DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY, DIVIDED SOCIETIES, AND THE CASE OF

APPALACHIA

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Theories of deliberative democracy, which emphasize open-mindedness and cooperative dialogue, confront serious challenges in deeply divided political populations constituted by polarized citizens unwilling to work together on issues they collectively face. The case of mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia makes this clear. In my thesis, I argue that such empirical challenges are serious, yet do not compromise the normative desirability of deliberative democracy because communicative mechanisms can help transform adversarial perspectives into workable, deliberative ones. To realize this potential in divided societies, mechanisms must focus on healing and reconciliation, a point under-theorized by deliberativists who do not take seriously enough the feminist critique of public-private dualisms that illuminates political dimensions of such embodied processes. Ultimately, only a distinctly two-stage process of public deliberation in divided populations, beginning with mechanisms for healing and trust building, will give rise to the self-transformation necessary for second-stage deliberation aimed at collectively binding decisions.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO DEMOCRACY THEORY AND THE APPALACHIAN CRISIS

“Democracy” is an ambiguous word, and a tricky concept. Whether construed as an attempt at collective problem solving, a fair mode of political competition, or a risky potential for majority tyranny, democracy does not lend itself to any easy definition. This concept is the cause of much equivocation among people with alternative political convictions, be they “progressive” or “conservative,” liberal, communitarian, or libertarian. The goal of my thesis is to introduce a pressing problem that faces us today on both a theoretical and an empirical level: what do we mean when we advocate for more or less democracy, and indeed, what should we mean? While I certainly cannot answer this question in the most exhaustive way in the span of just one hundred pages, I do provide a philosophical platform for answering it relative to one particular context in the Appalachian region of the United States, where a restless civic population is fed up with the lack of opportunity afforded them for genuine political engagement, and is making demands of the political system for more inclusively democratic procedures.

How should those with political power and resources respond to such demands? What might more inclusive procedures look like? And what kind of political theory should guide our efforts to transform democratic politics? Despite the complexity that vexes such questions (the literature we might look to for guidance – contemporary political theory and political science – contains much ambiguity in the way of what is meant by ‘democracy’), I pursue them by identifying two alternative strands of democracy theorizing that are quite different, and relevant, in a number of respects. Specifically, a rational choice theory model of democracy emphasizes self-interest and competition for influence within the political sphere, and runs alongside a deliberative democracy model that emphasizes common interest and collective problem solving.
in politics. In the former, preferences are registered through voting and pluralistic, special interest engagement; in the latter, common interest is discovered through discussion and a spectrum of participatory procedures. Democracy is suspended between these alternative interpretations of its definition, purpose, and practical utilization, and this ambiguity must be cleared up in order to properly address situations that exhibit a lack of democracy.

The procedures that govern the contentious practice of mountaintop removal coal mining in the Central and Southern Appalachian Mountains seem anything but democratic, and I argue along with many citizens of the region that this situation demands attention on a number of social, political, and environmental levels. I use my thesis as an opportunity to explore theories of democracy as they relate to this context. The arguments I advance in this thesis are inspired by this powerful case-study in which democratic ideals have been all but lost to the political economy of coal in the region: economic interests dominate the political agenda, corruption is rampant, and the population is struggling to find a voice and assert influence on the political decisions that affect their lives. Mountaintop removal mining (or MTR, for short) is as economically efficient as it is environmentally destructive, and this practice is highly contested among the population and has generated a huge amount of controversy throughout the region.

Despite such a situation, virtually no chain of influence exists between the general population and policy-makers, and even fewer public forums exist to allow the community members affected by the practice to debate about and determine the merits of mountaintop removal – instead, channels of influence and exchanges of ideas happen only at uppermost levels. As a result, people who feel their voice has been unfairly marginalized and ignored are demanding more democratic decision-making processes and scrutinizing the top-heavy form of political organization that is so ubiquitous in modern times. How, they ask, can a political system
that calls itself democratic leave average citizens with such little voice in decision-making processes? These challenges, whether made by Appalachians or any other politically marginalized group in modern democracies, are often met with justifications claiming citizens are ultimately too apathetic, uninformed, mean-spirited, selfish, and competitive to render participation of any use. However, given empirical evidence to the contrary,¹ this state of affairs begs further investigation of the political and philosophical climate of our day that allows these justifications to go unchallenged.

Questions of political engagement, and failures of existent institutions to act in accordance with the democratic ideals upon which they were founded, are being explored by citizens and political theorists alike, and a multitude of issues must be addressed in such explorations. In what follows, I argue that what is at issue here is no less than the overarching political ideology that underlies the majority of modern political institutions, especially in the United States. We must critically examine this ideology and, if need be, search for an alternative political vision that empowers average citizens and encourages their participation in political affairs. By thoroughly surveying the state of democratic theorizing today, I provide a better understanding of what the problems and issues are in Appalachian political affairs, and what the search for democracy in this region might require.

Before I get started, I must introduce some key components that run through my thesis as a whole. I first make a few prefatory remarks about the centrality of a methodology that is critical in its orientation; in searching for solutions to the Appalachian controversy, I look not only to philosophical texts, but also to social science research and theories, and to any fields of study that seem relevant to the issues at hand. A description of the case study follows, as it is the

most important component that comes up repeatedly. A few key details about this crisis help demonstrate the importance of democracy philosophy in helping craft an alternative for the region. Finally, I explain my decision to focus on rational choice theory and deliberative democracy, rather than some other categorization; in this context, I introduce a crucial distinction which I invoke throughout my thesis—the distinction between *model* and *mechanisms* in theories of democracy. The Introduction ends with a quick map of the thesis as a whole.

**Why a Case-Study: The Approach of Critical Theory**

When focusing on this particular case, I find helpful the utilization of a robustly interdisciplinary approach in addressing the problems it presents to us, and I find the approach of critical theory most helpful. John Dryzek points out that critical theory, in the broadest sense, “is concerned with charting the progressive emancipation of individuals and society from oppressive forces.”² I like Iris Young’s definition even more—for her, it means simply “socially and historically situated normative analysis and argument.”³ Keenly aware of the relationship between theory and practice, and the normative and empirical dimensions of both, critical theory uniquely positions itself in a way that is concerned with interpretation *and* transformation,⁴ both of which are key components for analyzing and prescribing changes in the Appalachian case. An interdisciplinary approach to social inquiry that makes both “the individual and the conditions under which he or she lives the object of critical reflection”⁵ is essential for accurate analyses

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and realistic prescriptions, and is imperative for determining the potential for human emancipation, as it exists in individuals and the social circumstances in which they are situated.

A study of history, ideas, societal transformation, sociology, psychology, philosophy, economics and economic theory, political institutions, language, and anything else one can think of, are all important to a critical theory of society. Accurately identifying potential for social and political transformation requires isolating aspects of existence that could not be otherwise from those arising out of historical contingencies that indeed could be otherwise. Critical theory finds important all of the following: an examination and interpretation of what exists and why, an exploration of what should and could be otherwise, and lastly, an indication of what is necessary and should be changed to enable what could be to actually come into being. These are the steps I intend to follow in the chapters that ensue. Because this approach emphasizes all these dimensions, I find it most useful to determine what is required for change in Appalachia. Moreover, the most important theories utilized in this thesis come from people who self-identify as critical theorists; most specifically, Jürgen Habermas, Iris Young, and John Dryzek.

I seek in my thesis to identify the most philosophically sound and emancipatory version of the democratic ideal already embraced by contemporary society, and then to identify the ways in which the reality of the situation on the ground could be transformed to come more in line with that ideal. I find it important to focus on one specific case because I agree with Iris Young that any theory should be historically and socially situated. After all, even if one manages to properly identify an ideal model of democracy that would hold across contexts, the potential agents of change that might give rise to social and political transformation in accordance with that ideal will vary from situation to situation. I choose to focus on this particular circumstance because mountaintop removal mining and the coal industry in general exact an extreme amount
of environmental, social, and economic injustice on the people of Appalachia, and the situation is one that demands immediate change. In true critical theory form, my methodology is such that I utilize whichever combination of philosophy and social science is most appropriate to identify the kinds of transformation that should be brought about, and how that transformation could be brought about in this one particular circumstance; the conclusions I reach may bridge to other similar circumstances. Multiple Appalachian citizens are calling for the dominant social and political order to afford them more power in decision-making that governs their lives; through my exploration of democracy theory with a critical orientation, I hope to theorize how these demands can and should be met. This task begins first and foremost with our case-at-hand.

Mountaintop Removal in Appalachia

I am firmly convinced that philosophical theories are only as good as they are relevant to and helpful for working through actual difficult and problematic issues that exist in the world in which we as human beings live. Inspired as so many theorists are by Marx’s tenet, I believe the purpose of philosophy is not only to interpret the world, but also to change it. I therefore want to introduce a case study that will serve as a lens through which to examine the applicability of various theories of democracy as they relate to an actually-existing contemporary situation. Our case narrative begins in the hills of the Appalachia, a region which consists of eastern Kentucky and Tennessee, western Virginia, and all of West Virginia, and is home to some of the richest biological and cultural resources in North America today, both of which are currently under serious threat. In the last decade, Appalachian people have come face to face with a new problematic and particularly tricky environmental/social problem: mountaintop removal coal mining. MTR is ecologically and culturally destructive, it has immediate and long-term adverse effects on humans and their homeplaces; at the same time, MTR and coal in general are central
to the economy and have a special place in Appalachian heritage. Needless to say, the role of coal in the region is an ambivalent one.

Currently, there are two general categorizations of coal mining – underground and surface – and it is with the latter that I am concerned, as it is undoubtedly the most controversial. Underground mining is the traditional method: miners dig into a mountain and remove the coal via shafts, leaving hollow layers within the in-tact mountain. Surface mining is the other way around; simply put, it consists in taking the mountain away from the coal. In this process, the entire top layer of a mountain is blasted away in order to expose the coal beneath. The process begins by clear-cutting all the forests and vegetation that cover the mountains (which destroys critical habitat for a multitude of species, some of which are endangered), after which large amounts of explosives are detonated to blast apart the earth and rock, exposing the coal seams beneath. The “swell factor” is typically 25 - 30%, meaning that after blasting, 25 - 30% more material by volume is present than before blasting because there is more air space in the debris. This loosening of the soil precludes the re-growth of native species while compaction grading efforts can disrupt the ground’s ability to absorb rainfall. “Overburden,” the non-coal debris generated by the explosions, is pushed into adjacent valleys (thereafter referred to as “valley fills”). As much as one thousand vertical feet of mountain may be destroyed in this process.

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7 National Research Council 1981: 127

Valley-fills often cover up important headwater streams, erasing them from the watershed and adversely affecting organisms (including humans) that depend on them for survival.

Simply describing MTR coal mining is sufficient to make the case that it is ecologically detrimental. Its effects combine to contribute to a rapid decline in biodiversity and land-health in general in these areas, severely affecting ecosystems. Yet to understand why MTR is so widespread despite adverse effects, consider that half of U.S. electricity comes from coal—a third of which comes from Appalachia\(^9\)—so the cheaper the industry can extract it, the more profit the industry generates. MTR is the most efficient form of mining, utilizing sophisticated technology and lots of machines. It does the job quicker and cheaper than humans alone ever could; hence, it is extremely financially profitable for the industry. This economic component is what enables MTR to continue, and the fact that coal has been integrated into Appalachian culture over the last century\(^{10}\) keeps many Appalachians from challenging or questioning the industry in any substantive way. The cessation of MTR seems to jeopardize the jobs, livelihood, and self-respect of many Appalachian citizens who often have access to few industrial employment opportunities outside of coal mining.

“Without coal mines I wouldn’t be working, I don’t believe. We do this for the people,” says Charles Farley, a coal truck driver in West Virginia.\(^{11}\) This kind of justification is often invoked by miners and other coal advocates to explain why they choose to continue working for the industry despite obvious environmental and cultural repercussions of mining practices. Unfortunately, noble intentions of workers are sometimes accompanied by adversarial attitudes toward those on the other side of the debate. Maria Gunnoe, mother of two and resident of Bob


White, West Virginia, is familiar with intra-community conflict surrounding coal mining. She began organizing to halt MTR after her house was flooded by mine run-off in 2000.\textsuperscript{12} Gunnoe and others have filed lawsuits to prevent the dumping of mine debris into valleys. One such lawsuit was won in 2007, which successfully ceased operations at the local mine, though it also resulted in thirty-nine mine workers losing their jobs. Soon thereafter, Gunnoe began receiving threats to her life and property, and she now travels with a bullet proof vest.\textsuperscript{13} Yet coal mining’s threats to the health and biocultural integrity of the region are as serious as the threats its absence poses to from the local economy, so those opposed to the practice refuse to back down despite pressure and opposition. Needless to say, an extreme amount of tension surrounds this issue both inside and outside of coalfield communities – the MTR debate has had devastating consequences, pitting family members against each other and causing people to sacrifice life-long friendships in order to stand up for what they believe.

Those opposed to MTR are especially concerned about the loss of culture and heritage the practice causes. Appalachian people have a unique cultural heritage that is closely tied to the land, and to see the land destroyed around them causes irreparable damage to their culture and their selves: loss of land can lead to the loss of cultural identity.\textsuperscript{14} Despite reclamation efforts, mining practices preclude the re-growth of many native Appalachians’ species in natural proportions.\textsuperscript{15} Planting non-native grasses in agitated soil is an affront to Appalachian traditions

\textsuperscript{12} Ken Ward Jr, "Boone County woman wins award for fighting big coal" \textit{The Charleston Gazette}, April 19, 2009

\textsuperscript{13} John Donnelly, "Coal's ascent is igniting a debate," \textit{The Boston Globe}, Dec. 26, 2007

\textsuperscript{14} For an ethnographic analysis of Appalachian culture and the integral relationship between that culture and the mountain ecosystem, see Mary Hufford, "Narratives of Progress, Preservation, and Ginseng," in \textit{Culture, Environment, and Conservation in the Appalachian South} ed. Benita J. Howell Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

\textsuperscript{15} U.S. EPA Region 3: \textit{Mountaintop Mining/Valley Fills in Appalachia Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement}, p. 159; also, "Terrestrial Plant Populations of Forested and Reclaimed Sites" Steven N. Handel, PhD, Dept. Ecology, Evolution and Natural Resources, State University of New Jersey.
centered on native herb gathering. Picking wild ginseng (a practice called ‘ginsengin’), for instance, is a cherished activity, and for some an economic necessity, that is disrupted and essentially rendered impossible by MTR mining. Increasing pollution and the degradation of land health have turned entire communities into ghost towns. Depopulation is tragic, as decreasing employment leads to increasing migration and harmful mining effects such as pollution or housing structural problems render living spaces uninhabitable. Indeed, depopulation seems to be an explicit goal of the industry, as it decreases opposition. Through coal industry practices of mining and waste disposal, wells are poisoned (due to chemicals used to clean the coal on-site) and housing foundations are cracked (due to explosives and loosening of the land). Entire towns are flooded (either by water, due to erosion and the inability of impacted soils to absorb rainfall, or by coal waste when slurry dams are breached), and many more catastrophes occur. To put it simply, physical, mental, spiritual, and cultural health are all threatened, and thus a resistance to this threat has existed as long as the mining practice itself.

On the other side of the debate are influential coal industry players, such as lobby groups, CEOs and other high-level company executives, governmental officials who benefit significantly

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16 Hufford (2002, 204).

17 A town’s dependence on the coal economy determines its capacity to sustain itself when mining operations cease. For more on population decline in coal-mining regions, see Socio-Economic Review of Appalachia; Appalachia Then and Now: An Update of “The Realities of Deprivation” Reported to the President in 1964; Andrew M. Isserman; Revised November, 1996

18 One company drafted a “depopulation plan” to provide incentives for coalfield residents to vacate the areas on the condition they never return, making it easier for the company to mine without opposition. For a draft of this plan, see letter from H.L. Snyder to Jack Taylor, available as Depopulation_Plan_Full.pdf at www.crmw.net/tools.php


from the profitable industry, and most importantly, community members who are employed by the industry or those close to someone who is. What is most difficult for theories of deliberative democracy, as I discuss in Chapter IV, is when a political community composed of citizens relatively equal in socioeconomic status and political power is polarized around an issue. In regards to mountaintop removal, those employed by the coal industry, and friends and relatives of such people, are the primary community-level advocates of the practice. Such favor is easy to understand considering the degree to which industry rhetoric frames and dominates discourse – through airwaves and other media outlets, through coal-mining job-related environments, and in other forums as well – and considering the economic dependence of the region and these individuals on the industry. A huge push has been made by sympathizers to continue MTR mining and even increase its usage. Behind this push have been massive marketing campaigns and lobbying attempts endorsed by the coal industry and civic groups like the Kentucky Coal Association and Friends of Coal. Media campaigns tout this method of mining as necessary to maintain the economic viability of Appalachian coal in the face of market competition.

Another argument for the continuation of MTR states that the flat land space created as a result of such a process is ultimately beneficial to a region lacking a sufficient quantity of it, because flat land space is a commodity attractive to investors and brings much-needed business ventures into the mountains. Some examples of such business ventures are prisons, schools, shopping centers, airports and golf courses. However, the percentage of mined land that does get

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21 Simply driving through the region can demonstrate this fact; for instance, strategically placed “Yes, Coal!” billboards tower over interstates and highways in Appalachia, yet are absent in the rest of the country.

