charge Mouffe with presuming a consensus on the values of pluralist democracy, which would itself be hegemonic, in her attempt to defend those values (Knops 2007: 116–7). Gürsözlü claims that to criticise Mouffe for being hegemonic in this

way is 'missing the core element' of her approach. Properly understood, it is not flaw in Mouffe's argument that her version of democracy takes the form of a hegemonic consensus: 'for Mouffe, what consensus around liberal democratic values means is the *constitution* of a hegemony, not the elimination of it' (Gürsözlü 2009: 358–9, original emphasis).

Gürsözlü elaborates that Mouffe's account of hegemony is grounded in her description of politics as ineradicably constituted by power relations. This draws in turn on her earlier work on hegemony with Laclau (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). Any attempt at consensus is 'political and based on some form of exclusion' in that it must always rule out other forms of action than those agreed upon, and the groups whose interests such action would promote (Mouffe 2000: 100 in Gürsözlü 2009: 358). Because any consensus relies on this relation of exclusion, it remains partial and contingent, always open to pressure from its excluded 'exterior'. Hegemony, for Mouffe, arises when we fail to recognise the partiality and contingency of a particular consensus, and instead construe it as universal and, since this rules out any alternative, objective (Gürsözlü 2009: 358). Gürsözlü quotes Laclau and Mouffe's original formulation of hegemony as a situation 'where a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it' (1985: xii in Gürsözlü 2009: 359 note 15).

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Given this account of political relations, Gürsözlü contends Mouffe's vision of democracy is not, as he suggests deliberative theories would have it, to agree principles of association that eliminate power and division. Rather it is to 'constitute forms of power more compatible with democratic values' (Mouffe 2005: 22 in Gürsözlü 2009: 359). Such 'forms of power' will be as hegemonic as any other. So it is necessary to distinguish between democratic outsiders and insiders: 'them' and 'us'. External democratic enemies 'challenge the very existence of the institutions of the democratic political association' (Gürsözlü 2009: 359). Internal democratic 'adversaries,' on the other hand, may hold different and sometimes conflicting beliefs, but these are not fundamentally threatening to democracy itself. They should therefore be tolerated, respected and free to contest their competing versions of the democratic project (Gürsözlü 2009: 359–60). From this perspective, the task of democracy is to take antagonistic political relations, which require enemies to be destroyed, and 'domesticate' them into adversarial relations where differences in belief are recognised (Gürsözlü 2009: 359–60). If the contextualised nature of hegemonic knowledge is properly understood, Gürsözlü claims, then Mouffe can consistently sustain the value consensus that these distinctions imply within her agonistic discourse constituted as another hegemony, despite asserting a universal consensus on values is in principle impossible.

Mouffe's thoroughly hegemonic account of the political not only legitimises a contextual consensus within agonism. It also explains the particular contestatory

tactics by which agonist politics should be conducted. 'Conflict and confrontation' is to be welcomed in a democracy, albeit within agonist bounds. It is a sign of democracy's vitality, not its weakness in failing to reach a deliberative consensus (Gürsözlü 2009: 361). In promoting agonist democracy over other systems, Mouffe allocates a leading role to the passions, in contrast to deliberation's emphasis on reasons. Although Gürsözlü admits Mouffe acknowledges some role for 'providing... reasons' in promoting democracy, she centrally advocates 'mobilising the passions'. Gürsözlü claims this goes beyond argument, to 'creating subject positions, and power relations that are compatible with liberal democracy' thereby encouraging identification with that project through 'persuasion' as opposed to rational argument (Gürsözlü 2009: 360–1).

Gürsözlü, then, argues I fail to grasp 'how Mouffe understands consensus and hegemony' (Gürsözlü 2009: 360). Correctly understood, there is no contradiction between her advocacy of agonistic democracy and her hegemonic characterisation of politics, as Mouffe construes agonism as another hegemonic form. Hegemony's contextualism allows her to talk of values, standards and distinctions within that agonist form. Furthermore, it justifies contestatory tactics, both within agonism and as a method of defending it, due to the contingent nature of any hegemony and the impossibility of a universal, objective consensus on rational grounds. Not only does this interpretation of hegemony justify Mouffe's agonism as a coherent project, according to Gürsözlü. It also distinguishes it from the deliberative endeavour. My attempt to reconcile the two, he claims, is simply an example of an attempt at hegemonic domination by deliberation. The most that can be achieved is a mutual recognition of the competing claims that each approach makes, recognising them as two distinct hegemonic positions, competing with each other in a 'vibrant, constructive, agonism' (Gürsözlü 2009: 367).