22 To be sure, advertising campaigns often conflate the different types of mining coal mining; the larger purpose of such messaging is to emphasize coal as good and opposition to coal as unreasonable.

redeveloped remains minimal, and just how much community members genuinely desire this kind of economic development remains unaddressed. Overall, then, proponents argue MTR mining is safer, more efficient, economically more competitive, and ultimately helpful for Appalachia and its inhabitants. Moreover, with an impending energy crisis and instability in foreign regions to provide for America’s demand, Appalachia has an obligation to harness what it possesses in coal reserves to reduce foreign dependency on oil and increase American self-sufficiency. Many inhabitants endorse these arguments and viewpoints, most of them employed by or close to someone employed by the coal-industry, as these pro-MTR positions are repeatedly propagated in the mining workplace. Understandably, these pro-coal enthusiasts are scared of losing a job in a region where unemployment is rampant. Coal companies threaten that if MTR-mined coal were more heavily regulated, the operating costs of mining in Appalachia would rise and mines would be forced to shut down. Indeed, as the example above indicated, this does occur, and the economic monopoly coal enjoys in Appalachia means that when mines shut down, real people suffer.

Controversy of the kind surrounding MTR is actually nothing new—indeed, as long as the coal industry has been in Appalachia, tension has existed within communities. Coal has an historical legacy as wrought with in-fighting among locals as is this current flare-up. In fact, community-level feuds are a common feature of Appalachian cultural heritage that dates back to Civil War times; this region was key battleground territory and men from the same community

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25 Moral overtones are ubiquitous in these arguments, and this is one key aspect—that is, the emphasis on Appalachia’s obligation to sacrifice in the name of the greater good—that makes this a question of distributive environmental justice: is this a just distribution of the burdens of America’s energy demand?

26 Unemployment can be as high as 10-12% in coal-producing counties in Appalachia; see U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Services, Local Area Unemployment Statistics <www.bls.gov/lau/>.
often would join opposing factions. This is where the popularized Hatfield-McCoy rivalry originated, in which the former fought for the Confederacy and the latter for the Union Army.\footnote{Otis K Rice, \textit{The Hatfields and McCoys}. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982.}

While actual Hatfields and McCoys are not necessarily involved, the two counties they hail from (Mingo County, WV, and Pike County, KY) are at the center of current pollution-related coal controversies. These particular families lived on opposite sides of the Tug Fork River, the same one that flooded in October 2000 when a damn holding coal-waste refuse burst in Martin County, Kentucky, and 306 million gallons of slurry flowed into this waterway. I return to this particular situation in Chapter III; my point here is only to emphasize the intertwined aspects of community-wide and regional controversies, which are often complex and historically situated.

In Appalachia, the mountaintop removal debacle plays into and highlights divisions that have existed for some time around a variety of issues.

As this particular debate rages on in the public and private spheres, consensus has yet to be reached. Opposition has existed for nearly a decade but MTR mining continues relatively unabated. Even on the rare occasion that a public decision has been made to curb the practice until further investigation, these decisions have been overturned by people in powerful positions. The failure of current policy procedures to assuage the concerns of engaged citizens warrants a brief explication of those procedures.\footnote{For example, in 1999, citizens’ concerns over the destruction of waterways was finally heard as multiple lawsuits advanced into the courts and rulings were issued temporarily stopping the practice of MTR on the basis of a provision in the Clean Water Act that rendered valley fills illegal. As industry growth slowed, the White House quickly responded by changing the definition of a key part of the Clean Water Act: the definition of the word ‘fill’. MTR mining resumed and the practice is still booming today. For a more detailed account, see Joby Warrick’s article in the \textit{Washington Post}, Aug. 17, 2004: “Appalachia is Paying Price for White House Rule Change.” <http://americanconscience.org/energy_coal_mountaintop_removal.html>}

Coal companies often purchase or lease land (or its mineral rights) from landholding companies. Procedures for obtaining permits are extremely complex and vary according to state and objective; for instance, different permits must be
granted for clear-cutting, mining, dumping of waste in proximity to waterways, etc. The maze of application and opportunity to appeal can involve both federal and state agencies (Environmental Protection Agency, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, and so forth). According to the Clean Water Act, mining permits are granted by the Army Corps of Engineers.\footnote{“Clean Water Act,” Public Law, 18 October 1972: 92-500, 33 U.S.C. § 1251.} Opportunity for participation comes when permit requests are announced in local papers; the public then has a specific time period to request public hearings and submit written and in-person comments. Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) are required and reviewed, and comments are responded to. That states’ permitting procedures differ is yet another potentially dividing factor amongst communities: physically adjacent human communities might be separated by political boundaries that set different democratic and bureaucratic rules. Moreover, coal seams, watersheds and migrating wildlife know no state borders; this speaks to the inadequacy of these procedures for governing processes like MTR mining.

The purpose of my thesis is to argue that these procedures are also democratically problematic: they rely too heavily on technocratic expertise, and the opportunities for participation and influence they provide to the people most affected are seriously lacking. Moreover, the collectively-binding decisions that do get made on account of currently existing political procedures face poor enforcement and implementation, which creates distrust toward governmental institutions and political forums. I argue that this time, for this particular dispute in this divided population, Appalachia needs an alternative and, I argue, cooperative political framework through which to address the issue. Given that people are making demands for more democracy and more power in decision-making that governs their lives, the question becomes how to respond to those demands. Because a few different understandings of democracy could
guide how we answer them, my thesis is dedicated to thoroughly examining those various possibilities, identifying what seems most appropriate, and investigating what how exhaustively that framework addresses the particularities of this Appalachian case. With complex and interrelated political, civic, economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions, an examination of the MTR controversy is particularly poignant to discussions regarding the relevance, applicability and desirability of alternative models of democracy, as well as the various mechanisms that might be utilized by a political system under that framework. I recognize that any claims for drastic change require extensive substantiation, and defending the general claims I have hinted, and providing potential alternatives is my overarching goal.

How to Categorize Democracy Theory: An Important Distinction

Perusing the usual places one might look to try and get clear on exactly what “democracy” means, one finds various ways of classifying alternative schools of thought. Sometimes full-fledged distinctions are drawn, such as direct versus representative theories of democracy, participatory versus elite theories, or liberal versus republican versions of democracy. One also finds political philosophies that are consistent with multiple kinds of democracy and have implications for democratic practice, but may not fit neatly into the dichotomous distinctions drawn by other theorists. Pluralism, populism, constitutionalism, pragmatism, and corporatism, for instance, are all philosophical platforms with political implications, and one’s stance on these positions is going to influence one’s interpretation of what democracy should and does mean. To rehash all of these distinctions and differentiations is unnecessary for the purpose of this thesis.30

Regarding my classification, I choose to distinguish between and expand upon a ‘rational choice theory’ model of democracy emphasizing aggregative mechanisms, on the one hand, and a ‘deliberative’ model of democracy emphasizing communicative mechanisms, on the other. Why I do so should become clearer as I review the theories and develop my arguments, but for now I will note that I have chosen this distinction for two main reasons. First, to differentiate between “aggregative” and “deliberative” democracy is becoming more and more common in Western political thought, as evidenced by a quick survey of the articles being published in top political science journals. A rational choice theory framework versus a deliberative democracy framework is undoubtedly the dominant split in political science and theory today. More importantly, however, I choose to distinguish between these two opposing strands of theorizing because it is with one of them that my sympathies ultimately lie: I find one of the two to be a more coherent model, with more commendable mechanisms, and a more appropriate answer to my overarching question of how we should answer calls for “more democratization” in Appalachia. Because it is within the debate between these two juxtaposing strands of contemporary theorizing that I find the best answers to the political, social, and environmental problems that face Appalachia, it makes sense that an overview of what they entail, and how they arose, is imperative for my thesis, and I undertake this task in the second chapter.

In explicating rational choice theory and deliberative democracy as they are presented in contemporary political thought, I find it helpful to introduce an analytical distinction that is all-too-often collapsed, but which seems essential in political philosophy, and which will help filter out various aspects of the categories into which democracy talk is commonly parsed. In each framework, I distinguish between the model of democracy that informs that strand, and the mechanisms that are commonly utilized within and advocated by that strand of theorizing.
model, such as liberalism, is an overarching philosophical framework that defines what
democracy is or should be, a worldview of sorts that includes explicit endorsements for various
ontological, epistemological, and ethical positions. Models influence the way in which concepts
such as citizenship or the common good are defined because the philosophical foundations of a
model determine through a series of extractions the horizon of possibilities it sees for what such
concepts can entail in the first place—this relationship should become clearer in the next chapter,
but for now suffice it to say that assumptions flow from the model about the role of politics, and
about the purpose and function of a democracy.

Mechanisms, on the other hand, are simply the procedures, such as the opportunity to
vote, join interest groups, attend town hall meetings, etc, employed by a democratic system to
give citizens a voice and connect them to governance. Mechanisms are integrally related to
concepts such as legitimacy and authority in a political system because they are the avenues
through which citizens assert political influence, and it is only when a clearly defined
relationship exists between citizen and governance, between “rule” and “the people,” that a
democracy will be perceived as legitimate among the population. This relationship is defined by
the mechanisms offered citizens in a political system. An overarching model and a particular
mechanism are of course related in that any judgment of what mechanism best serves a goal, or
the designation of the goals which a mechanism should serve, or what it means for a mechanism
to “serve a citizen” in the first place, are all influenced by whatever model of democracy one
endorses. This in turn influences the perceived efficacy of a given mechanism. While certainly
related, drawing a clear distinction between model and mechanism will ultimately help us
untangle some ambiguities present in contemporary democratic theory. A central task of the first
chapter is to separate out as much as possible these aspects of a political framework (whether it
be rational choice theory or deliberative democracy), and determine the implications of this separation for the respective theories of democracy.

Because this distinction between model and mechanism is seldom disambiguated in contemporary literature, I will sometimes speak of a “strand of theorizing” or a “framework” referring to both a model of democracy and the mechanisms commonly associated with it, as they are presented in the fields of political science and theory. A ‘strand of theorizing’ is helpful because I must utilize contemporary literature in which this distinction is seldom explicitly invoked, and so it is at times difficult to maintain it consistently. Aside from the practical aspect, it is sometimes necessary to speak in terms of an overarching ‘framework’ because as I mentioned, models and mechanisms do interpenetrate and feed back on one another in particular ways that will become clear in the following chapters. For these reasons, I refer at times either to a “strand of theorizing” (which connotes more precisely a theory or idea as presented in the literature) or a “framework” (which connotes more precisely the fact that model and mechanism are related in particular ways). Overall, then, I invoke the model-mechanism distinction relative to theories of democracy throughout my thesis in order to determine which understanding(s) should guide attempts at political change in Appalachia; further, I look at the technical aspects of how that political change might be brought about, and I use a thoroughly interdisciplinary and critical approach to do so.

An Outline of the Thesis

Chapter II begins with a thorough explication of rational choice theory and deliberative democracy. Situations in which citizens are unsatisfied are best handled when there is a thorough understanding of the alternative theories from which prescriptions might be made. For this reason, I use the first chapter to get a handle on these two dominant strands of theorizing,
invoking the model-mechanism distinction to determine when and if a choice is required. Disambiguating these strands of theorizing according to this categorization helps illuminate what is at stake in choosing to endorse one framework over the other, and helps identify which aspects of each could be retained when endorsing its alternative. I point out how the models differ in terms of how they see the purpose of politics and view the political subject, differences which can be traced back to underlying philosophical convictions. I find that a rational choice theory model of democracy endorses three suspect positions—a strict public-private dichotomy, an egoist model of behavior, and the primacy of instrumental rationality—and I show that those positions are informed by even more basic philosophical convictions about the nature of self, knowledge, and society. I demonstrate that a commitment to atomism gives rise to a particular view of the political subject, and subsequently, what the purpose of democratic politics should be, and I draw out the implications of these views for the kinds of mechanisms endorsed by this model. Aggregative mechanisms focus on aggregating the pre-formed preferences of fundamentally competitive political actors whose interests must be balanced lest conflict erupt in a political setting.

The deliberative democracy model rests upon alternative philosophical convictions that give rise to a different view of the political subject and democracy. Rationality is communicative and politics involves engaged discussion; preferences are amenable to change, and political actors are intrinsically connected to one another, holding at least certain interests in common. This view rests on alternative philosophical convictions: a relational-social ontology and epistemology. The deliberative democracy model suggests the need for communicative mechanisms that focus on public discussion in the political sphere aimed at transforming perspectives on the issues. Because these models rest upon mutually exclusive philosophical
foundations and give rise to opposition implications for politics and citizens, I end this chapter by arguing that a choice must be made between them.

I move in Chapter III to more closely examine which is most appropriate in the Appalachian case with which I am concerned. The deliberative democracy model turns out in to be the most normatively desirable for guiding political change in Appalachia—the justifications often given for a deliberative approach speak directly to the failures of current institutions and procedures in Appalachian environmental politics, and it has the potential to subsume valuable aggregative mechanisms commonly associated with rational choice theory. Yet endorsing a deliberative model forces us to address many complicated issues; specifically, what should be done when political actors in a given community actually are adversarial, competitive, unwilling to work together? This “problem of divided societies” is one of the largest challenges that faces this strand of theorizing. After all, according to the theorist of rational choice, the capacity of that framework to accommodate such a type of person is precisely why it is better than its rival for most political issues in diverse and complex modern societies. This is certainly a poignant challenge in my Appalachian case that involves divisions which go much deeper than this manifest MTR debate — many people implicated in the controversy want to get their way and are uncompromising in that regard. Whether deliberative democracy is fully equipped to deal with this in a satisfactory way is unclear, and so I use the remainder of my thesis to explore just how much of a challenge these empirical realities are to, and how they might be dealt with by the model that is in all other ways normatively preferable.

In the latter half of Chapter III, I begin this exploration with an historical/psychological explanation for why adversarial citizens seem to dominate in political affairs. I claim that the past half-century of explanatory political theory and corresponding social science research
strengthened an adversarial view of persons, and the hermeneutic concept of the *self-fulfilling prophecy* phenomenon helps explain how the dissemination of these views through various mediums in society (including available political mechanisms) could actually increase or create the dominance of adversarial actors in public affairs. To the extent that this dominance can be attributed to social science research that advanced certain claims about persons and knowledge after corroborating its own assumptions, the rejection of this model depends on calling into question the validity of that science’s methodology and claims to objectivity, as well as challenging the ways in which the findings of that research (which examined how politics supposedly did work) were transmitted into normative claims about the way politics should work. I end the chapter by claiming that just as aggregative political mechanisms can serve to (re)produce adversarial political subjects, carefully constructed communicative mechanisms have emancipatory potential because they could conceivably serve to (re)create *cooperative* political subjects who are more in line with deliberative democracy’s normative requirements.

While Chapter III offers an *historical* explanation of how adversarial political subjects have risen to prominence in the last century, Chapter IV offers a *philosophical* explanation for the same prominence over the last few centuries; this analysis gets to the core of why deliberative democracy has failed to address this empirical challenge in any substantive way: it does not take seriously enough the feminist critique of political theory’s separation of public-political spaces from private-personal ones. I begin with a thorough explication of one of the most influential accounts of what exactly an ideal citizen is supposed to look like under a deliberative democracy framework—that of Amy Guttmann and Dennis Thompson. Theirs offers a perfect example of why the citizen virtues commonly said to be required for successful deliberation may also potentially be exclusionary and perpetuate a public-private dichotomy that
renders nearly impossible the achievement of such virtues on any meaningful scale in the population at large, especially surrounding deeply divisive political issues.

After sketching their theory of citizens and discourse in deliberative democracy, I critique their lack of emphasis on and recognition of the character transformation their mandated virtues require in divided populations. This lack of emphasis helps explain the lack of mechanisms for transformation in the deliberative democracy framework. I trace this blindness back to the political traditions deliberative democracy upon which emphasize transformation away from particular, personal experience, and toward publicly interested people. This emphasis involves associating the former with embodied experience and expression, and the latter with overly-cognitive experience and expression. I argue that the gender bias inherent in self-transformation theses of democracy theory, and the degree to which deliberative democracy draws on these theses renders the latter ill-equipped to prescribe satisfactory mechanisms for healing and transformation in divided societies. I invoke the critique leveraged by Iris Young against the wrongheaded separation in this strand of theorizing between dispassionate, rational communication and the affective, embodied communication styles traditionally relegated to private, personal space. It is precisely because of deliberative democracy’s failure to seriously challenge a public-private dichotomy manifest along a number of lines that it fails to offer a clear and compelling way for transforming adversarial political subjects in deeply divided populations into ones willing to cooperate and work together to forge common solutions.

Overall, Chapter IV argues that if deliberative democracy theorists took this feminist critique more seriously, the centrality of first-stage deliberative forums that invoke communicative mechanisms aimed primarily at healing, reconciliation, and trust building would be more readily recognized. So long as such embodied processes are not allowed in or associated
with public, political spaces, then this potentially liberatory framework will fail to move us beyond adversarial politics, especially in polarized communities like MTR-divided Appalachia. Once deliberative theorists recognize the importance of this point, they will begin to focus more carefully on constructing deliberative forums aimed specifically at healing and reconciliation (rather than consensus or decision-making per se), processes that are indeed political, and that are necessary in certain cases for successful deliberation aimed at collectively binding decisions.

When an existing political system is perceived by those implicated in it as fundamentally flawed, simply not working, or systematically disenfranchising certain populations, political theorists have an obligation to critically examine both the political philosophy that forms the foundation for dominant ideologies and institutions, and those theories that challenge or stand in opposition to dominant trends. Within the context of Appalachia, citizens are definitely challenging existing institutions. Many Appalachians are demanding more democracy, and I am firmly convinced that we as a larger society have an obligation to respond to these demands. Yet these responses could be answered in a number of ways, especially if we look to the literature and see these two opposing versions of democracy. How should such demands be met? My thesis is an attempt to craft a plan that responds substantively. Undoubtedly, many dimensions will still need to be explored and ironed out, but through this exercise, I begin the process, and hopefully through doing so will contribute something meaningful to this case, to deliberative democracy theory in particular, and to normative political theory in general.
CHAPTER II
A CLOSER EXAMINATION OF TWO DOMINANT PARADIGMS: APPLYING THE MODEL-MECHANISM DISTINCTION TO RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Introduction

Normative democratic theorizing and political philosophy generally had all but disappeared in the wake of World War II, which saw a shift in emphasis toward explanatory theory.¹ With John Rawls’s publication of A Theory of Justice in 1971, however, all of that changed, and we now see an abundance of sophisticated theorizing exploring questions of democracy in a normative context: what should democracy mean, and what should it look like in our modern world, a world that is drastically different than it was only fifty years ago? I find this theorizing fascinating and quite relevant given the demands being made by Appalachian citizens for more political power, and given the failures of currently existing institutions to meet those demands in any substantive way.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore what I see as the most promising direction for democratic theory that presently exists; I therefore thoroughly examine what are arguably “the two most influential traditions of contemporary theorizing about democracy”: rational choice theory, on the one hand, and deliberative democracy theory on the other.² I bring the model-mechanism distinction outlined in the Introduction to bear on these theories to try and uncover what within the two main strands of theorizing reflects overarching philosophical differences in model, and what refers only to specific mechanisms. I seek to carefully disambiguate some

¹ Held, Models of Democracy, ch 5-8.
explicit and implicit normative and empirical claims inherent in both these schools of thought – in aggregation as a mechanism, in rational choice theory as a model, in communication as a mechanism, and in deliberative democracy as a model. I find that the rational choice strand of theorizing consists of a *model* founded on an atomistic social ontology and epistemology that emphasizes the private and static nature of political preferences and the competitive nature of citizens who pursue their self-interested preferences in political space. This strand advocates mechanisms that aggregate such pre-formed preferences in a logically coherent fashion, minimizing confrontation between adversarial political actors. On the other hand, a deliberative democracy model draws on a relational social ontology and epistemology which gives rise to a view of politics as at least partially cooperative in nature and citizens who hold interests in common. The distinction between model and mechanism illuminates exactly what is at issue between these two traditions, and makes the problem of choosing between them much more tractable. Explications in this chapter set the stage for further discussions on which model of democracy is most appropriate to endorse and why, and what this implies for political mechanisms under that model – a discussion that will equip us to best answer calls for more democracy in the region of Appalachia, and ultimately lead us to specific prescriptions for Appalachian environmental politics.

Rational Choice Theory and Preference Aggregation

*The General Theory*

A rational choice approach is the first strand of theorizing in political thought that I explicate. Broadly speaking, rational choice theory refers to a research platform employed by the social sciences to explain and model human behavior in a variety of circumstances. This approach is based on the conviction that the best way to explain social phenomena is by
analyzing the choices of the individuals that are implicated in the phenomenon and it was originally formulated in economics to explain and predict consumer behavior in the marketplace. Rational choice theory is premised upon the notion that self-interested individuals make their choices based on rational calculations of the costs and benefits perceived to be associated with that choice.³ The explanatory power of this model in economics is easy enough to understand: people want to obtain the most desirable products at the lowest price, and thus engage in a cost-benefit analysis of the various options when faced with a choice in the marketplace; they generate in the process a calculus of value, so to speak, whereby the value of an object or course of action is quantitatively determined by the degree to which it optimizes a certain goal or purpose, and the degree to which it can be assigned a monetary value. The combination of goal-optimization and monetary value comes to be synonymous with the object or choice’s value as such.

Because of its success in explaining and predicting human behavior in the economic sphere, rational choice theory as a research program quickly migrated beyond this field into other social science disciplines, which envied its empirical success.⁴ Its prominence can now be observed in fields ranging from mathematics (decision theory, game theory) to political science (social choice theory). Seeing as how my focus is on theories of democracy, I am most interested in the implications of applying rational choice theory to political science and political theory, disciplines where in the span of four decades, it has emerged as a central, even most powerful paradigm⁵ hailed for its contributions, its “wide applicability, explanatory power, influence on


public policy, and promising future.”⁶ Most generally, when applying rational choice theory to politics, the “choice” to be explained is not consumer behavior, but political action. Persons’ political behavior, be it voting, lobbying, joining an interest group, running for office, etc, is explained and predicted by the rewards or costs such activities are likely to afford them based on their underlying preferences, needs, or interests. Under a rational choice framework, human interaction comes to be seen as a process of social exchange that mirrors economic exchange, whereby people are motivated toward any choice (not just economic ones) by cost-benefit analysis of that choice relative to various pre-determined goals or desires.⁷ Political activities “are valued and chosen not for themselves, but as more or less efficient means to a further end,”⁸ just as economic choices are made not on account of the intrinsic value of the product, but because the product does the best job of serving some other purpose.

This caricature of political actors has led many to claim rational choice theory perpetuates a view of the person as homo economicus, “an instrumentally rational egoist, concerned only with maximizing a set of predefined elements in a utility function (which might include income, wealth, pleasant leisure time, etc.).”⁹ In short, persons are primarily self-interested, strategically rational actors, and most importantly, they act politically the same way they would economically. While initially intended to be primarily explanatory in nature, derived from supposedly value-free scientific studies of human behavior that are the subject of Chapter

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⁷ Scott (2000, 2).


⁹ Dryzek (2000, 32).
III. I argue that a rational choice approach in political science and theory has now become an overarching philosophical framework, heavily influencing one’s view of political subjects and the purpose of politics; in other words, it has become a model of democracy. I refer to it as such precisely because, as I will show, this platform embraces, advances, reproduces, and at times explicitly advocates a certain worldview that has very real political implications. That worldview can be located squarely within the intellectual tradition that stems from the Enlightenment project aimed at freeing, politically and epistemically, the autonomous rational agent from pre-Modern dictates of tradition and authority. A brief tour of the ontological, epistemological, and political positions stemming from that time helps clarify why certain questionable assumptions about political agents and the purpose and function of a democracy, such as homo economicus and others I discuss in a moment, flow so easily from the rational choice theory model.

Atomism, Enlightenment, and the Rational Choice Model of Democracy

Models are characterized by the fact that they embrace certain philosophical positions that influence descriptions of and prescriptions for politics made by those who endorse that model. The metaphysical position known as atomism is what characterizes the social ontology of a rational choice model of democracy; this is the claim that discrete bodies, be they electrons or persons, are ontologically prior to the continuous relationships they enter into with other bodies.10 The view dates back to ancient Greek atomists Leucippus and Democritus, and is pursued at the beginning of the Modern period by Enlightenment-era contemporaries Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Rene Descartes (1596-1650), whose philosophies exemplify the logical extension of this position into the social-political and the epistemological realm, respectively. In the realm of knowledge, Descartes concludes that certainty can be obtained in solitude through

the rational activity of the mind when it completely divorces itself from embodied, sense experience. 11 Further, knowledge is reductive, founded in “the objects simplest and easiest to know,” ascending “little by little… step by step, to the knowledge of the more complex.” 12 In Descartes’s account, atomistic knowers are self-sufficient and interchangeable and legitimate knowledge is discovered in solitude. 13 This approach is mirrored in rational choice theory, which explains complex social phenomena through reducing it to a function of individual behavior; further, individuals make choices through a self-reflective calculation of value.

Individuals in Thomas Hobbes’s state of nature follow a strikingly similar procedure in deciding to move from the state of nature to a social contract and finally to politics: each autonomous rational agent engages in a process of reasoning and valuation, and all ultimately come to the same conclusion that it is in their best interest to give up natural rights, turn power over to a sovereign, and enter into the contract for the purpose of self-preservation. 14 Atomism is characteristic of classical liberal political philosophy, which emphasizes the individual as the fundamental social and political unit—the unit of value and agency, the unit whose behavior determines the nature of the political. 15 Politics for Hobbes is the same as it is for modern-day theorists of rational choice: something that combines or aggregates the multitude of individuals in society. The atomistic epistemology and social ontology of Hobbes and Descartes is, as

Callicott points out, “reductive,” “aggregative,” and “quantitative.”\textsuperscript{16} This kind of philosophical foundation runs through the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant, whose deontological ethical framework emphasizes moral reasoning as a monological activity in which an individual rational agent universalizes a potential action in order to determine whether it meets a transcendent principle that determines its moral validity.

These epistemological, political, and moral frameworks, and Enlightenment-era individualism in general, continue to dominate both the physical and social sciences today, and influence normative claims for the study and practice of democratic politics. To the extent that rational choice theory is the apex of these views in political science and theory, it is best considered a model of democracy because it is precisely these endorsements for various ontological, epistemological, and ethical positions that define what democracy and citizen is or should be for the rational choice theorist. The largest effect of a model of democracy is that it gives us a theoretical starting point to consider questions of appropriate political mechanisms or those procedures employed by a democratic political system to best achieve its goals and serve its citizens. What those goals entail, and what constitutes a ‘citizen’, are determined in the model. I mention here three suspect philosophical convictions that are derived from the ontological and epistemological convictions mentioned above, which underlie the view of the political subjects and resultant interpretations of the purpose of democratic politics under a rational choice model; I then show how those views in turn influence the selection of certain kinds of mechanisms.

\textsuperscript{16} Callicott (1980, 304-306).
First, this model demonstrates a commitment to egoism, or the view that what motivates persons to act in the world is only their own self-interest.\textsuperscript{17} If people act purely in their own self-interest, a proper political theory must account for this, and provide mechanisms that balance conflicting interests and minimize confrontation. Second, rational choice democracy sees humans as operating solely according to the dictates of instrumental or means-ends rationality in which a person’s actions (the means) are rational depending on the degree to which they allow for optimal achievement of an already given goal (or an end). If political engagement does indeed happen among actors who operate only according to the dictates of strategic rationality – behavior which involves anticipating other’s preferences, predicting the way others are likely to behave, and adjusting one’s own course of action accordingly – decision-making processes must take this into account, and indeed an entire field of “social choice theory” is dedicated to the task of figuring out what mechanisms are most appropriate for fairly and consistently aggregating the individual preferences of these fully rational and purely strategic actors. Lastly, a strict public-private dichotomy characterizes the rational choice model – personal preferences are a private affair, based on individual values, beliefs, interests, or needs, and politics is a public sphere for preferences to be expressed. If political preferences are essentially private, a democracy must give all citizens who so choose the opportunity to make their private preferences public in an attempt to influence decisions that affect society as a whole. Overall, then, democracy under this model means balancing between the conflicting interests that inevitably exist within a political population, and securing the fundamental equality of all citizens who are basically competitive with interests that are fundamentally at odds.

\textsuperscript{17} For a more thorough explication of this theory of moral psychology see C. D. Broad “Egoism as a Theory of Human Motives,” in Broad, \textit{Broad's Critical Essays in Moral Philosophy}, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971.
Mechanisms of Aggregation and Limitations of Rational Choice. Which mechanisms most appropriately accommodate the assumptions about persons and politics mentioned above? Let’s draw out the implications of these assumptions. First, the central question for democratic politics under this model asks how to translate a vast number of static, individual preferences into a collectively binding decision in a way that secures the fundamental equality of all participants. Relying on convictions derived from a combination of egoism, instrumental rationality, and private nature of political preference formation, theoreticians and social science researchers working from a rational choice theory model investigate the normative desirability of various avenues of political influence. The result is that the most appropriate mechanisms through which citizens voice an opinion about political matters are ones that focus on aggregating pre-formed individual preferences. Aggregative mechanisms give people who have already decided for themselves, through individual acts of knowledge-formation and valuation, the opportunity to register an opinion regarding the most appropriate position on an issue. Why aggregation? Consider, under a rational choice model, mechanisms must be ones that allow political actors to register their self-interested private preferences, fairly and with relatively equal influence in a forum that minimizes the chances of confrontation between these competitive people. Quantitative aggregation gives us a nice numerical calculation of pre-formed preferences on the basis of which decision-makers can draft policies accordingly.

Currently, the most common mechanism of aggregating preferences is voting. Seeing as how mechanisms are integrally related to political legitimacy and authority, and given the dominance of a rational choice understanding in contemporary democracy, it is no coincidence

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18 Fields of social choice, public choice, and collective choice are dedicated to this task. For an overview and history of the field, see James M. Buchanan, “Public Choice: The Origins and Development of a Research Programme,” Blacksburg, VA: Center for the Study of Public Choice, 2003. Online: www.gmu.edu/jbc/pubchoic/.
that voting is considered integral to modern democratic societies (recall, legitimacy is
determined through perceived appropriateness of mechanisms given the assumptions of the
model). Voting is good because it serves as an interface between private preferences (voting is,
after all, a private act) and public politics; as a private activity, it is an ideal way for someone to
register a personal opinion. Another aggregative mechanism is joining an interest group, which
allows people who hold strong preferences to join together. This gives more weight to those
interests that are held more strongly, but it is still a form of aggregating similar, pre-formed
preferences. People aggregate themselves, in a sense—those with passionately-held interests
about a given issue combine with other passionate interests of the same kind, and through doing
so, assert more political influence, just as more votes translate into more political influence.
Although interests groups do more than vote—they engage in discussion between themselves
and they lobby—this discussion is strategic and one-sided in that it is not aimed at mutual
understanding or forging common ground with adversaries but is instead focused on getting
one’s own way. Indeed, the *rational choice* approach to politics of which I speak is often referred
to synonymously with the view of democracy as *interest-group pluralism* in which bargaining
and negotiation, rather than communication aimed at reaching understanding and consensus, are
the main processes that govern relationships between individuals or the groups into which they
aggregate themselves.

As we will see in the next chapter, the contemporary rational choice strand of theorizing
in political thought is the culmination of the pluralist vision of democracy advanced by Robert
Dahl and others that dominated twentieth century democracy theory,¹⁹ and the movement of the

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same time period to economize politics initiated by Joseph Schumpeter and more specifically Anthony Downs. David Held points out that this tradition in political theory “tended to take for granted the view that just as economics is concerned with individuals maximizing their personal interests, politics is concerned with sets of individuals maximizing their common interests. Accordingly, a very particular utilitarian conception of individuals as satisfaction-maximizers, acting in competitive exchange with others in the market and in politics, is also presupposed.”

Since the focus of this framework is the instrumental value of mechanisms that aggregate preformed preference of individuals to generate collectively binding decisions, I consider them in the overarching category of aggregative mechanisms, rather than communicative ones, despite the fact that they might involve at the most basic level certain forms of (strategically-oriented) communication. Unfortunately, voting and other forms of preference aggregation suffer from a number of short-comings on a purely practical level.

The first fundamental failure of aggregative mechanisms is that while affording all preferences a fundamentally level of equality, these mechanisms provide no way of distinguishing legitimate interests, such as the desire for a new elementary school, from less legitimate ones, such as the desire to punish people because of their race. That is, one finds no room in aggregative mechanisms for the relative weight of different kinds of interests, nor can they discriminate between the quality of preferences based on their content, origin, or motive.

Aggregative mechanisms are a purely quantitative method for determining the prevalence of


certain positions across a given political community. Second, and relatedly, because each preference counts equally, these procedures may potentially obscure important differences. Recognizing difference in, for instance, race, class, and gender may mean that in many cases equal respect justifies preferential treatment, and this is difficult to afford solely through aggregation. Perhaps most importantly, though, aggregative mechanisms allow only for the expression of pre-formed preferences and perpetuate an untenable dualism between the private realm of preference formation and the public, political realm of acting on those preferences. As such, no possibility remains for political actors to change their mind through social and political interaction with peers. Those who advocate an overarching rational choice theory framework seem blind to the fact that individual, personal preferences are often transformed in light of new evidence or perspective.24 The opportunity for political processes to play a transformative role is diminished with aggregative mechanisms.

The deficiencies outlined above can be traced back to assumptions inherent in the rational choice model of democracy, because again, the fundamental relationship between a model and a mechanism is that a mechanism does not allow for that which the model does not see as a genuine possibility. Aggregative mechanisms do not allow for the transformation of people or preferences in the political sphere because a rational choice model does not see any potential for such a transformation existing in the real world, indeed, does not believe such transformations ever occur. Also, rational choice theory posits that rewards, costs, and profits of a given choice are calculated relative to underlying preferences that embody basic subjective and non-rational values, needs, and interests, which vary from person to person or group to group. Because preferences are thought to be informed by values that are at their core non-rational and not

subject to philosophical analysis, the mechanisms utilized under this model of democracy provide no space for the discussion of such ends. We can see, then, the clear relationship between the assumptions of a model, and the possibilities it does or does not afford through its associated mechanisms.