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2. Fives—the good (deliberative) democrat

Fives accepts the characterisation of Mouffe's agonism as contextualist and contestatory (Fives 2009: 975). He also thinks it is impossible to combine agonist and deliberative theories of democracy (Fives 2009: 968, 972). In these respects his views coincide with those of Gürsözlü. However, unlike Gürsözlü he believes that agonism is inconsistent and flawed (Fives 2009: 968–70). He thus sets up an opposition between agonism and deliberation similar to Gürsözlü's, but favours the opposite side—deliberation over agonism.

Fives's criticisms of agonism are that it is contradictory, and that its contextualism gives rise to an undesirable relativism and immoralism (Fives 2009: 967–70). He identifies a contradiction in Mouffe's agonism between what she asserts—the contextualism and contestability of all political positions—and what her assertion assumes: 'that this position should be accepted universally on rational

grounds; and that her agonistic pluralism is normatively preferable to consensus-based liberalism' (Fives 2009: 968). In addition, he argues, Mouffe's eschewal of context-independent standards—her contextualism—means her agonism is relativist, ultimately lacking fixed meanings or standards. It is also 'immoralist' in that it is incapable of distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' political systems. This he contrasts to the universal principles of rationality and mutuality that he sees as underpinning a deliberative construction of liberal democracy (Fives 2009: 968–70). Fives also juxtaposes the political strategies agonism and deliberation respectively sanction. Agonism, he argues, promotes 'contestability' and conflict, as opposed to the deliberative virtues of 'reasonableness' (Fives 2009: p. 976). For these reasons, Fives sees Mouffe's agonism as distinct from a deliberative interpretation of liberal democracy. Consequently he argues I am wrong to suggest it is possible to integrate insights from these two perspectives, despite acknowledging I recognise the contradictions that agonism implies (Fives 2009: 968). Instead, he attempts to show any such endeavour must ultimately come down in favour of one or position or the other (Fives 2009: 973–974).

In this struggle Fives is clear that he favours the deliberative over the agonist version of democracy. However, despite the weaknesses he identifies in the agonist position—self-contradiction, relativity and immoralism—he feels deliberation is insufficiently equipped to defend itself by characterising agonism as an unacceptable conception of the good. Since deliberation accepts the liberal principle of moral neutrality between different universal world-views, it is powerless to condemn one or promote another on moral grounds (Fives 2009: 975–976). For this reason, Fives argues, it is necessary to supplement a deliberative perspective with a perfectionist ethics, which he uses to buttress the deliberative practices and values, or 'virtues' as he construes them (Fives 2009: 975). He does, however, recognise the danger that this strategy may itself be accused of the very relativism that he attributes to agonism, and the need for his chosen approach to retain respect for liberal human rights (Fives 2009: 975).

So both Gürsözlü and Fives conclude that I am wrong to attempt an integration of agonist principles into a deliberative framework on account of agonism's contextualism and contestatory nature. Gürsözlü because he believes agonism is consistent and that such an attempt would amount to hegemonic domination by deliberation. Fives because he believes agonism is contradictory, relativist, immoralist and that its contestatory precepts are opposed to the deliberative 'virtues' which require the protection of a perfectionist ethics. I will now take issue with both positions, to show that not only is it possible to integrate elements of agonism and deliberation, but that such a model has much to offer each perspective. Before doing this, however, I have to make clear that the agonism that I integrate is one that has been divested of its central contradiction. In this sense, Gürsözlü is correct to state that my proposal for combining the two positions is based on a

'reinterpretation' of agonism (Gürsözlü 2009: 356). Indeed, the desire to avoid this inconsistency while salvaging agonism's substantive insights was what motivated my endeavour in 'Agonism as Deliberation' (Knops 2007: 118). But this step is not optional, as Gürsözlü seems to imply. A theory of agonism that retains this contradiction is incoherent. Any consistent interpretation of Mouffe's agonism must be re-interpreted in this way. The avoidance of contradiction can also serve as the basis for an ethically neutral defence of deliberative principles. This is necessary if Fives's alternative of a perfectionist virtue ethics, which would place deliberative practices in direct conflict with agonistic insights, is to be ruled out. So I first examine this question of contradiction, to clarify the modifications that must be effected to agonism, and to allow deliberation to stand without recourse to Fives's exclusive perfectionism. With the ground thus cleared, I can then consider both the form I suggest an integration between agonism and deliberation should take, and the benefits it can bring.