While it may be the case that a mechanism does not allow for certain things, this does not mean that the mechanism itself is what perpetuates a worldview that sees such things as impossible. To be sure, these shortcomings are real, and under a stronger model of democracy (to use Benjamin Barber’s terminology) aggregative mechanisms would have to be complimented more robust mechanisms that correct for these shortcomings. But mechanisms of aggregation have positive benefits as well. Although initially crafted in the image of an adversarial political system, mechanisms such as representation and voting are not inimical to other models of democracy. That is, they could potentially be extrapolated and put into practice under an alternative model. The fact that mechanisms are not intrinsically or necessarily connected to the model whose presumptions motivated their creation means we can more easily dismiss a given model if it proves to be less normatively desirable without throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Luckily, however, this is not the case, and indeed the fact that a deliberative model could conceivably utilize aggregative mechanisms turns out in the next chapter to be one reason for endorsing the former. I now turn to an explication of deliberative democracy and bring to bear the model-mechanism on this other strand of theorizing I wish to discuss.

Deliberative Democracy and Communicative Collaboration

*The General Theory*

Deliberative democracy emerged among a subset of political theorists who sought to characterize democratic politics in a new way, and to resurrect some of democracy’s older
philosophical justifications – justifications that had been all but lost in 20th century political theorizing. The “deliberative turn” in democratic theory,25 which began in the early 1980s and has gained considerable momentum in the last decade or so, was initially motivated by a rejection of a number of the presuppositions upon which the rational choice model is based. That people are naturally competitive, with preferences that are unamenable to change and interests that only conflict, were assumptions that deliberative theorists were no longer content to let go unquestioned. Although many variations on the theme exist, deliberative democracy can be broadly defined as “the idea that legitimate lawmaking issues from the public deliberation of citizens,”26 rather than simply a quantitative calculation of individual preferences, as is the case with the alternative.

Contemporary deliberative theorists seek to critically re-examine what democracy has come to mean, and more importantly, what it should mean, in today’s world. It draws inspiration from participatory theorists such as Hannah Arendt and John Dewey who were arguing early in the 20th century against an elitist and aristocratic interpretation of democracy, and in favor of a more engaged political structure.27 Even earlier, John Stuart Mill advanced a conception of “government by discussion,” and justified this, as did Dewey decades later, on the grounds of human fallibility – people are imperfect in their knowledge, and so democracy should bring in as


many ideas as possible to determine what is most appropriate. An interpretation of democracy as discussion among free and equal citizens about collective problems at the center of this contemporary strand of theorizing, and the proliferation of this framework in the last two decades means a theory of deliberative democracy is thus no longer the singular province of an occasional political philosopher. New sophisticated analyses and normative frameworks have sweeping implications for what constitutes political legitimacy in a democratic society. Deliberative democracy theory is by no means a homogeneity, and is not synonymous with direct democracy as is so often presumed. As the thesis progresses I discuss many versions of the theory found in this strand of theorizing (Chapter IV in particular distinguishes those theorists steeped in political liberalism). I focus in this section mainly on applying the model-mechanism distinction to the main themes in deliberative democracy literature, emphasizing specifically the ways in which this strand of theorizing deviates from its contemporary rival.

Deliberative democracy begins by challenging the notion that citizens could never come to an agreement about contentious issues. Instead, divisive issues should be wrestled with and engaged. It has its roots in both Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, both of whom men declared themselves “deliberative democrats” in the mid-nineties. Contemporary deliberative democracy theory revives a line of argumentation focusing on democracy’s relationship to civic engagement as a participatory political structure. Generally, the central idea in deliberative theory is that all people subject to a given political decision should have the opportunity or ability to deliberate about, figure out, and better understand (rather than just vote on or elect a representative to deal with) the shared social issues at hand. No agreement exists on just how

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extensive or substantive this opportunity should be, and we should not confuse deliberative democracy with direct democracy or see it as inimical to representative democracy. Over the years, theories have become increasingly nuanced and sophisticated as dedicated adherents work out kinks, respond to criticisms, and incorporate new ideas. Deliberative democracy is normative in nature, and wants to shift the locus of democratic legitimacy from consent, registered through voting, to accountability, or the justification of political decisions to the people bound by them through reasoned argument. This shift for what constitutes legitimacy has implications for mechanisms, which are the procedures that must adequately embody that model’s normative claims. Overall, then, deliberative theorists are in search of institutions and processes that allow for and encourage collective choices to be made through widespread public discussion such that policy outcomes may be publicly justified. I discuss some mechanisms forged within the deliberative-communicative strand of theorizing in a moment, but first I extrapolate a few philosophical convictions inherent in the deliberative model that help clarify the shift seen in this model regarding the purpose and function of democratic politics.

Communicative Rationality and Relational Selves: An Alternative Model

I call deliberative democracy a model because it relies upon, embraces, and advances a certain worldview that, like its counterpart, has particular implications for democratic practice.

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30 Much could be said about the relationship between public deliberation and representation, but this is neither the time nor the place for an extensive literature review on this sub-topic in deliberative theory. See Young (2000, ch. 4), Dryzek (2000, ch. 4&5), and De Greiff “Deliberative Democracy and Group Representation.” Social Theory Practice. 26(3): 397-415, 2000.


This contemporary strand of theorizing seeks to fundamentally reorient assumptions about why citizens engage politically, and about what the role is of democratic politics, and to the extent it does so, deliberative democracy carves out an entirely new model of democracy (that is, it does not just suggest new mechanisms). The main difference between the two models lies squarely within the mentality of the participants, and more generally, in the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie the deliberative sphere. People are understood as interdependent, and their interests as co-constitutive. Knowledge about what is best for society is discovered through reasoning together rather than through a private process of individual reflection in which one appeals to some asocial moral or empirical principle. Under this model, a democratic society has citizens who hold at least certain interests in common, and engage politically with the goal of reaching understanding and coming to agreed-upon solutions and compromises to collective problems, rather than simply winning or getting one’s own way.

This theory thus takes inspiration from political philosophies that emphasize the importance of public spiritedness and view citizenship as an engaged and active process of participation, rather than the mere guaranteed protection of individual liberty. Assumptions of common, rather than conflicting interests, guide the democratic process. Preferences are not purely individualistic and pre-formed, but rather part and parcel of public communicative processes whereby politics is a transformative individuals and people reason together about shared problems to arrive at agreed-upon solutions. Consider how these views of politics and the political subject are further informed by even more basic ontological and epistemological convictions—they are underlain by an understanding of the self as relational and interdependent. The basic metaphysical alternative to the atomism which underlies rational choice theory is a relational ontology in which the relationships between discrete entities are more fundamental
than the entities themselves. Dating back to German and British Idealism, this “doctrine of internal relations” asserts that no entity can be fully understood apart from its relationships with other things – that is, each individual is bound up with other individuals and cannot be conceived of independent from its co-constituents.  

A relational ontology is organic, dynamic, and complex, and implies that the well-being of any single entity is dependent upon the well-being of others and the well being of the whole.

The deliberative model rests on this relational philosophical foundation. Consider, if the most basic definition of an individual self is bound up with other selves, then the framing of that individual’s self-interest is going to inherently include a consideration of the self-interest of others, and thus will not result in fundamental selfishness and competition, but instead in cooperation and in the pursuit of individual yet interrelated interests. A deliberative model of democracy puts emphasis on social actors coming together in recognition of their relationships with one another. Extending this relational ontology into the realm of knowledge leads to a social epistemology that is central to the deliberative strand of theorizing. Instead of viewing legitimate knowledge as something to be pitted against an opponent in a philosophical argument, it is seen instead as what works provisionally relative to a given social or political dilemma, and what is figured out by a group of peers in the process of reasoning together so as to move beyond their particular contextual understandings. Indeed, contemporary Communitarian, Feminist, and Environmental philosophies often begin with a rejection of this very same atomism, whether in terms of epistemology, ontology, society, ecology, morality, or politics.

Two of the most important philosophical contributions that gave rise to deliberative democracy as an explicit political philosophy were Habermas’s theory of communicative

rationality and John Rawls’s political liberalism. Habermas was influenced by the far-flung critique of instrumental rationality and Enlightenment leveraged by Horkheimer and Adorno. Unwilling to abandon an ideal of the overall progressive rationalization of society that appears to characterize modernity, Habermas seeks a more exhaustive concept of reason that does not fall victim to the oppressive, dominating qualities of narrowly-construed strategic rationality, and that better accounts for the operation of human reason in all spheres of action. Communicative action turns out to be the key element in fulfilling this goal. For Habermas, the interaction between people that consists in the give and take of reasons to justify actions and positions is more basic to and comprehensive of human experience in the world. Central to the expanded notion of communicative rationality is the fact that people, in engaging in discourse, are doing so with the goal of reaching mutual understanding, rather than just getting their own way. Because the process involves at minimum two people acting together, communicative rationality is dialogical rather than monological like the moral procedure prescribed by Kant. Habermas says: “rather than ascribing as valid to all others any maxim that I can will to be a universal law, I must submit my maxim to all others for purposes of discursively testing its claim to universality…this version of the universality principle does in fact entail the idea of cooperative process of argumentation.”

35 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume One)* trans. by Thomas McCarthy, Boston, Beacon Press, 1984 (hereafter referred to as *TCA-I*).


38 Habermas’s theory here must be understood in the context of sociological action theories, which prior to him consisted only of teleological, normatively regulated, and dramaturgical action. His exhaustive explications of various theories can be found in pgs 94-101, TCA-I.

The desire to reach mutual understanding is what allows us to attend to particularity without compromising an ideal of universality. Habermas’s extension of communicative rationality into moral and political philosophy is his discourse ethics, which states that actions are only right to the extent that all those who would be affected by them have had an opportunity to discuss and come to consensus about them. Projected into the political sphere, discourse ethics is the deliberative theory of democratic legitimacy, as should be clear by the previous explication—the deliberative model of democracy depends on the moral mandate that decisions are only moral, and thus legitimate, after all parties to be affected by them have a chance to participate in their formulation. Equally important for deliberative democracy were concepts advanced by John Rawls. While his earlier accounts of the original position and the veil of ignorance were monological processes of individual and solitary reflection, he was persuaded by critics and contemporary theories to switch to a more dialogical model that emphasizes public reason and overlapping consensus. These concepts necessitate discussion and dialogue to realize points of commonality, rather than a veil of ignorance, which implies individual reflection. Overall, the deliberative democracy model rests on conceptions of society, politics, and knowledge that diverge significantly from the rational choice alternative. I turn now to the mechanisms implied and required by this framework, which are going to look very different than the aggregative ones found with the rational choice model.

*Expanded Mechanisms in Deliberative Democracy*

The deliberative model’s view of rationality, persons and politics suggests a much richer account of how collectively-binding decisions should get made, and correspondingly allows for a

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much broader understanding of what constitutes a mechanism of political decision-making. A deliberative model of democracy gives us more to work with, so to speak, because what happens before a collectively-binding decision gets made turns out to be as important as, and at times more so than how that decision is finally made. Recall, deliberative democracy puts emphasis on communication, and legitimacy consequently lies in the justifiability of policies to the people subject to them. Presumably, the only way in which a decision-maker will be able to justify a decision in terms that all affected by it could accept would be to involve them in the reasoning process that occurs before the decision is made. Only then will a decision-maker know what kinds of policies would be considered justified among those bound by them, and what kinds of reasons would be considered acceptable. Deliberative democracy theorists focus on the practical aspect of generating collectively-binding decisions from a process of public deliberation. Mechanisms that emphasize communication provide a public space for these kinds of processes to occur, relative to knowledge in general as well as particular interests built upon situated understandings. Mechanisms associated with this model are thus decidedly social (rather than individualist) in nature.

Much time has been dedicated to working out precisely what such mechanisms would look like that allowed for such translation. Deliberative theorists have gone a long way toward providing mechanisms that allow for genuine public deliberation. Some of these mechanisms are smaller scale and emphasize face-to-face genuine deliberation of citizens. Citizen juries are one example of such a mechanism. These involve bringing together a randomly chosen group of citizens to discuss a particular issue, set a policy agenda, or discuss specific options that face the political contingent of people. Smith and Wales describe this: “Over a number of days

42 See Dryzek “Deliberative Impacts: The Macro-Political Uptake of Mini-Publics” for a more exhaustive analysis.
participants are exposed to information about an issue and hear a wide range of views from witnesses, who are selected on the basis of their expertise or on the grounds that they represent affected interests…following a process of deliberation amongst themselves, the jurors produce a decision or provide recommendations in the form of a citizen report.” (2000). Another communicative mechanism referred to as deliberation day was devised by James Fishkin and Bruce Ackerman. They propose a paid holiday preceding national elections in which people all over the country are brought together in local forums for open discussion to exchange ideas about whatever issues they will be voting on. Aside from small-scale forums, John Dryzek argues that even political representation could embody communicative principles if it involved representation of discourse communities rather than arbitrary geographical boundaries. Carefully constructed mechanisms of representation could be genuinely communicative if a group can self-identifies as a community with similar interests and can identify a representative to engage in reflective, dialogical public deliberation with other representatives from varying discursive communities.

Mechanisms under a deliberative democracy model must involve not just registering a comment at a hearing, in writing, or voting at the ballot box. Citizenship under a deliberative model is much more engaged, and this model has more heavily binding requirements for what constitutes democracy and opportunities for democratic engagement. These opportunities for participation should be communicative, involving the opportunity to raise and challenge facts and validity claims made by other parties to deliberation. Whether such communication results in a majority-rule vote, a consensus-based decision, or a draft of a collectively-binding document,

45 Dryzek (2000, ch. 4).
the key is that they are preceded by deliberation about the issue, and everyone has had an opportunity to participate. This is where legitimacy comes from under a deliberative framework and the result is that mechanisms under a deliberative model are greatly expanded. Mechanisms must be crafted to allow for this legitimacy to be brought about—now that we have more mechanisms, the locus of legitimacy lies in something other than an aggregated result.

Concluding Remarks: Why We Must Choose

In this chapter, I have outlined two different models of democracy, noted the mechanisms commonly advocated or utilized by those respective models, and highlighted the relationship between each model and mechanism in terms of the degree to which the fundamentally different presuppositions about politics and the political subject influence the endorsement of certain mechanisms over others. The purpose of this survey has been to provide crucial insights as to why democratic theorists tend to reach such varied conclusions about how modern democratic institutions should be constructed and construed. On the one hand, advocates of deliberative frameworks assume citizens’ opposing interests are not all that crippling, and aggregative mechanisms of voting and electoral representation are fundamentally inadequate for the realization of democratic ideals like cooperative self-governance and collective problem-solving. On the other, rational choice theorists see such hopes as unrealistic, motivated by the conviction that individual preferences are incompatible and fundamentally self-interested (though the rationality that governs their pursuits is the same); they think the role of democracy should be purely to provide a mechanism for adjudicating between these preferences and guarding against power-driven tyranny. While both schools of thought seek normative accounts of what constitutes political legitimacy in a society, they diverge significantly in a number of ways.

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46 This does not mean everyone has to participate, just that the opportunity is genuine.
Ultimately, because the two models are contradictory in many respects, a choice must be made in terms of how the political process and the political subjects implicated therein should be constructed and construed. On the other hand mechanisms, while having some relationship to the model whose assumptions guide their creation, are not intrinsically dependent on that model, and could potentially be utilized for various purposes under any model that renders them intelligible.

In the next chapter, I turn to the question of which model is most appropriate to endorse and I return to the case to answer it. I find a deliberative democracy model appears to be most appropriate for guiding attempts to transform what democracy should look like in Appalachian environmental politics. Yet the empirical challenge of a political sphere dominated by adversarial actors is presents a challenge is a legitimate one – while philosophy is undoubtedly normative in nature, when we are dealing with political prescriptions, practical applicability is an important factor in the appeal of a given theory. I turn in the second half of Chapter III to an historical explanation of how rational choice theory’s view of political subjects as competitive and adversarial came to be accepted so unquestionably. I argue that the apparent empirical dominance of this kind of person in politics is a contingent rather than a necessary fact of human existence, due in part to the fact that no mechanisms exist that allow people to act in accordance with motivations that are not adversarial in nature. Reversal of this absence could lead to reversal of adversarial political actors.
CHAPTER III

POTENTIALS AND PROBLEMS IN THE DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY MODEL

Introduction

In the last chapter I argued that when looking for a political ideal to guide change in Appalachian environmental politics, a choice must be made between the two models that dominate contemporary theorizing about democracy. I now move to more closely examine which is most appropriate in the Appalachian case with which I am concerned. I find the deliberative democracy model most normatively desirable. It certainly has the strongest argumentative appeal—the requirements of my case and failures of current institutions crafted under a rational choice model, coupled with persuasive arguments given for deliberative democracy by its advocates, suggests deliberative model provides the best guidance for political transformation in Appalachia surrounding the mountaintop removal (MTR) controversy. Moreover, this model subsumes that which is most valuable about the rational choice model: its aggregative mechanisms that sometimes prove quite useful. Yet deliberative democracy is not without difficulties. It demands sweeping changes in contemporary social and political institutions. Moreover, it is possible that the gap is just too wide between this model’s normatively binding requirements for the character of the political subject and the empirical realities of the world in which we live; many political situations implicate a population that is deeply divided and unwilling to work together and consists primarily of adversaries as envisioned by the rational choice model.