3. Contradiction

Firstly, I want to consider the performative contradiction at the heart of Mouffe's claim that a universal rational consensus is impossible even in principle. Despite Gürsözlü's criticisms, it seems the first point I made in respect of this in my original article still stands. The claim that all political consensus is necessarily hegemonic, and the arguments that Mouffe offers to back it up, represents a universal assertion, presented for agreement by all, motivated by reasons. As such the act of assertion contradicts what is being asserted: a performative contradiction (Knops 2007: 115–6). Fives recognises this point (Fives 2009: 968). Unfortunately, Gürsözlü does not engage with it. Instead, he takes my secondary argument, that Mouffe's version of agonism itself implies a rational consensus on ethico-political principals, in isolation from this earlier point (Gürsözlü 2009: 358). Gürsözlü does this in an attempt to show that the proper understanding of hegemony, outlined above, allows Mouffe to talk of agonist consensus while maintaining that ultimately universal consensus is in principle impossible. Yet even on these terms it is not possible to sustain the idea that a universal rational consensus must be ruled out in principle.

As we have seen, Gürsözlü's objection is primarily that I fail to fully grasp Mouffe's notion of hegemony. He draws on her earlier work on this concept with Laclau to develop a better understanding of her position. His contention that Mouffe may invoke a degree of consensus within a particular hegemonic form—in this case her agonism—would seem to receive support from this source. Although arguing that the political is ultimately contingent, Laclau and Mouffe define 'hegemonic formations' as comprising 'systems of differences which partially define relational identities' (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 142). A 'hegemonic formation' is a discourse that has been constructed antagonistically, in opposition to other discourses,

which form its 'exterior' (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 135–6). Exterior discourses might contest a hegemonic formation's 'relational identities' in an attempt to destabilise them. But internally a hegemonic formation—indeed any discourse according to Laclau and Mouffe—is capable of constructing 'nodal points which partially fix meaning' by articulating their relation (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 112–3).

However, although Gürsözlü's point that Mouffe is entitled to speak of consensus on principles relative to her agonist, hegemonic, framework receives support from these sources, a conflict remains with the broader assertion that universal consensus is in principle impossible. For if Laclau and Mouffe admit the possibility of partial objectivity and agreement surely they must accept the possibility that some agreements will be more or less partial? And if they accept that some agreements will be less partial, must they not acknowledge at minimum the possibility of a least partial agreement—in other words a universal consensus that encompasses the interests of all? Such an agreement may be very difficult to achieve in practice. But it would seem that the same arguments that permit Mouffe to avail herself of the notion of a partial consensus, within a hegemonic form, necessarily imply that a full universal consensus is at least a conceptual possibility.

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So, even when we consider Gürsözlü's arguments on their own merits, they are unable to sustain Mouffe's claim that universal consensus is in principle impossible to conceive. This is important, since that claim is what sets agonism and deliberation at odds. Mouffe's denial of the possibility even in principle of a rational, neutral consensus deprives deliberation of its rationale. The whole purpose of deliberative activity becomes difficult to justify. While practical examples may fall short of this ideal, retaining it as an ideal provides a standard against which actual instances can be evaluated, and the extent to which they fall short gauged. Once admitted we have not only an ideal at which deliberation can aim, but a standard for assessing progress towards that ideal and distinguishing more from less partial consensus in practise.

Of course, it might be objected that in restoring this deliberative tenet we deprive agonism of a core principle instead. Does this not similarly undermine the agonist project? Denial of the possibility in principle of a universal, neutral consensus arrived at by rational means is certainly a central article in Mouffe's account of agonism and the underlying hegemonic concept of the political she developed with Laclau. At the same time, we have shown there is no option but to reject this assertion. Failure to do so commits a performative contradiction, rendering her theory incoherent. Yet despite the prominence of the belief in the impossibility of universal consensus for Mouffe, the substance of agonism—its aims, but also its concepts and methods—far from being compromised by its rejection, can be preserved and indeed enhanced. Divesting agonism of the insistence that it is impossible in principle to conceive of universal, neutral consensus opens the way to an

integration of agonism and deliberation within a dialectic that encompasses both. Through that integration we can appreciate the essential dimensions which both positions share, and how their promotion can be enhanced by combining insights from each. These dimensions include recognition, respect and contestation of difference grounded in context and subjectivity, acting against domination, and the avoidance of premature closure in political agreement that marginalises. Before moving to a consideration of integration, however, we need first to address a final obstacle to that relationship: Fives's concerns about the limitations of a deliberative perspective.

Even if we can retain the concept of a universal rational consensus as the *telos* of deliberation, Fives argues that deliberative democratic principles are themselves insufficient for defending the values and practices by which such a project should be pursued. Drawing on Gutmann and Thompson, Rawls and MacIntyre, Fives identifies these 'virtues' of reasonable debate—such as openness to questioning, free exchange and mutuality—as comprising the process of rational interchange (Fives 2009: 963, 76 & 8; Gutmann and Thompson 1996: 52–3; Rawls 2001: 432; MacIntyre 1999: 161). He argues they cannot be defended against agonist alternatives because deliberation adheres to the liberal principle of ethical neutrality. Deliberation's advocates cannot therefore distinguish between different worldviews—in this case agonism and deliberation—promoting one as good, and the other as bad. Consequently, advocates of deliberation cannot recommend that the deliberative goal of consensus is pursued by these rational means as opposed to, for example, the more conflictual or contestatory measures advanced by agonism (Fives 2009: 976).