While a rational choice model may not be normatively desirable, its empirical accuracy relative to certain situations prompts us to think twice before abandoning it solely on the basis of the normative appeal of its alternative. Endorsing a deliberative model forces us to address the
empirical problematic that presents itself in deeply divided societies. What should be done when political actors in a given community actually are adversarial, competitive, unwilling to work together? Whether deliberative democracy is fully equipped to deal with this in a satisfactory way is unclear. In this Chapter, I offer an historical/psychological explanation for why adversarial citizens seem to dominate in political affairs. I claim that the past half-century of explanatory political theory and corresponding social science research strengthened an adversarial view of persons, and the hermeneutic concept of the *self-fulfilling prophecy* phenomenon helps explain how the dissemination of these views through various mediums in society (including available political mechanisms) may be to blame for the dominance rational choice-type people in politics. To the extent that this dominance can be attributed to social science research whose findings rest on questionable assumptions, to the hasty acceptance of its findings by the larger society (including political theorists), and to the proliferation of political subjects acting more in accordance with dominant ideals than with natural tendencies, it appears more an historical accident than a necessary fact of human political behavior. I end by arguing that just as aggregative political mechanisms potentially (re)produce adversarial political subjects, carefully constructed communicative mechanisms have emancipatory potential because they could conceivably serve to (re)create *cooperative* political subjects who are more in line with deliberative democracy’s normative requirements.

**In Favor of a Deliberative Model with Contingent Mechanisms**

A deliberative democracy model is undoubtedly the most appropriate for my Appalachian case for two main reasons. First, the most common justifications for this alternative framework speak directly to the failures of currently existing political structures and processes that govern MTR mining. Including citizen perspectives and opinions about collective problems, and taking
seriously the importance of the local, situated knowledge they possess would greatly improve the epistemic dimension of MTR-related policies. Moreover, the recognition dimension of justice demands such inclusive procedures, and only communicative mechanisms advocated by this framework meet such a normative requirements. The second overarching reason for endorsing a deliberative model is that it can subsume aggregative mechanisms, whereas the kind of person envisioned by the rational choice model renders communicative mechanisms unintelligible.

Epistemics and Justice in Appalachian Environmental Policy Decisions

The most ubiquitous argument in favor of a deliberative approach states generally that policies arrived at through a process of public deliberation are better than those produced by alternative mechanisms for a number of reasons. The instrumental value of deliberation is that policies are improved epistemically because more information and more ideas can be brought to the table, and the more we are exposed to, the more likely we are to discover the most appropriate course of action.¹ Public deliberation is also said to be intrinsically a more just political process because all those who would be affected by a policy have an opportunity to discuss and determine the relative merits of that policy, and through doing so assert cultural and other aspects of their particularities.² Overall, then, policies are more effective when generated through a process of public deliberation because those subject to them actually understand why and how the policies were crafted, feel substantively involved in their creation, and are thus more


inclined to endorse and abide by them. To demonstrate these points and how they speak to challenges in Appalachia, I return to the case and bring in a particularly difficult and salient issue that could benefit from public discussion: water contamination caused by coal-waste storage practices.

“Slurry” is a result of washing coal before sending it to processing plants; giant slurry ‘ponds’ can be found throughout Appalachia. Coal companies also inject the refuse into old, abandoned underground mine shafts. Various toxic chemicals can be identified in this mixture, and cancer and other illness clusters can be found throughout the region near these ponds and injections. Sludge Safety Project in West Virginia is a coalition of non-profit organizations who aim to expose this (especially the underground injections that are very poorly regulated), mobilize communities, and pressure government to do something. The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (WDEP) has documented some four hundred cases of coal slurry waste being injected into underground mine shafts. Residents of Rawl in Mingo County, West Virginia, are greatly impacted by this process. Nearby households who draw their water from wells now see black or brown liquids coming from their faucets and many suffer from a plethora of peculiar health problems. Residents suspect these health issues are related to their contaminated water, but have been kept out of processes that regulate the waste and assured by industry experts and policy makers that they are in no danger.

I contend that policies surrounding slurry injections and water-related public health concerns would be greatly improved by more participatory and inclusive practices of public deliberation. Currently, the WDEP contends that although the slurry injections contains over one

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3 For more on this particular dimension of the struggle against mountaintop removal and the coal industry in general, go to www.sludgesafety.org.

4 "When Mountains Move" John G. Mitchell, National Geographic, March 2006.
hundred different chemicals used in coal preparation, residents can rest assured that slurry stored in mines will not be able to enter well water. These claims depend on narrowly technoscientific investigation of knowledge elites – technocrats, engineers, and scientists, and in the mean time, residents are suffering severe health effects. In this case, the knowledge and experience of local residents is neither as valued as a state department’s tests nor integrated into their own water quality policy. Traditional policy-making procedures, especially surrounding environmental politics (risk assessment, EIS statements, permitting procedures, etc), consistently privilege expert knowledge, assuming other kinds of knowledge are irrelevant or less important than technical expertise. This approach is coming under increased scrutiny, and the relevance of a deliberative democracy framework for a new approach to environmental policy making is being increasingly explored.6

Technocratic procedures refuse to acknowledge the seriousness of the situation these citizens face by minimizing the role impacted residents are offered. The claim that public deliberation improves the epistemic dimension of policies draws heavily upon theories of social epistemology which challenge the primacy given to technical, positivistic, scientific analyses of policy and environmental issues.7 Privileging this kind of knowledge has resulted in failures of current policies that fail to take into consideration the situated perspectives of the issues, which weakens the policies themselves and potentially puts people in danger. In Appalachia, residents

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5 "What is Underground Coal Slurry Injection?” Sludge Safety Project of Coal River Mountain Watch <www.sludgesafety.org/coal_slurry_inj.html>


7 See, for instance, Sandra Harding “Democratizing Philosophy of Science for Local Knowledge Movements,” Gender and Technology 4:1, 1-23, 2000; see also Fischer (2000, part I).
face the problem of not being included in the policies and regulation of their water quality, yet designation of problem spots by those experiencing the issue from the ground level could greatly expedite scientific and technical environmental assessment of pollution and other waste-storage risks. As regards solutions, local understandings of the land could help identify springs that are not affected by groundwater pollution. These are only a couple of ways the inclusion mandated by the deliberative democracy model would improve the epistemic dimension of environmental policies in Appalachian.

In emphasizing the citizen’s perspective, communicative mechanisms are also more just—the normative dimension of participatory justice is only met through discursive processes. This justification considers public deliberation intrinsically valuable in that it allows for assertions of identity and particularity that are required for a fully just political system; people are allowed and encouraged to share their views. Deliberative democracy has a distinct advantage over rational choice theory in questions of justice for the simple reason that it actually explores them; the latter dismisses attempts to define and pursue any substantive idea of justice, defaulting to a thin, utilitarian conception the ideal. Iris Young argues quite cogently that justice is inextricably linked to the capacity and opportunity to express oneself in a way that is culturally and socially situated; this requires verbal communication. The importance of recognition justice is important in the Appalachian case because to the extent that certain conceptions of what is good and valuable become institutionalized in the apparatuses of the modern state, then those whose positions rest on value commitments that are out of step with the dominant societal values are not considered equal.

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Aggregative mechanisms do not offer any form of participation that allows for expression of alternative identities and value commitments; indeed, the rational choice model considers any debate on questions of *ends* unimportant and potentially destabilizing. Yet economic approaches that emphasize distribution or economic benefits and burdens of MTR do not grasp the richness of Appalachian culture and the intricate relationship citizens have to the land around them, their *homeplace*. Any framework that does not emphasize a robustly participatory dimension that views participation as personal expression of particular situational experience falls short for this region because of the degree to which Appalachian culture rests upon value commitments that differ from dominant societal values such as mobility, unrootedness, etc. The particular situated perspective of powerful national actors like politicians and high-level company executives that are bias toward economic arguments and concerns renders them incapable of recognizing the social, cultural, and historical context of mountaintop removal mining. If these implicit endorsements are going to influence dominant perceptions of what is the right thing to do about MTR, then democratic ideals of equality, fairness, and self-determination require that the only just course of action is to allow local inhabitants to express their own situated perspective of the situation and the consequences environmental policies have for their culture.

*A Model that Gives Us More to Work With*

Besides its improvement over currently existing procedures in Appalachia, deliberative democracy is more desirable because it gives us more to work with. Specifically, the deliberative model can allow for aggregative mechanisms, and not the other way around. The basis for this claim is partially psychological and is more fully developed in the next section, but for now suffice it to say that the view of persons embraced by the rational choice model makes communicative mechanisms unintelligible. That is, if individuals are at base competitive and
rational only in an instrumental sense, then discussion-based procedures are even more susceptible to strategic manipulation than are aggregative mechanisms. Many writing in the rational choice strand of theorizing expand on exactly this point in an attempt to discredit the deliberative conceptualization of democracy.⁹ Whereas rational choice theorists scoff at the idea that communicative mechanisms could do anything but generate problems, deliberative theorists have gone to great lengths to investigate the potentially useful role of aggregative mechanisms in deliberative politics.¹⁰ Nothing is inherently wrong with mechanisms of aggregating individual preferences. At no point to do the claims advanced in a deliberative model of democracy suggest it could not allow for both communicative and aggregative mechanisms in politics, depending on the context, and many theorists focus carefully on figuring out exactly how mechanisms traditionally associated with a rational choice framework could be extrapolated and put into use in a deliberative democracy without compromising the basic integrity of the latter.

This point suggests a deliberative democracy model is more appealing if only for a logical reason: it can subsume aggregative mechanisms, and not vice-versa. A rational choice model rules out the possibility of utilizing communicative mechanisms simply by virtue of the kind of citizen it is likely to engender. Voting, for instance, does not itself re-create adversarial subjects. Since deliberative democracy is not inconsistent with either communicative or aggregative mechanisms, appropriate mechanisms in this framework should be determined primarily by context. Indeed, the model suggests that it remains the province of a given political community to decide which mechanisms they think are most appropriate to invoke to solve a collective problem. This further strengthens the dimensions of participatory justice found in this


model. Overall, then, a deliberative democracy model is most appealing because it subsumes that which is most valuable in the alternative: mechanisms of aggregation that may sometimes prove helpful and desirable for a given political community. This model seems the most normatively desirable political ideal to guide attempts at transforming political affairs in Appalachia. It produces epistemically improved policies, offers a broader framework for decision-making, and it more robustly meets requirements of justice (especially that of recognition).

Yet this framework is not without problems. Specifically, Appalachia presents a particularly poignant challenge of a deeply divided political community that is dominated by adversarial actors of the kind envisioned under the rational choice model. Coal-related political and social controversies often involve strategic and mean-spirited political behavior involving threats and violence, and competition for power and influence, behavior more consistent with the rational choice model’s view of persons than that advanced by the deliberative model. Complicating matters further, this problem runs deeper than any particular divisive issue—as I pointed out in the Introduction, the history of deep divisions in Appalachia goes back centuries, and political issues feed into and fuel divisions. If MTR were ended tomorrow, I contend that communities would still be divided unless more deeply ingrained divisions were first reconciled. Appalachia thus offers a clear example of what is referred to in deliberative democracy literature as a “divided society,” and its political dynamics mirror similar long-standing controversies surrounding racial, ethnic, religious, or other deep-seeded conflicts. While the deliberative-communicative strand of theorizing has heavily debated and improved upon a whole host of challenges it faces,¹¹ this obvious one – that of mean people in divided societies who have no

desire to engage with one another in the cooperative fashion mandated by the deliberative democracy model – has only received brief and cursory attention,\(^\text{12}\) and it is to this empirical problematic that I now turn.

But Wait! What about Mean People? The Challenge of Divided Societies

In situations like Appalachia that involve truly adversarial political actors, the model’s empirically inaccurate description of the political subject may present too much of a hurdle in that the overall framework provides no mechanisms for transforming adversaries into friends.\(^\text{13}\) While I do not think we should immediately discard an appealing normative theory on the basis of empirical inadequacy, I do argue that deliberative theorists have not given enough attention to the practical question of what to do when a group of people are extremely divided around an issue, and are steeped in controversy and hatred that goes back decades or centuries. The communicative mechanisms outlined in Chapter III, for instance, are primarily effective among groups of people that have no prior history of deep divisions.\(^\text{14}\) Before moving to address the larger philosophical problems this lack stems from, I use the remainder of this chapter to establish a more basic justification for the claim that political mechanisms, if carefully constructed, have the potential to transform adversaries into friends. Defending this point


\(^{13}\) For an account that emphasizing the importance of friendship dimensions of political practice, and political aspects of friendship, see Sarah Goering "Choosing Our Friends: Moral Partiality and the Value of Diversity" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 34(3): 400-413, 2003.

requires demonstrating the ultimate contingency of adversarial political attitudes; after all, if the ubiquity of such kinds of persons is the result of something intrinsic to the human condition, then deliberative democracy is a hopeless endeavor and we can stop before we begin.

Political Theory and Twentieth Century Social Science Research

The challenge of adversarial subjects is ironic because it is exactly this empirical fact that leads rational choice theorists to argue for the superiority of that model. To speak of empirical facts in any capacity brings us to a key tension in democracy theory between explanatory claims and normative ones. An attempt to strictly divide between the two can be traced back to Hobbes, whose social contract was meant as an *explanation* for political organization; yet the inseparability of explanatory from normative claims ones is apparent in that Hobbes moves from saying political actors *are* a certain way to making prescriptions about the way politics *should* work based on that fact: it must accommodate people so characterized.¹⁵ In contemporary times, a marked shift toward the explanatory pole characterized the *revisionist period* in political science, and it was in this period that rational choice theory applications emergence dominant.¹⁶ The hugely influential pluralist and market models of democracy emerged concurrently, broadcasting proudly their empirical, descriptive, and explanatory emphasis.¹⁷ Widespread excitement about the prospects of the capacity of science and logic to explain every aspect of humans and the world was characteristic of this era,¹⁸ and political thinkers were no exception,

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advocating a shift away from “the normative question of how democracy should work” toward “the scientific question of how it actually worked.”¹⁹ To be sure, political science was motivated by noble intentions to do this: thinkers in this field had a fervent desire to understand and explain what went wrong in “democracies” such as Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. It was in this revisionist period that Enlightenment-era adversarial and overly rational views of the political subject were finally solidified by social science research because of the influence scientific findings have on the social imaginary and normative theorizing.

Twentieth century social science research is certainly a broad topic, and so I limit myself here to an interest in those studies that emerged suggesting people had tendencies toward quite un-democratic and authoritarian personality traits because these findings were hugely influential on the emergence and rise to prominence of the rational choice strand of theorizing in political thought. If it is the case that such research is based on social and methodological assumptions that are themselves suspect, this would cast a shadow of doubt over the validity of this mid-20th century political science research that so heavily influenced the normative philosophies of democracy that crafted our current political institutions. If its findings were haphazardly disseminated through society at large through a) the translation of its explanatory ‘facts’ into normative prescriptions, and b) the restriction of political engagement by institutional adaptation of those prescriptions, then the current dominance of adversarial political actors could be based just as much on historical accident than any necessary or natural fact of human existence. To the extent that the apparent ubiquity of *homo economicus* in political activity can be demonstrated to be the least bit contingent, we have reason to explore how it could be undermined. I seek to call into question the value-neutrality of this research and show that its empirical findings should not

stand alone as justifications for anything, and must be evaluated in conjunction with the values that informed the research.

Just as ontology and epistemology influence how we perceive the world, and what we see as possibilities in persons and politics, these fundamental assumptions also influence political and social science research in restrictive and fundamentally detrimental ways.\(^\text{20}\) One key implication of atomism is that it gives rise to methodological individualism in social science research methodology. This commitment holds that society is best explained in terms of the actions of individual rational actors. Popper’s formulation is quite straightforward: "The task of social theory is to construct and to analyze our sociological models carefully in descriptive or nominalist terms, that is to say, in terms of individuals, of their attitudes, expectations, relations, etc. – a postulate which may be called “methodological individualism.”\(^\text{21}\) This is yet another incarnation of the Cartesian scientific-epistemological framework that found its pinnacle in the logical empiricism that characterized science generally at this time, and it is in this context that the commitment to methodological individualism should be understood. Although potentially useful as an explanatory tool for certain phenomena, the problem with this approach is that because it refuses to explain individual behavior by reference to relations within the whole, it blinds itself to the possibility that the causal arrow may flow in the other direction; that is, social forces may better explain phenomena, including the behavior of the individual.\(^\text{22}\)

\(^\text{20}\) The degree to which this is the case has been heavily theorized in post-colonial studies of science.


\(^\text{22}\) Held gives the example of their failure along these lines in the analysis of how power works in individual relationships and politics. The Pluralist model of power as solely the property of an individual or a group of aggregated individuals was wholly unequipped to explain the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. See Held (1996, 201-214).
In addition to a commitment to methodological individualism on the level of methodology which was influenced by a certain social ontology, underlying assumptions also contributed to the kinds of subjects researchers chose to investigate. They already thought people were basically mean and strategic—indeed, the research itself was motivated by the emergence of Fascism on a mass scale. To demonstrate the influence of the conviction that people are basically strategic and competitive on choice of subject matter, note that research abounds on the authoritarian personality, whereas its corollary, the democratic personality, has received little to no attention.23 This relates back to the dominance of a rational choice model in a very clear way—because the latter assumes people are naturally mean-spirited and un-democratic, it devises ways of testing and measuring those people according to narrow criteria that mirror its assumptions. For example, the f-scale or Fascism-scale is a series of questions designed to test people’s latent tendencies toward fascism; no corresponding Democracy-scale was ever developed. One might argue that the d-type person was simply someone who demonstrated no fascist tendencies when tested on the f-scale. However, as we will see in a moment, the lack of an articulated archetype of the democratic personality has psychological-hermeneutic repercussions for what possibilities people see in their own selves.