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There are two ways in which this argument of Fives is mistaken. Firstly, it is possible to positively defend deliberative principles while remaining ethically neutral. The need for any theory to avoid performative contradiction guarantees these principles. For they comprise—at least in Habermas's version of deliberation that I defend—what must be presupposed in any attempt at communication if such contradiction is to be avoided (Habermas 1990: 88–90). So, for example, the principle that participants must be free to make any assertion they wish cannot be challenged without exercising a freedom to make assertions. And the principle that participants must be free to question any assertion cannot be questioned without exercising the freedom to question. Such a deduction is rational, and so ethically neutral—it is indeed possible to defend deliberative principles on an ethically neutral basis. It is therefore unnecessary to rely on perfectionist ethics in defence of deliberative 'virtues' as Fives proposes. At the same time, this does not mean that deliberation is guilty of 'immoralism'—an inability to decide between different moral positions. Moral standards can be arrived at through the deliberative process, grounded in the rational presuppositions of deliberation. Although

that process does not directly prescribe substantive ethical positions, it does provide a means for identifying and legitimising them (Habermas 1990: 86).

The second sense in which Fives is mistaken is in opposing agonist to deliberative practices. As we have seen, what lies behind such an opposition is Mouffe's insistence on the impossibility in principle of universal rational consensus. However, we have shown, and Fives accepts, that this implies a performative contradiction. As such the claim cannot stand. Again it is rejected on rational, ethically neutral, grounds. Once this has been conceded, the way lies open to integrate the agonist and deliberative projects in a way that recognises their shared substantive elements and goals (elements and goals which, incidentally, Fives himself acknowledges may be held in common (Fives 2009: 966)). To the extent that this is achieved, we can appreciate that agonist insights and practices contribute to, rather than oppose and undermine, deliberative goals. Of course, Fives considers that obstacles remain to such an integration—specifically the relativism and immoralism arising from agonism's contextualism and its contestatory strategies (Fives 2009: 968–970). The integration I propose also allows us to appreciate how these difficulties may be resolved. So it is to a consideration of how we might combine deliberation with an agonism divested of its central performative contradiction—that is an agonism that admits, at least in principle, the possibility of a neutral, universal, rational consensus—that I shall now turn.

4. Integration—the model

My ultimate aim is to demonstrate the benefits to an agonism—minimally modified as proposed—and deliberation of an integration of the two approaches. But it is first necessary to outline what such an integration would look like. Otherwise it is difficult to comprehend how these benefits might be delivered. The integrated model I advance is grounded in the similarities between the theories of language that Mouffe deploys in support of her agonist proposals and those that underpin deliberative principles. Although both Gürsözlü and Fives acknowledge my method here, neither engages with my analysis of these elements, despite rejecting my endeavour (Gürsözlü 2009: 361–2; Fives 2009: 973). It would therefore seem all the more important to re-state the key elements of that integration here.

The conception of language on which Mouffe bases her agonism is primarily grounded in observations drawn from the later Wittgenstein (Mouffe 2000: 70–1), and the post-structuralist theories of Derrida (Mouffe 2000: 12, 21, 99–100) and Lacan (Mouffe 2000: 137–8). Although she uses these to construct a position that she opposes to deliberation, I argue that these perspectives are susceptible of an alternative interpretation, which permits the two accounts to be reconciled. I commence by drawing parallels between Wittgenstein's observations and Habermas's discursive model of deliberation. I then extend these to the aspects of Derrida and Lacan's thought that Mouffe deploys (Knops 2007: 118–125).

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Wittgenstein's[1] later theory has language originating from shared 'forms of life'—our everyday practices and activities (Wittgenstein 1968: paras 19 & 23; Cavell 1969: 52). I equate this with 'normal communication' which predominates in Habermas's shared 'lifeworld' (Knops 2007: 122). Wittgenstein accepts that reason allows those familiar with one form of life and its attendant language to understand those of another (Wittgenstein 1968: para. 87). In its simplest and most general form this process involves a person *A* acting on another person *B* to produce a response from *B* that *A* has predicted. *A* determines what act is most likely to bring about this response according to the understanding they have developed through their particular 'form of life'. Where *B*'s reaction is as *A* forecast, this confirms *A*'s assumption that they understand *B*. Where it is not, this still provides *A* with information about how *B* differs in their view of the world or 'form of life'. On the basis of this it is possible for *A* to reformulate their view of *B*. With this modification, derived from their shared interaction, *A* can try a new action which will either be successful or require further iterations of refinement. Through repeated interactions, understanding can be developed to the extent that *B*'s reactions are as *A* predicts. Although this process has been related in the most general terms of actions and responses, it covers the more specific form of language-learning, where the actions and responses are utterances (Knops 2007: 119).