Although the myopic research agenda of 20th century social science was understandable given its position in the wake of World War II and the rise of totalitarianism and fascism, I argue that its one-sidedness is not excusable and indeed discredits the findings. It seems the research aimed primarily at explaining phenomena that were already assumed in the Western scientific tradition to have ontological status and were thought to originate in the individual, and so the

23 Fred Greenstein, “Personality and Political Socialization: The Theories of Authoritarian and Democratic Character,” The Annals of the American Academy, 1965, 81-95, has a great literature review of this research, including sophisticated analyses of the underlying motivations for this research, and suggestions of some consequences of its lopsidedness. Many of my points are derived from his account.
enlightenment-era atomistic, competitive view of persons and society was thus confirmed. To make my final point, I return to the explanatory-normative dimension of larger-level political theorizing. Recall, the revisionist period was characterized by a supposed bracketing of normative dimensions to the point that data collection and empirical studies took over to the near disappearance of normative theory. Yet it should now be apparent that such bracketing of normative dimensions is impossible even on the most basic level of research methodology and choice of subjects.

Important here is the fact that a number of theoretical texts were published at this time arguing explicitly for the economization of politics, suggesting that democracy be viewed “along the lines of a market in which political parties, like firms, compete with one another for votes.”24 While these theories may have been based on empirical data, the implications that were derived for democratic politics had an undeniable normative dimension. Indeed, people should be selfish, these theories argued. It is exactly the fact that people pursue their own interests that creates shifting majorities and decreases chances of majority tyranny. Individual self-interested pursuit is better than a herd-mentality pursuing an elusive general will that could potentially give rise to authoritarianism under the guise of democratic politics. Economic models should be applied to explain political behavior and to model politics because research suggested that people pursued only their self-interest in politics just as they did in economics. Inspired by empirical research, revisionist theorists inadvertently or intentionally systematizes normative frameworks for democracy that advanced as desirable a view of self-interest and competition in politics.

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24 Joseph Schumpeter’s classic *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* jumpstarted this trend and it found its pinnacle in Anthony Downs’s *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, which is often considered the beginning of social choice theory in political science.
David Held puts it perfectly: “empirical findings, once again, become inadequately justified normative virtues.”

This strand of normative democracy theorizing had an important effect on the development of more systematized aggregative mechanisms in politics. Theorists were subsequently motivated to focus their attention on “the processes creating and resulting from individuals combining their efforts in groups or in the competition for power” at the expense of mechanisms that could bring people together to cooperatively discuss issues. Emergence at this time of the fields like social choice, public choice, and collective choice theory demonstrate a clear focus on mechanisms of aggregation and their normative desirability. Ironing out the problems and inconsistencies that may arise through processes of aggregating individual preferences was paramount, and how a political decision that must take into consideration a number of alternating individual preferences can adequately aggregate those together into a consistent collective choice that is not arbitrary and does not fall victim to any number of problems was the primary concern of the majority of political scientists for decades. While these studies are not unimportance (no matter a model’s moral psychology, preference aggregation critical to in any democratic system), what is unfortunate is that all this activity meant a lack of emphasis on devising political mechanisms consistent with alternative normative frameworks for democratic citizenship and collective decision-making, such as those that would have been recommended, for instance, by a Deweyan model of discussion-based democracy. I

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26 Ibid.

demonstrate in the next section that the lack of other kinds of mechanisms has extreme consequences in what persons see as possibilities in themselves.

The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy, Political Mechanisms, and the (Re)Creation of Political Subjects

So far I have shown that methodologically suspect and one-sided empirical research was haphazardly or inappropriately taken up by the society at large, specifically through the claims put forth by academic political science and theory, and the influence those claims have on the way political institutions shift and evolve over time. The last component necessary to demonstrate the contingency of adversarial political subjects, and to jumpstart the discussion about potential reversal of such tendencies, is to invoke the phenomenon of a self-fulfilling prophecy to explain how the claims advanced by advocates of elitist, pluralist, or economist democracy percolate through the social imaginary and (re)create the very kind of person they presume. The self-fulfilling prophecy refers to a process whereby an original and possibly false definition of a situation influences the way an individual perceives the situation, which in turn evokes a new behavior from that individual; the new behavior actually “makes the original false conception come ‘true’.”28 If I believe you hate me, even if you do not initially hate me I may act in mean or rude ways based on my belief; this in turn will likely cause you to actually begin hating me. This phenomenon was first systematized and investigated in social psychology, and particularly in education where it was routinely observed that a teacher’s prior expectations of students’ performance correlated with those students actual performance. Further study indicated that a causal relationship was at work and that teacher expectations had more to do with

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outcomes than did other factors such as a student’s IQ or previous record of academic performance.²⁹

The self-fulfilling prophecy phenomenon operates along a number of levels besides individual relationships – consider another commonly cited example: a run on a bank occurs because some coincidence (lots of people happen to be there at once) and misperception (the bank must be insolvent since so many people want their money) causes people to all withdraw their money at once, thus making the misperception come true (result is actual insolvency).³⁰ It appears, then, that the initial false definition can come from an active definer (such as a teacher), from a spontaneous social situation (like at the bank), or most importantly for my purposes, from society at large, where the concept is often invoked to explain the perpetuation of war in society.³¹ Fear of war leads to stockpiling of weapons and training of soldiers, which alerts enemies of war preparation; once alerted, enemies decide to prepare themselves as well, and the ultimate result is war. If in the first place the assumption had been that no war would occur, then indeed, no war would have occurred.

This example demonstrates how general assumptions held by governing systems or society at large can lead to empirical affirmation of an initially false interpretation or definition. When the process is more the result of institutional infrastructure and the societal imaginary, I consider Ian Hacking’s description of the “looping effects of human kinds” another appropriate concept reflecting the same basic phenomenon. He explicates this hermeneutic feedback mechanism whereby “people classified in a certain way tend to conform to or grow into the ways

²⁹ Brameld (1972). For an extensive survey of this research and the concept in general, see Wilkins (1972).
³⁰ This was in fact the original example cited by the progenitor of the concept, Merton.
³¹ Alport (1950)
that they are described” (especially, he notes, by experts). The relevance of this idea to political theory, science, and practice is paramount, as it demonstrates why it matters that no archetype of *the democratic personality* was ever devised or systematized – how people are classified, especially by experts, does affect how they manifest in reality.

So what are the consequences of all of this? I argue that the main point to glean is that we may very well be creating the kinds of political subjects envisioned by the rational choice model. Consider that both competitive and cooperative traits have evolutionary advantage, and the idea of power-driven selfish monads naturally in conflict with one another is much disputed in social philosophy. Since making a final call about which view of persons most accurately describes humans’ natural tendencies is seemingly impossible (especially given the difficulty of psychological research to distinguish nature versus nurture with any consistency) it is reasonable to posit that the dominance of adversarial subjects is a contingent rather than necessary fact of human political experience. Were the dominant modern, Western definition of the individual and his motivations based more on a relational ontology that emphasized cooperation and social knowledge, and were *that* view investigated and disseminated throughout the society at large, it could be the case that people would recognize alternative tendencies in their own ways of being and more closely resemble that different view of persons. Moreover, if political mechanisms were crafted accordingly, persons would have an opportunity to act on motivations that were not purely self-interested and pre-decided; such capacity could turn out to be as inherent in human behavior as is the rational choice view.

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I argue the above discussion suggests that no evidence exists to ultimately confirm that people naturally do act only in their self-interest; instead, evidence suggests only that social scientists working within a society premised upon such assumptions can easily find evidence of selfishness among its members. This confirmation bias should caution us against unquestioning acceptance of rational choice theory’s claims, and lead us to affirm the ultimate contingency of this kind of person in political affairs. Unfortunately, the rational choice model’s view of persons is well-ingrained in the modern, Western societal imaginary. So ubiquitous is this view of human “nature” and motivation that individuals often do not even try to conceive of themselves in any other way. Anyone who has tried to teach political philosophy to a class of undergraduates, or who has tried to convince fellow humans that we could work together to solve a problem, can attest to the fact that so many accept as absolute truth the moral psychology of the rational choice model. The lack of social science research exploring the view of persons derived from alternative philosophical positions is lamentable. A comprehensive normative framework for how democratic citizens should behave was intentionally discarded in the revisionist period and the consequence is a conspicuous absence in our social imaginary of a view of persons that corresponds to what is envisioned under the deliberative model.

If empirical reality of the political subject seems to be a function of certain historical contingencies and the ways in which those contingencies become institutionalized and reproduced, this suggests empirical accuracy should not be what guides our endorsement of a given model of democracy. The question then becomes, if a normative framework seems more appealing, but practically speaking does not reflect current social and political realities, what could be done to reverse the effects of the social system that has created that individual in the first place? Here the emancipatory potential of the self-fulfilling prophecy becomes apparent: it
may be possible for a model, if widely accepted as normatively desirable, to model the political agent in accordance with a definition that is seemingly empirically false. To be sure, I do not intend to paint a completely determinist picture here. Hacking points out that though people tend to conform to how they are defined, “they also evolve in their own ways, so that the classifications and descriptions have to be constantly revised” (21). This suggests that descriptions matter, and so do opportunities for action. It is the latter that renders my account a dynamic rather than static one. Actions, especially through political mechanisms, are what allow people to evolve organically and in their own personal ways within the context of a new normative ideal. It is to this point that I now turn.

So far I have argue that just as a self-fulfilling prophecy phenomenon helps explains the current dominance of adversarial political actors, it also allows us to claim things could indeed be otherwise. A better understanding of this process helps us envision how to reverse the societal trends delineated above. Let’s look at the number of ways it might take effect. Recall, a self-fulfilling prophecy results from an original false conception that influences the way an individual experiences a situation; yet how is that definition disseminated? I argue that two main avenues perpetuate the false conception—one is media in general (television, radio, pop-culture references, etc); examining how to reverse this aspect is not my intention in this thesis, but is certainly an important topic. The second source is of more interest, and it returns us to the fundamental model-mechanism relationship. Recall, these are related in that a mechanism does not allow for that which the model (in the image of which it was created) sees as impossible. Aggregative mechanisms do not allow for political preference transformation because the rational choice model sees preferences as fixed. While nothing is inherently bad with mechanisms that aggregate pre-formed preferences, they do restrict behavior to certain actions
(voting, bargaining, etc) that do not involve preference transformation. I suggest that insofar as they restrict certain behaviors and encourage/allow others, political mechanisms play a quite important role in self-fulfilling prophecies of a society.

A mechanism is the realm of political action, and the *kinds* of action available matter. Opportunities afforded to citizens influence the interpretative possibilities political actors see for themselves, and influence how they define themselves in relation to the political and social environments in which they are situated. For instance, a person who is encouraged to share an opinion or preference in a non-confrontational way comes to see herself as someone who is capable of speaking in such a way; if that opinion may actually influence a decision, she sees herself as someone who is substantively engaged in politics.\(^{33}\) Self-definitions arise in part from institutional assumptions. It might be the case, then, that by accommodating primarily adversarial political subjects and reflecting atomistic assumptions in the procedures, aggregative mechanisms simply highlight and exacerbate these dispositions in people, rather than respond to some necessary fact of the matter. So long as aggregative mechanisms are the only realm of political action, common perceptions in our individual and social imaginations go unchallenged and are unlikely to erode in any expedient fashion. If, on the other hand, communicative forums are created which assume and encourage the recognition of interdependence and cooperation, then actors within these forums could see new potentialities revealed in that political space, and through acting within them, transform their own self-perceptions.

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\(^{33}\) Further research into concepts put forth in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and sociology could offer a lot of insight on this point.
Concluding Remarks: Expanding Mechanisms Farther in Deliberative Democracy

In this chapter, I have argued that a deliberative democracy model is most appealing to guide political change in Appalachia if it can seriously address one particularly salient empirical challenge that has been commonly ignored in the literature. Addressing that challenge begins by demonstrating the contingency of adversarial behavior in the political sphere, and I have shown that certain preconceptions about persons and rationality influenced the social science research that claimed to ‘prove’ the inevitability of such behavior, thus undermining the prescriptions that flowed from such empirical findings in normative democracy theory. Moreover, hermeneutic phenomena such as the self-fulfilling prophecy and the looping effects of human kinds suggest that political subjects will indeed be able act cooperatively if given the opportunity, especially if it is assumed in advance that they will behave in such a way. Consequently, the empirical inaccuracy of the kind of person generally envisioned by deliberative democracy is not in principle an insurmountable challenge. Yet practically speaking it will be overcome only if the framework theorizes and systematizes mechanisms specifically attuned to this problem, aimed at transforming adversarial political actors in accordance with new normative ideals of open-minded attitudes and cooperative behavior; so far, it has failed to do so, and I explore why in the next chapter.

Because under a deliberative democracy framework, decisions must be preceded by some form of political public deliberation, and because many real-world situations (ironically, usually the very ones which need to be publicly discussed) involve adversarial political actors who make constructive discussion nearly impossible to achieve, I argue that whatever processes help engender the kind of character required for deliberation should themselves be considered mechanisms under a deliberative democracy framework. That is, we must explore not only what
is most useful in transforming preferences or transmitting public opinion to governing officials, but also which communicative mechanisms would most likely facilitate the transformation of adversarial actors into more cooperative and open-minded democratic citizens. So which mechanisms help most in the service of the long-term project of moving a political community from one whose view of political engagement is grounded in a rational choice model replete with atomism and individualism, competition and strategic rationality only, to one that is informed by a deliberative democracy model, and engenders a view of persons and politics as it exists under this alternative? Indeed, Ian Hacking’s analysis suggests that because people have a tendency to conform to ways in which they are defined, the first step in this reversal process is to craft an exhaustive and normatively defensible framework describing the kind of person envisioned in a deliberative democracy. Then we can carefully construct mechanisms for personal transformation with a mind to situational nuances. A lack of focus on such mechanisms in the deliberative democracy framework is unfortunate. I take up this task in my next chapter, considering in the process why the empirical problematic that concerns me is so poorly handled in the literature, and what this suggests for the future of this strand of theorizing.
CHAPTER IV
DYNAMICS OF CHARACTER IN PUBLIC DELIBERATION AND PRIVATE COMMUNICATION: MECHANISMS FOR HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION

Introduction

Phenomena like the self-fulfilling prophecy and the looping effects of human kinds suggest we should be able to utilize what is currently an empirically inaccurate description of political actors, devise mechanisms that accommodate people so characterized and give participants the benefit of the doubt, assuming they might just rise to the occasion and act in accordance with the alternative description/expectation. This process has the potential to bring out cooperative potential behavior even if people previously appeared adversarial in political affairs. It is unknown whether we could ever determine which philosophical position on human moral psychology is ultimately correct; what’s more, the emancipatory potential of the self-fulfilling prophecy and related phenomena suggests we have the capacity, at least to some extent, to mold ourselves as humans in accordance with whatever moral psychology fits our needs or desires. As a realm of action through which the self-fulfilling prophecy may operate, political mechanisms hold potential for transformation. So why have deliberative theorists paid so little attention to these kinds of mechanisms?

In this chapter, I argue that the deliberative democracy strand of theorizing is, like so much political theory, guilty of marginalizing the experiences of persons whose way of being is inconsistent with dominant, accepted norms (especially political ones), people who are deemed too passionate or overly emotional to participate in affairs of governance; if this strand of theorizing were to take seriously embodied aspects of expression and personal psychological transformation, the importance of processes such as healing and reconciliation, learning and
trust-building, as political mechanisms would be recognized. I begin in Section 1 with an account of the ideal political subject as envisioned by the deliberative democracy model. After acknowledging that the virtues outlined are indeed desirable, I argue that deliberative democracy theorists often make an egregious error in requiring participants to exhibit such virtues before they enter into deliberation. This exclusionary tendency has generated a strong reaction against this strand of theorizing which I explore and respond to at the end of Section 1; this motivates me to heavily emphasize in Section 2 to the importance of a feminist perspective for the deliberative model. Specifically, this perspective reveals that while an emphasis on “character formation” and “acquisition of virtue” is not in itself negative, these should not be considered separate from processes of healing and reconciliation, especially in communities that exhibit deep divisions. Moreover, the embodied aspects of such processes must not be ignored. Because healing connotes embodied, personal processes, and because character formation has traditionally been construed as something that happens before politics, deliberative theorists have failed to explore how such processes might happen in political spaces, through communicative mechanisms themselves. This is too bad, seeing as how such processes so centrally involve a process of public learning and intersubjective recognition that is important for deliberative democracy. I end the chapter by outlining some key components of mechanisms for healing and reconciliation to transform adversarial political actors into cooperative ones.