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I argue that this form of exchange, which Wittgenstein terms 'explanation' (Wittgenstein 1968: para. 87; Tully 1989: 180), mirrors Habermas's account of deliberation (Knops 2007: 121–2). In Habermas's view, the process starts when person *A* makes a validity claim—to truth, moral rightness or authenticity. Such a claim can be seen as an utterance that expresses *A*'s understanding of the world, derived from *A*'s 'form of life'. If this claim is rejected by *B*, then *A* must advance reasons for that claim that will convince *B* to accept it. In the paradigm case, rejection is signalled by *B* uttering a 'no' (Habermas 1990: 67). However, we can extend this to cover any utterance or reaction from *B* that *A* did not predict the claim would elicit. From this perspective this is simply another case of a response from *B* that *A*'s assumptions about *B*, based on *A*'s 'form of life', did not allow *A* to predict. And the reasons that *A* might advance constitute further claims or utterances expressing *A*'s understanding of *B* based on *A*'s 'form of life'. Only now that knowledge includes *A*'s experience of acting on *B* and the unanticipated reaction which it provoked. So reasons are simply further utterances which *A* thinks will produce the desired response—agreement to their original claim—from *B*. Of course, *B* might produce counter-arguments of their own, which could lead *A* to modify their claim. The process of interaction and the aim of mutual prediction—or agreement—remains the same however (Knops 2007: 122).

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1 Mouffe's characterisation of Wittgenstein's later thought is based in particular on Pitkin (1993) and Tully (1989; 1995). To do justice to her, I focus on their interpretation.

Having established the identity of Wittgenstein's process of 'explanation' with Habermas's model of deliberation, I demonstrate that the same formula can account for objections to the possibility of consensus that Mouffe raises by reference to the post-structuralist theories of Derrida—*difference,* the constitutive other and undecidability—and Lacan—the 'master signifier' (Knops 2007: 123–5). As the principles are similar, I will not reproduce that reasoning here. Taken together, the effect of my arguments is to clear the way for the integration of agonistic and deliberative insights.

Instead of different discourses confronting each other we can now see that it is possible to develop a less partial model that incorporates both positions. In this model, agonism represents a theory of the moment of difference or contest within a wider deliberative dialectic. The second moment, which deliberative theory focuses on, is that of bridging the recognised difference through recognising and developing underlying shared dimensions of experience, values and language which allow different 'forms of life' to mutually understand one another within a common frame that relates them. This common frame can then be used as the basis for co-ordinating action, in a way that respects these different, partial, constituent forms of life. In this way, the dialectic is given a constructive dynamic that moves from more to less partial rational consensus. Far from doing violence to the initial component aspirations of agonism and deliberation, such a move leads to a clearer appreciation of their relative potential. I will now examine the benefits such an integration has to offer both agonism and deliberation, in answering Gürsözlü and Fives's remaining objections to this course.

5. Integration—the benefits

In general terms, the advantages of an integrated model are that if we avoid the performative contradiction implicit in the agonist claim that a rational, universal consensus is in principle impossible, it provides a way of sustaining and animating the substance of agonist aspirations. By relegating the assertion that rational, universal consensus is impossible in principle to an assumption about any actual attempt at such consensus, we restore internal consistency to agonism. This move also opens the possibility of combining insights from agonism with those from deliberation as part of a shared dialectic that aims to move from more to less partial agreements. Reconceived as a theory of the moment of difference within this broader dialectic, agonist principles can be preserved and indeed sharpened. Notwithstanding both Gürsözlü and Fives's arguments to the contrary, this benefits both agonism and deliberation. Below I present some of the main types of insight this enables in more specific detail, and the advantages they offer.

First, the agonist clam that a consensus is hegemonic. As we have seen, coherence requires this is trimmed from an absolute claim about the possibility in principle

of consensus, to an assumption—that can be rationally disproved—about any actual consensus. However, this alteration presents a problem. A universal premiss that all consensus is hegemonic would have absolved us from the need to show that a particular example of consensus is hegemonic. Since this premiss is ruled out we must now distinguish whether a particular attempt at consensus is hegemonic or not. Recall the definition of hegemony by Laclau and Mouffe as a 'particularity' that 'assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it' (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: xii). Hegemony comprises a partial consensus which has been over-extended. So a method for identifying hegemonies must offer a way of gauging the partiality of a consensus that is otherwise assumed to be inclusive.