The “Ideal” Deliberative Citizen: A Particularly Influential Account

Creating a new definition is extremely important for the ultimate transformation of adversarial political subjects. In this section, I summarize of one of the most influential and exhaustive characterizations of citizens involved in public deliberation – that of Amy Guttmann
and Dennis Thompson.¹ I look at Gutmann and Thompson’s theory for a number of reasons. First, it is important in terms of the sheer size of responses it has generated. Moreover, their account of ideal deliberation under ideal conditions is normatively appealing in a number of ways. Their exhaustive picture of the deliberative citizen, the way in which one’s claims should be made, and the characteristics of the environment in which those claims are advanced and defended, are all reasonable, defensible, and desirable. The controversy surrounding Gutmann and Thompson’s account does not center on it being inaccurate per se, but rather on their emphasis that participants conform only to these standards in all circumstances of public deliberation, and further, that people not be allowed to be participate in the first place unless they do so. Indeed, its shortcomings are another motivation for me to expand on it so extensively – they have inspired a rich dialogue between deliberative theorists, and it is precisely within this dialogue that I locate my contribution to deliberative democracy theory. I criticize deliberative democracy frameworks for being too binding in terms of character requirements, not because those are not appropriate virtues, but because these requirements are not accompanied by any sort of roadmap to arrive at them when they are not present.

Reciprocity and the Deliberative Perspective

Gutmann and Thompson want a new theory of democracy that secures “a central role for moral discussion in political life,” preoccupied as they are with the “persistence of moral disagreement” in a pluralistic society. They concern themselves with the procedural principles that must guide deliberation in order for any moral discussion to progress. They put forth substantive requirements for form and content of communication, as well as for the attitude of

participants in a deliberative setting. Reciprocity is central to their framework, and they refer to it as a moral value. Referencing Becker (1986), Gutmann and Thompson define reciprocity generally as “making a proportionate return for a good received” (55) and deliberatively as all participants making claims in terms that other parties to the discussion can accept. Reciprocity falls between prudence (which sees moral disagreement as only resolvable by adjudication between purely self-interested claims) and impartiality (that would refer to some transcendent moral principle to resolve a moral conflict), and entails two main requirements.

The first requirement of reciprocity is primarily a moral one and mandates that when people make moral claims in a deliberative environment, they do so by appeal to “reasons or principles that can be shared by fellow citizens who are similarly motivated” (55). The goal is not to acquiesce to others’ ethical frameworks, but to “seek fair terms of cooperation,” that is, to focus not on those moral claims about which we fundamentally disagree, but to search for those convictions shared by participants. If this can be done, the beneficial outcome is that the political decision based on such claims becomes mutually justifiable (56). A second requirement of reciprocity is an empirical one: the real-world claims that moral reasoning depends upon must “be consistent with relatively reliable methods of inquiry,” should not contradict that which has “been confirmed by the most reliable of available methods,” and should not rest on “implausible premises” (56). This can be seen to relate to the first requirement in that morally, claims must relate to mutually recognizable moral principles, and empirically to mutually verifiable empirical conditions. These two requirements of reciprocity are necessary in that they govern the terms in which reasons are presented, but they are not sufficient; reciprocity thus also makes

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2 My explication of their account of character and deliberative perspective comes especially from chapters 1 & 2.

3 Similarities to Rawlsian ideals and requirements of public reason and overlapping consensus are unmistakable. Indeed, his framework was a huge influence on them and on Joshua Cohen, another progenitor of deliberative democracy whose version is very similar to Gutmann and Thompson.
psychological demands of participants, and it is these that interest me most. A large body of
literature critiques the exclusionary requirements of reason-giving put forth in this account and
far less has focused on the ways in which this portrayal advances a thin understanding of the
embodied, empathetic components of psychological experience.

Guttmann and Thompson argue that certain motivations and dispositions must guide
interactions between political interlocutors in a process of public deliberation. First and foremost,
a preliminary desire to discover mutually acceptable terms of deliberation is of the utmost
importance. Rather than merely tolerating alternative perspectives, as is the norm in
contemporary democratic societies, participants must demonstrate a genuine “mutual respect” for
each other. This respect is characterized by personally acknowledging of a degree of uncertainty
regarding the truth of one’s own position and of moral claims in general. An eschewal of
dogmatism and a genuine recognition that one may be wrong and one’s opponents right forms
the basis of constructive deliberation, according to Guttmann and Thompson. These dispositions
make up the essence of a “deliberative perspective,” “an excellence of character that permits a
democracy to flourish in the face of fundamental moral disagreement” (79). Calling these
psychological requirements “principles of moral accommodation,” Gutmann and Thompson
specify a “family of moral dispositions” that flow from this fundamental virtue of mutual respect
and support the principle of reciprocity: civic integrity and civic magnanimity (81). Through the
former, participants demonstrate that their own political positions are moral at base, rather than
just strategic or power-driven, and through the latter they affirm and recognize their opponents’
positions in the same light.

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4 Steven Macedo’s edited volume Deliberative Politics: Essays on Democracy and Disagreement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) is dedicated entirely to cataloguing the debate between theorists about Guttmann and Thompson’s theory.
Civic integrity requires a few things. “Consistency in speech” means participants are sincere and espouse the same moral principles outside the political sphere as they do inside. “Consistency between speech and action” is a requirement that participants are not hypocritical; that is, they should personally conforming to their own convictions rather than just demanding the collective do so. Finally, “integrity of principle” is recognizing and acting in accordance with the broader implications (especially policy-wise) of whatever moral position one chooses to endorse (i.e. “right to life” advocates should not endorse capital punishment). While civic integrity may be difficult to judge in practice (how could you ultimately know if someone were being sincere or hypocritical), its corollary, civic magnanimity, may prove the more difficult of the two from a personal perspective to achieve in practice. This requirement of reciprocity is at heart of the empirical problematic I have outlined. What it demands, in short, is that individuals affirm the moral status of their opponents’ positions and recognize one another’s equal capacity for moral reasoning. This affirmation proceeds along many lines. First, one must demonstrate “acknowledgment in speech” that the position of an opponent has a moral foundation; nothing is more disrespectful, they note, than accusing someone of being purely politically motivated and rejecting their positions outright. “Open-mindedness,” the second requirement, maintains that citizens leave open the possibility of being “convinced of the moral merits of their adversaries’ positions” (83). Lastly, civic magnanimity requires a commitment to the “economy of moral disagreement,” which extends further the moral requirement of reciprocity: even if overarching value systems are in conflict, one should search for “points of convergence” between one’s own position and the position of others in order to “avoid unnecessary conflict” (85).
Common Challenges to this Ideal

Guttmann and Thompson’s picture of the deliberative citizen is extremely helpful in giving us something specific to shoot for. Unfortunately, their account falls victim to a very important criticism: although rational reason giving and certain attitudes are valuable for generating collective solutions to common problems in a cooperative fashion, the problem with Guttmann and Thompson, indeed with many mainstream theorists of deliberative democracy who fit within the tradition of political liberalism,⁵ is that they require participants to conform to these standards, rather than prescribe them as ideals and craft meaningful solutions for how to get there in undesirable circumstances like divided societies. Guttmann and Thompson’s requirements are exclusionary in the sense that those affected by a given norm in question who do not meet them are deemed unfit to enter into deliberation, even if their so-called inadequacies may result more from differences in culture, class, opportunity, or resources. Stanley Fish points out the inherent liberal bias in the empirical requirements of reciprocity: they appear to rule out prima facie arguments derived from religious texts that contradict the claims of science, or claims which are logically suspect by analytical standards.⁶ This framework is thus guilty of the same exclusionary bias found in political theories emphasize a common education, socialization, social position, or standard of reason for collective democratic engagement. In the event that these commonalities are not present, simply excluding those who do not meet the criteria of

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⁵ Deliberative democracy can be seen to arise from political liberalism on the one hand and critical theory on the other. The liberal strand, epitomized by Guttmann and Thompson, is also represented in Joshua Cohen (1989, 1996) and Joseph M. Bessette (The Mild Voice of Reason, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); on the critical theory side is, among others, James Bohman (1996) and John Dryzek (1992, 2000); for a more thorough survey of the liberal bent of deliberative democracy compared to a communitarian emphasis, see Rainer Forst, “The Rule of Reasons. Three Models of Deliberative Democracy,” Ratio Jurisdiction 14:4, December 2001, 345-378.

character is excessively impractical and potentially unjust, especially when nearly all parties affected by the social or political norm in question lack a deliberative character.

Deliberative democracy faces a tough question because it presumes that in order for processes of public deliberation to function constructively, citizens must already possess certain virtues that enable them to engage with one another. But where should these virtues initially come from? Most deliberative theories acknowledge at some point the irony that virtues required for constructive deliberation, such as toleration, magnanimity, reciprocity, respect, public reasonableness, open-mindedness, etc, are pretty much as far as one can get from conditions in actual, real-world deliberations, but this empirical problematic has not been sufficiently addressed. For all its improvement over rational choice, deliberative democracy does not forge much of a new path in addressing the proper origin and generation of democratic character. The theorists that discuss the issue simply go back to the common tendency in democracy theory to encourage or mandate that certain virtues be acquired before one enters the political sphere. Barber notes that “an enthusiasm for participatory democracy has [historically] been coupled with a zeal for public and civic education: the training of competent and responsible citizens.”7 Deliberative theorists follow a similar line of reasoning a majority of the time, and Guttmann and Thompson focus heavily on the importance of education. Even Habermas, writing in the tradition of critical theory rather than political liberalism, puts an emphasis on the importance of common political socialization that could potentially be exclusionary.8

Unfortunately, frameworks that emphasize common education or socialization will prove insufficient if they face either of the following common situations. First, it could be the case that

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no form of common education or socialization exists that engenders democratic virtues in a given population. Second, even in the event that these virtues are present in a citizenry, the topic at hand may be one that is so heated that open-mindedness and respect are abandoned and replaced by accusatory and distrustful personalities. Yet virtues such as open-mindedness, respect for others’ perspectives, and a willingness to compromise or change one’s position, are undoubtedly necessary for constructive deliberation. How might this circularity be addressed? I argue that these approaches demonstrate too sharp a separation between private spaces where character is most substantively formed, and public spaces where one acts in a political capacity. Versions of deliberative democracy which mandate prerequisites and exhibit exclusionary tendencies perpetuate a public-political/private-personal dualism in that those virtues required for political engagement are supposed to be acquired in one’s personal and pre-political activities; moreover, these virtues are defined in juxtaposition to the kinds of empathetic, embodied virtues (like nurturing and caring) that characterize private life.

Choosing as they do to focus so heavily on the kinds of reasons and dispositions required of participants, rather than on how those might be acquired in less than perfect political environments, Guttmann and Thompson expose a fundamental assumption which claims a normative framework for a deliberative character is prior to and more important than a normative framework for inclusive institutions or equality of resources. This is problematic because historically marginalized or oppressed social groups often do not feel a part of the larger society and cannot find time to dedicate to public, political affairs; to this extent, inclusive institutions and equality of resources are necessary for and prior to acquiring a democratic character.9 Guttmann and Thompson place the burden of proof on the individual to live up to the standards

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9 For an expansion of this point, see Iris Young, “Justice, Inclusion, and Deliberative Democracy,” in Macedo (1999, 151-158).
put forth for democratic deliberation, rather than refocusing on the structural elements of society and politics required to engender certain attitudes. I argue that these kinds of demands are misguided, impractical, and potentially unjust; a feminist perspective helps illuminate why.

The Importance of a Feminist Perspective

The problem with the deliberative model characterized by Guttmann and Thompson and advanced by a number of other theorists writing in the mainstream liberal tradition\(^\text{10}\) is not that it advances an undesirable view of deliberative character, but that the framework lacks mechanisms to transform participants in accordance with agreed-upon, desirable virtues of democratic participation. I argue a key reason for this is that such mechanisms would require substantial psychological transformation, a dimension of personal experience that has traditionally been excluded from politics and relegated to non-political spaces. Yet healing, trust-building, and counseling are most certainly political activities when the deep divisions that create the need for such processes are situated within a political context and/or caused by politically powerful actors. Feminist philosophers have long recognized the political dimensions of oft-considered personal affairs.\(^\text{11}\) For this reason, I explore through a feminist perspective the empirical challenge of transforming adversarial political actors into ones who are willing to work together. To begin exploring mechanisms that could serve this purpose, I consider what embodied character transformation would look like in public, political space, and why such processes have been ignored in deliberative democracy theory. Ultimately, political mechanisms

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\(^{10}\) I recognize alternative approaches in deliberative democracy strand of theorizing (see n9 above); because the liberal-constitutionalist strand is still most influential, I speak directly to this strand and continue the tradition of critique started by others (see n4 above).

that emphasize healing and reconciliation, character transformation and virtue cultivation, through embodied forms of expression rather than purely rational argumentation, are of the utmost importance.

**Embodied Character Transformation**

The argument that political engagement itself can play a transformative role for citizens in a democracy is certainly nothing new. Mark Warren\(^{12}\) charts what he calls the “self-transformation thesis” argument for democracy advanced in various strands of theorizing, including participatory democracy, democratic socialism, some forms of liberalism, and parts of the civic republican tradition.\(^{13}\) Rather than rehash of their arguments here, I sum them up by outlining the three key claims he identifies that underlie this thesis. First, one value of democratic practice is that it “transforms individualist and conflicting interests into common and non-conflicting ones” (8), engendering in democratic citizens cognitive capacities and character traits that “reduce factional threats to rights and pluralism,” thereby reducing the conflict which appears inevitable in diverse societies. The second argument holds that because self-transformation through democratic engagement has the potential to ameliorate tendencies toward controversy, it increases governability and reduces the need for coercive power. Since the strategic use of power has traditionally been justified to keep order, a result of democratic transformation is that it lessens the importance of coercive power. The last claim of the self-transformation thesis states that active democratic practice is necessary to sustain the very values that the philosophy of democracy is founded upon; that is, “values of self-development, autonomy, and self-governance” are exactly what rights and freedoms are meant to protect, so to

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the extent that political engagement fosters and enhances these character traits, it transforms citizens and works to maintain the desire for and goal of democracy as a political ideal.14

It appears, then, that an argument in favor of transformation through political engagement has already been made and is implicitly or explicitly advanced in deliberative literature. So why has this strand of theorizing failed to focus on communicative mechanisms for transforming adversaries into friends? A closer glance reveals that self-transformation theses in these traditional theories of democracy make one crucial mistake that is repeated in deliberative democracy theory: the transformation from factional opponents to open-minded citizens is supposed to come through the recognition of commonality and universality, and the suppression of particularities.15 Iris Young points out that such an ideal is epitomized in Immanuel Kant’s deontological ethical framework which asserts that the moral act is not what seems most appropriate relative to one’s situational dilemma and its contextual nuances, but rather whatever one logically reasons could be adopted by all rational humans under any circumstance.16 Rousseau emphasizes something similar with an expressly political bent when he insists that the only way a common will can be forged is when individuals ask not “what is good for me?,” but rather, “what is best for society?”17 Rousseau and Kant exemplify a common dialectical tendency in Western thought to define what is best for the whole, especially in political affairs, through the exclusion of individual preferences, needs, and interests.

14 Ibid., 11.
15 Ibid.
Feminist critics have long challenged the dualism that characterizes Western thought and permeates multiple dimensions of humans’ theory and practice. Along feminist lines, I argue that when the universal-particular dualism evident in the Western ethical tradition is mapped onto a public-private dualism in the political tradition, the result is a distorted conception of democratic self-transformation. Because the universal-public-political-rational sphere has been linked with the mind, and particularity with the body, transformation has been erroneously construed as a primarily cognitive process. Those who advance the self-transformation thesis construe a cognitive-rational experience that is associated with public-political behavior: acting politically transforms character and engenders public virtues only when citizens use their cognitive capacity to reason beyond particular emotion-based desires to determine what would be universally good for all. Indeed, the capacity to do this is the civic virtue that is so often aimed for. I argue that this emphasis is exactly where the problem lies within the deliberative democracy framework, evidenced by the emphasis on public reason and the general deliberative perspective, rather than a process of public learning through empathetic sharing of particular perspectives. If this framework is to ever overcome the empirical problematic that presents itself in divided societies, transformation must be recognized for what it truly is: a richly embodied experience with a multitude of psychological dimensions.

Deliberative democracy has focused too heavily on the cognitive components of political preference formation and ignores the embodied component of character transformation; it has


19 While he does not frame his position as I do in terms of character transformation, Michael E. Morrell’s paper presentation to the 2005 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (Washington, DC) entitled "The Role of Empathy in Deliberative Democracy (online: http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p42400_index.html) offers an amazing and extensive account of the near complete absence of emphasis on embodiment and affectivity in all influential theories of deliberative democracy. He picks apart Dryzek, Bohman, Gutmann and Thompson, Habermas, Rehg, and Benhabib, examining how each recognizes empathy as important in deliberative democracy, and then demonstrating how each theory is still too overly cognitive. (Retrieved 2008-04-21).
thus not adequately prescribed communicative mechanisms that could work specifically for healing and reconciliation in divided societies. It must be emphasized that transformation is embodied *and* cognitive—these two aspects of experience intermingle in all human activity, and especially in processes of self-transformation which are most certainly psychological in nature. Most deliberative theorists wrongly assume that psychological healing is not political, or is pre-political. If someone appears mean and unwilling to work with others, that is a personal problem that should be overcome in one’s private life prior to participation in public discussion aimed at collectively-binding decisions. A feminist perspective leads us to consider that these processes are indeed political to the extent they are situated in a political context, a point demonstrated well by the Appalachian case. In 1989, local activist Patty Sebok was involved in a large citizen protest demonstration to draw attention to overweight coal trucks that drive unsafely and frequently cause harmful injuries.\(^{20}\) Sebok was arrested and her activities created resentment and hatred among those who felt threatened by her activities. As she lobbied for stricter laws on coal trucks, she received frequent threats — threats of violence undoubtedly generated fear and hurt — and truck drivers most certainly felt threatened themselves, at least in terms of job security.