The process of explanation, or understanding, embodied in my integrated model, allows us to do just this. Encounters with other 'forms of life', resulting in failure to predict responses of those engaged in those forms, demonstrate the limits of our existing knowledge. In fact, Laclau and Mouffe acknowledge this role for difference. However, their treatment does not go beyond opposing current understanding to new experience and their potential mutual subversion (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 110 n. 20 & 127–9). In terms of my model, they confine themselves to failure to predict. In order to describe how, or in what way, our existing knowledge is partial, which we must if we are to gauge whether it is over-extended, we have to go further. It is necessary to *relate* that knowledge to its limiting other. Only by asking in what way they differ can we start to develop the framework within which to locate one 'form of life' in respect of the other.

This involves the additional step of reflecting on the reaction that we failed to predict, and asking ourselves how it differed from that which we expected. In doing this, we locate the partiality of both our understanding, based on our 'form of life,' in respect of our interlocutor's—we relate them. On the basis of this expanded understanding, we can also proceed to further interaction, in the hope that our subsequent actions meet with a predicted response. Insofar as this is achieved, we can be confident that our conception of the relation between our two forms of life is shared. To be assured of that relation, and our description of the relative partiality of our respective positions, we therefore need to develop a shared understanding which provides a more comprehensive framework spanning both, within which they can mutually oriented. So to describe their partiality in this way, we must already develop an expanded understanding that builds on them, and bridges the gap between them which it also defines. In locating partiality we build a framework that is less partial.

It is this relational dimension which Laclau and Mouffe fail to recognise. Yet without it, particular discourses remain simply different. There is no way to describe their appropriate scope. And so there is no way to evaluate whether a particular

discourse has over-reached itself. In short, there is no way to tell whether a particular discourse, or consensus, is hegemonic or not. It turns out then that the key agonist concept of hegemony requires a deliberative interpretation for its full realisation. Moreover, that process of realisation—the location of instances of hegemony through a description of the partiality of discourses—is quite simply identical with the central deliberative process of developing less partial understandings, or consensus, from encounters between more partial understandings. When interpreted within a dialectical framework, there is a coincidence between the process for identification of hegemony and rational consensus building.

Not only is there a coincidence between these processes. We can also see how such an interpretation helps resolve deliberative suspicions about agonist relativism. Fives objects to the agonist assumption, underpinning the notion of hegemony, that all knowledge is contextual. He argues this consigns agonism to subjectivity and relativism, despite Mouffe's disavowals (Fives 2009: 968–70). However, if we interpret agonism within the deliberative dialectic of developing less partial from more partial understanding, it is possible to retain the agonist insistence that all knowledge arises from 'forms of life', while at the same time recognising that it is possible to develop more or less inclusive, more or less explanatory, more or less partial knowledge from those contextual foundations. The result remains grounded in experience, but is capable of covering more experience than the component understandings from which it has been derived. Hence Fives's concerns about the relativist nature of agonism, versus the universalist pretensions of deliberation, are resolved. Subjectivity ceases to be grounds for opposing agonism to deliberation, and becomes instead an important shared component in their fusion, permitting a much more sophisticated understanding of the potential of political exchange.

A similar approach can be adopted to the agonist notion of contestation. Again, Gürsözlü is worried this will be 'subsumed' under a deliberative emphasis on consensus leading to premature closure on supposedly 'neutral' agreements that actually exclude and marginalise (Gürsözlü 2009: 365–6). In his turn Fives is worried an agonist emphasis on conflict and the passions is hostile to deliberative reason (Fives 2009: 976). We have seen Mouffe claims contestation characterises all politics. Although 'domesticated' within agonistic limits of respect, it should still be counted a healthy feature of democracy (above: 3–4). But taken as emphasising the element of divergence or difference in a deliberative dialectic, we can appreciate how this agonist concern with conflict aims to distinguish differences. And this aim of distinguishing differences is central to the deliberative goal of promoting maximally inclusive consensus. For deliberation does not aim for consensus *tout court.* Rather, it aims for a consensus that represents the settled, reasoned agreement of as many as possible, and that embodies their interests to the greatest extent. For this reason deliberation shares with agonism the goal of giving maximum voice to different positions (e.g. Knops 2006).

Not only does deliberation share this aim. It also has a parallel mechanism for promoting contestation that sits at the heart of the deliberative process: free questioning. The ability to question any assertion without hindrance is arguably deliberation's most singular feature (Habermas 1990: 89). And questioning just is the contesting of differences, since it embodies the process of juxtaposing difference to an assumed consensus. A question challenges an assertion, since it is an unpredicted response. That unpredicted response arises on the basis of a difference—in lifeworld assumptions, or forms of life—and the understandings derived from them. Seen from this position, deliberation and the method of rational debate is at its core a method for maximally seeking out and giving voice to divergent positions and their contestation. By contrast, without deliberation, such differences can be passed over or never engage with each other. The deliberative imperative to develop rational consensus ensures that these positions are fully exposed and contested. Because it mobilises the most stringent standard of inclusion—a universal rational consensus—it is fully sensitised to exclusion. Anything falling short of this ideal standard is seen as exclusion. Moreover, identification of exclusion carries with it the imperative to remedy such marginalistion by engaging with it through challenging the status quo—contestation. Within a deliberative vision, therefore, this aspect of agonism receives its strongest expression. Without that framework, the danger is that such differences go unrecognised or if recognised they are simply tolerated. So integrating agonism within deliberation both sharpens our sense of the importance of difference and contestation, albeit within agonistic bounds of respect, and through this improves the inclusiveness of any consensus that results. Again, both Gürsözlü and Fives can be assuaged.

A third significant feature of agonism is contingency. Mouffe claims all political positions are fragile and open to challenge. Failure to recognise this risks oppressing perspectives that a position excludes (above: 3). Contingency's counterpart in deliberation is fallibility. Fallibility, in turn, is fundamental to a deliberative concept of rationality. The definition of a rational assertion is precisely that it is contingent and open to challenge (Habermas 1998: 140; 1987: 73). Once the equivalence between agonist contingency and deliberative fallibility is appreciated, we can again see that deliberation acknowledges that all positions, or political agreements, are open to challenge. Indeed, in founding deliberation on logical grounds of the avoidance of performative contradiction, even its most basic elements are opened to potential challenge. That this recognition is a foundational precept of rationality ensures that this tenet of agonism is safeguarded by a deliberative framework. It also highlights the importance for deliberation of paying heed to agonist injunctions to avoid premature closure. As agonists make clear, the possible consequences of such a mistake are that biased and exclusionary agreements appear to be settled in the interests of all. This hegemonic illusion of neutrality makes such domination more difficult to challenge.

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The last point also helps us understand how even an agonist emphasis on the passions might be understood from a deliberative perspective. In aiming for a more inclusive consensus, deliberation recognises exclusion and marginalisation. Disrespect, oppression and domination may be deeply embedded and have existed for some time, with damaging consequences. Divisions may also have had the effect of distancing 'forms of life' so that it requires considerable effort for one to express itself in the terms of another. Indeed, due to the hostility thus engendered, and the association of the dominant form with oppression, there may be considerable reluctance to do so. Moreover, adherents of the dominant form may see challenge as unsettling and threatening to their settled 'worldview', and so be reluctant or positively resistant to embrace its development to embrace alternatives, which they may perceive as threatening. All this can mean that challenge and difference is first articulated in ways that draw more on extreme emotions—the passions, devoted to expressing identities or subject positions rather than relating them. While deliberative theory has never ruled these elements out, it should pay more attention to them as marking particular stages within the deliberative dialectic. As elements in the expression of difference, understanding them can play an important role in developing more inclusive consensus.

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The final concern I wish to address is Fives's worry about agonism's 'immoralism' (above: 4–5). Again, he sees this as a barrier to any integration with deliberation. We have already seen how Fives considers that deliberation itself could be susceptible to an inability to distinguish 'good' from 'bad' propositions. However, by recognising that deliberative practices and values are grounded in the rational premiss that any attempt at communication must avoid logical contradiction, we secure these foundations without surrendering ethical neutrality (above: 7). Once the process of rational debate has been secured, that process provides the basis for generating legitimate moral judgements. Since the integrated model proposed here integrates agonism into that process, as theorising the moment of difference within it, then it is secured from immoralism by the same route. Although agonism concentrates on identifying, respecting and contesting difference, it does so as part of a dialectical deliberative process the outcomes of which embody legitimate moral values and judgements. In this way an integrated agonism is shielded against the Fives's charge of 'immoralism'. Indeed, to the extent that legitimate moral judgements are the product of an inclusive consensus, they emphasise an indispensable element of the process of distinguishing good from bad.

6. Conclusion

At the end of his criticism of my attempt to integrate agonism and deliberation Gürsözlü portrays it as an attempt at 'hegemonic absorption' by deliberation of agonism. Such an attempt, he argues, fails to respect important features of agonism—notably the fundamentally hegemonic nature of the political and the

contextualism, contingency and contestation that flows from that—which make it incompatible with deliberation. Recognition and respect for such differences would lead instead to a 'vibrant, constructive agonism' where both sides 'recognize each other as equals struggling against each other.' (Gürsözlü 2009: 357).

In this article I have attempted to clarify my position. To begin with, Gürsözlü is correct that my argument re-interprets agonism in an important way. I never suggested otherwise. 'Agonism as Deliberation' is explicit that agonism must surrender its claim that universal rational consensus is impossible in principle if it is to remain consistent (Knops 2007: 118). Despite Gürsözlü's attempts to argue the contrary, the sacrifice of this principle is necessary (above: 5–6). Failure to do so by a distinct agonism that hence remains opposed to deliberation would simply mean agonism remains incoherent, and so loses that confrontation. Fives has recognises that Mouffe's denial of universal rational consensus in principle is fundamentally flawed (Fives 2009: 968). His response when faced with this inconsistency in an agonism he believes is antithetical to deliberation illustrates the problem with Gürsözlü's pursuit of separatism. By continuing to oppose agonism to deliberation, the insights of the former—such as the subjective basis of knowledge, the importance of identifying and contesting difference, and the contingency and fallibility of any actual agreement—run the risk of rejection or marginalisation within the vision of the latter. This is clearly illustrated by Fives aggressively perfectionist model of the universal virtues of deliberation. With its hostility to subjectivity and contestation it distorts the roles these can play in deliberatively developing less partial knowledge that respects and builds upon constituent 'forms of life', all of which are derived from contextualised individual experience (Fives 2009: 968–70; 974–79). While Gürsözlü's approach respects difference to the letter this shows that it does not provide a particularly 'constructive' or, indeed, 'agonistically vibrant' outcome.

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I have presented a case for a more positive alternative, building on the space that rejection of agonism's denial of universal rational consensus in principle opens for a reconciliation with deliberation. Having demonstrated how such an approach can be independently justified without recourse to Five's perfectionist virtue ethics, I then explain how it can sustain and indeed sharpen and revitalise central agonist concepts such as hegemony and its associated notions of contextualism, contingency and contestation. Rather than opposing agonism to deliberative goals, however, we can appreciate that such goals are shared. These insights can be deployed in their support. I even argue this treatment can be extended to recognise a deliberative role for the passions.

The key to my argument is the interpretive step of reconstructing an agonism divested of the inconsistent denial of universal rational consensus in principle as a theory that emphasises the moment of difference within a broader deliberative

dialectic. Combined with a parallel stress on consensus building that maximally incorporates such difference, this dialectic aims to move from more to less partial, and less exclusive, understanding. Far from denying or ignoring agonist insights and aspirations, I try to show that the more stringent standards and supplementary resources of deliberation animate those aspirations and throw those concepts into clearer relief.

My model, and its associated values and practices thus set out a subject position, defined by this dialectical deliberative process, along with the advantages that attach to it. This has been presented to you, the reader, in an attempt to persuade you to accept and adhere to this identity—to motivate you to give it your allegiance. Or, if you prefer, I have argued rationally in favour of that model, which you are free to decide to accept or reject on the basis of your assessment of the force of the better argument. And these parallel descriptions of what this article has been about illustrate just one more way in which agonist and deliberative processes may be constructively and dynamically integrated, rather than separated and statically opposed.

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Endrju Knops

Prednosti integrisanja agonizma i deliberacije

Apstrakt

U članku „Agonizam kao deliberacija" (Knops 2007) predložio sam pomirenje između agonističke verzije demokratije Mufove, uz određene korekcije kako bi se očuvala konzistentnost, i deliberacije. Ovde nudim odgovor na dve kritike ovog projekta koje su usledile: Gürsözlü (2009) i Fives (2009). Iako oba autora smatraju da nije moguće pomiriti agonizam i deliberaciju, oni to čine sa suprotnih pozicija. Gursozlu brani agonizam Mufove kao poseban i koherentan projekat na osnovu onoga što smatra ispravnim razumevanjem njenog pojma hegemonije. Fajvs tvrdi da je njen pristup poseban ali nekoherentan, i da zato treba da bude odbačen. Nasuprot ove dve suprotstavljene pozicije, nastojaću da pokažem ne samo da je moguća integracija agonizma i deliberacije, već i da je veoma korisna kako za agonizam, tako i za deliberativnu teoriju. Oslobođen kontradiktorne tvrdnje da je univerzalni racionalni konsenzus u principu nemoguće postići, agonizam se može interpretirati kao teorija momenta razlike unutar šire deliberativne dijalektike koja pokušava da od parcijalnog, dođe do šireg konsenzusa. Ako ih posmatramo na taj način, možemo da uvidimo kako se ova dva pristupa dopunjuju u traganju za zajedničkim ciljevima, pre nego što predstavljaju statičnu i nužnu opoziciju kako to smatraju kritičari kojima se u ovom članku bavim.

Ključne reči demokratija, agonizam, deliberacija, Muf, Habermas.

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