This kind of exchange is a common occurrence in the mountaintop removal (MTR) and other coal-related debates, and resentment in divided societies is often generated, exacerbated, and/or entrenched through political activity. To the extent that relationships are fractured because of public policies and political activities, attempts to reconcile and heal such relationships should also be considered political. This has been overlooked by many deliberative theorists and helps explain a lack of emphasis on mechanisms for character transformation. To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that these theorists have made no improvement as regards certain untenable

aspects of public-private dualisms in political thought. I pointed out in Chapter II that one of the limitations of the rational choice model of democracy is that it perpetuates a strict public-private dichotomy in terms of political preference formation (preferences are a personal matter formed in private spaces and only registered or expressed, rather than transformed, in public political spaces), and that a deliberative model improves upon this by emphasizing the public and dialogical nature of political preference formation. I argue, however, that the overall framework still fails to realize the full force of the feminist critique—in most versions of deliberative democracy, public preference formation still only happens through discovering commonalities in rational, reasonable, cognitive processes, rather than through acknowledging and affirming particularities in personal, embodied, private forms of expression.

Such an imbalance in the account of how preferences and perspectives are transformed means that this framework falls short of seriously challenging a strict public-private dichotomy that bothers so many feminist political theorists.\(^{21}\) This helps explain why many radical feminist philosophers dismiss deliberative democracy in favor of a more agonistic model that emphasizes “the recognition of the legitimacy and validity of the particular perspectives of historically oppressed segments of the population” (rather than some universalized moral standard).\(^{22}\) At the heart of the feminist vision is a “politics of identity and difference that contests any attempts to impose universal identities.”\(^{23}\) My point is that most contemporary versions of deliberative


democracy run the risk of doing just that—imposing universal identities—not only by virtue of the kinds of communication they often emphasize (a point that has been argued extensively and is outlined in the next section), but solely by virtue of how transformation is construed in this model. By describing and prescribing transformation of self, perspective, and preference, as something that occurs primarily through cognitive processes (i.e. reason-generated role-playing) rather than embodied ones (such as affective empathy), deliberative democrats are yet again privileging the importance of mind over body. To the extent that this privileging can be shown to map onto a privileging of universal over particular and public over private, the mechanisms prescribed by this framework for personal and preference (trans)formation are likely to result in an imposition of universal identities, even if only inadvertently.

*Embodied Communication*

I have so far argued that while deliberative democrats make much headway emphasizing the public nature of political preference (trans)formation (rendering preferences amenable to change and challenging the core assumption of the rational choice model), they have failed to recognize to erode the very same public-private dichotomy relative to character (trans)formation. As such, theorists are forced to require that participants meet certain demands of character and operating procedure *before* they enter public political spaces. Yet I have argued that mechanisms of transformation are imperative for deliberative democracy to work in divided societies, and those mechanisms must emphasize embodied processes like reconciliation. This point relates to a more common and quite relevant criticism of deliberative democracy’s emphasis on rational reason-giving as the highest form of communication in public deliberation. While the

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24 Such mappings occur through what Val Plumwood calls “linking postulates,” which are “assumptions normally made or implicit in the cultural background which create equivalences or mapping between the pairs,” (1993, 45). For an account of how this mapping of mind-body onto universal-particular/public-private occurs in political thought and practice, see Young (1990).
deliberative democracy strand of theorizing has failed to seriously theorize the embodied aspect of transformation or the importance of psychological components like healing and reconciliation.\textsuperscript{25} Feminist political theorists persuaded by and sympathetic to many ideals of this model have made much progress in rendering deliberative spaces more inclusive by expanding forms of expression allowed and encouraged within the forums.\textsuperscript{26} In the next section I point out that one important component of mechanisms for transformation must be an emphasis on embodied forms of expression and communication that have thus far been deemed less important or undesirable in most deliberative theories.

Many feminist political philosophers have recognized in deliberative democracy a potentially liberatory political ideal.\textsuperscript{27} These philosophers have taken issue less with the exclusionary criteria of character and the lack of transformative mechanisms, and more so with the potentially exclusionary forms of communication that are emphasized by most theorists. Guttmann and Thompson’s account is peppered with Rawlsian ideals like public reason and overlapping consensus that require people to utilize a specific kind of reasoning that searches for commonalities rather than emphasizing differences. An emphasis on reasonable and dispassionate communication styles can be seen in many deliberative theorists, reflecting a failure to take seriously the degree to which emphasizing these overly rational forms of communication, rather than storytelling, testimony, etc., downgrades the importance of the embodied aspects of communication. Habermas’s theory of discourse ethics, particularly the ideal speech situation in which speakers raise and challenge validity claims according to certain

\textsuperscript{25} Iris Young’s \textit{Inclusion and Democracy} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) has this as its specific aim.

\textsuperscript{26} This is especially true of those in the Habermasian tradition; see esp. Seyla Benhabib, “Introduction,” in \textit{Democracy and Difference}; and Young (1999, 2000).
guiding principles, is centrally implicated in this critique. Specifically, the Habermasian idealization of rational argumentation as impartiality reproduces the dichotomy between public and private and masks important differences that cannot be expressed in what Habermas considers allowable formats. This would likely compromise identities that depend for their force on other forms of communication. His and others’ positions must be thoroughly reconstrued and brought in line with its feminist interpretations that have implications for the kinds of communication allowed within the deliberative sphere.

Feminist critics charge that any attempt to restrict communication within the deliberative sphere is exclusionary and bias toward modern, Western, male-centered processes of reasoning and expression. I focus here on Iris Young’s philosophical framework put forth in *Inclusion and Democracy* in which she fleshes out the idea of an inclusion principle on par with Guttmann and Thompson’s principle of reciprocity. She began this line of reasoning a 1999 article directed specifically at their account in which she first argues for the importance of such a principle for taking advantage of this framework’s emancipatory potential without exhibiting the exclusionary tendencies that make it so undesirable to agonist democrats. Young begins by making an important distinction between internal and external exclusion. She points out that although deliberative democracy theorists allow in principle for all those affected by a norm to participate in deliberation about it (circumventing charges of explicitly external exclusion), she points out that any attempt to restrict communication or reason-giving to certain kinds within deliberative

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30 Young, “Impartiality and the Civic Public” (1990).
space is likely to exclude non-dominant forms of expression, thereby creating *internal* exclusion that ignores potential for discursive oppression and/or domination.\(^{31}\)

Rejecting versions of deliberative democracy that privilege dispassionate and disembodied articulate argumentation, Young articulates three kinds of communicative forms that would be useful in deliberation but do not conform to the narrow standards of public reason or rational argumentation of the kind advanced by Rawls and Habermas, respectively. She draws attention to the important point that the modes of communication she emphasizes “already appear in everyday interactions,” and can be seen to have both a communicative and normative function in processes of political discussion.\(^{32}\) Greeting (or 'public acknowledgement' in political discourse) is "a form of communication where a subject directly recognizes the subjectivity of others, thereby fostering trust."\(^{33}\) Rhetoric (or "the ways that political assertions and arguments are expressed") is a component of all speech acts, and Young argues that even impassioned and emotional rhetoric, typically looked down upon by many theorists, is important in calling attention to points that may have been ignored. To the extent that rhetorical flourishes personalize statements, this component situates speakers and audience in relation to one another.\(^{34}\) The last form of communication emphasized by Young is the most important for my purposes. “Narrative” empowers relatively disfranchised groups to assert themselves publicly. Some groups, brought together politically for whatever reason, may have experiences and beliefs that differ to a large degree, and may further disagree in what they consider proper premises of discourse or debate. Narrative is the communicative form that most enables interlocutors to reach


\(^{32}\) Young (2000, ch. 1)

\(^{33}\) *Ibid*, 57-62.

\(^{34}\) *Ibid*, 63-70.
dialogical understanding because processes of storytelling and sharing experience allow people to recognize one another’s “normative starting points.”

Young emphasizes that rhetorical forms like storytelling allow people to share parts of themselves, and the Appalachian case again helps humanize the importance of this expansion for inclusive political space. Appalachian culture is a story-telling one, so sharing stories reminds adversaries of their common heritage of storytelling and narrative forms of expression, even if only in a non-cognitive, empathetic and embodied way. Moreover, storytelling comes easily for Appalachian people. The freedom of form afforded by storytelling, less restrained as it is by the mandates of logical argumentation, has the positive effect of increasing the probability that those who are shy or feel threatened will engage with others, helping prevent the “internal exclusion” that preoccupies Young. Perhaps most importantly, a forum that encourages story-telling gives Appalachian people a rare opportunity to speak in the first place. This is important because we are dealing with an historically oppressed, impoverished population whose voices have been lost to outside influence, who live in a shadow of threat of from powerful extractive industries. Empowering these people to speak a non-threatening environment through a process that Forester calls “ritualized story-telling” is part-and-parcel of engendering deliberative virtues through self-transformation.

Concluding Remarks: The Two-Stage Process of Public Deliberation

While most deliberative theorists seem to agree there is a large gap between what these theories require of participants and situations, and the real-world conditions of public discourse, very few tackle the problem in a way I find satisfactory. The deliberative democracy model most


certainly improves upon the strict public-private dichotomy that characterizes political preference formation in the rational choice model of democracy (which, recall, emphasizes that personal preferences are formed in private spaces and only registered or expressed in politics), but it does not erode this dualism nearly enough as regards the transformation of personal character from adversarial tendencies into cooperative ones. To the extent that adversarial political actors exhibit caring, open-minded tendencies in their personal lives, deliberative democracy has the potential to draw out such characteristics in political spaces aimed at engaged communication about pressing issues. However, to do so it must quit ignoring mechanisms that emphasize embodied processes such as healing and trust-building. In this Chapter, I have highlighted a few key elements of communicative mechanisms for character transformation in divided societies. The psychological journey of transforming one’s character from a mean-spirited, uncompromising person into one who recognizes the moral worth of an adversary’s position is very, very difficult; the uncertainty and vulnerability that accompanies a recognition that one’s own moral or political position might be wrong is a decidedly embodied process. Ignoring this fact of human experience leads to short-sighted prescriptions for communicative mechanisms that enable character transformation.

Let’s glance one last time toward Appalachia before I end with a classificatory recommendation for political mechanisms under the deliberative democracy framework; my final prescription, like most, is rendered more forceful in light of the case. Consider, the question of what to do about mountaintop removal is currently presented as an either-or issue. Either MTR continues, miners keep their jobs, and ecological destruction continues; or MTR ceases, mountains remain in tact, and unemployment skyrockets. It seems as if a decision in either direction will drastically compromise the identity of those on one side of the debate or the other.
For this reason, I contend there is no way any deliberative forum focused specifically on generating consensus on a course of action relative to MTR could lead to anything but controversy and further polarization. If the practice is rendered illegal, coal-miners lose their job, and as such, forfeit an identity that is closely connected to coal’s integral role in Appalachian history. If MTR is allowed to continue, those who value their place-based cultural heritage are forced to see the land destroyed around them, and their souls grieve. Contentious issues in which identities as such are at stake are going to produce a lot of polarization. Fear of compromise keeps people from engaging with one another. If I think being open to your ideas could even potentially lead to my losing my job, I will refuse to engage. If you think coming together to deliberate with me could possibly lead to continued destruction of the mountains you cherish, you will hesitate to engage with me on this issue.

These points have important implications for a deliberative democracy framework in divided societies. In any region ravaged by internalized oppression, threats, displacement, violence, poverty, etc, a lot of psychological groundwork and foundation-building must be done before collaborative planning is an option. Polarization and controversy will be difficult to avoid if the forum for public deliberation aims too quickly at a collectively binding decision. For this reason, I propose that public deliberation in divided populations is better conceived as a two-stage process in which the first stage is aimed only at reconciliation and character transformation, and not arriving at a collectively binding decision. In advancing such a position, I draw on research, concepts, and arguments put forth by a handful of helpful deliberative practitioners. John Dryzek, for instance, argues the importance of “partially decoupling the deliberative and

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decisional moments of democracy” in deeply divided societies. Cass Sunstein points to research that suggests a phenomenon of group polarization, whereby attempts to force consensus about divisive and contentious issues often results in each side gravitating further toward whatever position they already held. Deliberation geared toward a decision that must favor one value system over another is likely to “freeze identities rather than transform them” (221), even if the process is communicative rather than aggregative. Archon Fung distinguishes ‘hot’ deliberative settings that are most likely to lead to group polarization, from ‘cold’ ones. While all these theorists contribute something meaningful to the conception I advance, my framework situates such prescriptions in the larger context of the relationship between political mechanisms and the deliberative democracy model, and argues that deliberative theorists must recognize the political nature of forums aimed at healing, reconciliation, and trust-building in historically polarized population, even though they explicitly do not seek binding decisions.

Contentious political issues such as mountaintop removal mining are often framed in an either-or way, and so deciding only between one of those two options as presented will often require a choice between irreconcilable value-systems. Pressuring participants into a decision in such situations is an unlikely way to avoid confrontation and strategic behavior. If the goal is healing and reconciliation that allows for trust-building and character-building, then this forum cannot commit such a mistake and must be prior to and separate from public deliberation aimed

39 Sunstein (2002).
41 Indeed, John Forester, a participatory planning theorist, presents a framework that inspires my entire project and contains ideas I draw from heavily (including the emphasis on storytelling noted above); Forester prescribes a process similar to what I outline and he calls this initial process of reconciliation and trust-building “public dispute resolution” and considers it part-and-parcel to “public deliberation.” I take his framework a step further in emphasizing and theorizing the embodied and affective components that compliment the cognitive dimensions of dispute resolution. See Forester (1999, ch. 8).
at binding decisions. Thomas Murphy points out that “politics is not only about agreement and compromise, but also about comprehending other’s disagreement, expressing one’s identity with words and deeds, and revealing and thereby constituting oneself and one’s society through action undertaken with others.”

A two-stage process of public deliberation in divided societies recognizes exactly this point, while still moving toward the ultimate goal of generating together the collectively binding decisions that govern citizens’ lives. Figuring out exactly what these mechanisms would look like in particular circumstances will require nuanced analysis and should utilize insights from whatever fields of study seem relevant — although I do not attempt to do so in this thesis, crafting mechanisms for first-stage deliberations in the context of the Appalachian case with which I am concerned is an important next step in this research project.


CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS FOR DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND APPALACHIA

In Appalachia, an extreme amount of contention and polarization surrounds the contested practice of mountaintop removal (MTR) coal mining. Habermas once stated that his discourse ethics, and I would argue deliberative democracy theories in general, are irrelevant without “real conflicts in a concrete situation in which the actors consider it incumbent upon them to reach a consensual means of regulating some controversial social matter.”¹ Mountaintop removal is undoubtedly a “controversial social matter” in a polarized region, and as such is an issue that begs for public deliberation. Unfortunately, rather than feeling obliged to work through the issue cooperatively with opponents, many actors seem content to scorn and belittle the other side while dogmatically asserting the moral superiority of their own position. The “problem of divided societies” is one that deliberative theorists have only begun to tackle, and it remains one of the most challenging issues that faces this strand of theorizing. After all, the rational choice theory research platform in social sciences was designed on the assumption that people were self-interested and competitive, and so to the degree that a political model is based on this explanatory framework, it offers a very clear way to accommodate such adversarial actors. A clear vision for deliberative politics in deeply divided populations has yet to emerge.

Because of fundamentally opposing philosophical foundations and convictions about the nature of politics, one must choose whether to advance a deliberative democracy model or a rational choice one. While the latter seems appealing because of its accurate depiction of political actors in certain circumstances, the former is undoubtedly the most normatively desirable. Its binding requirements for democratic legitimacy guarantee a substantive role for

citizens in determining the policies that govern their lives, one that will likely increase the
overall quality of policy decisions and more robustly meet demands of a just political system.
Indeed, I have argued deliberative democracy holds great promise for Appalachia, especially as
regards environmental policy making. Current procedures that emphasize preference aggregation
bias the outcomes toward ones in line with dominant economic interests that are based on a
market-oriented value system. Unfortunately, the population is deeply divided, and at this point
bringing citizens together for a neutral debate about the benefits and burdens of mountaintop
removal is unrealistic. Just as aggregative mechanisms fall short of offering certain opportunities
to political actors, current communicative mechanisms crafted under a deliberative democracy
model have their own problems which can be traced back to failures within that model and help
explain its inability to meet the empirical problematic of divided societies.

The case of Appalachia demonstrates that processes of public deliberation traditionally
construed are potentially unjust to the extent that a narrow focus on rational argumentation does
not allow for expression of and working through the psychological wounds inflicted on those
implicated in the controversy. What’s more, a narrow focus on decision-making and self-
transformation borne of exposure to other persons’ arguments comes at the expense of a focus on
healing and trust-building which gives rise to self-transformation through hearing other persons’
stories. I have argued that deliberative democracy places too much emphasis on citizens who
already possess a deliberative character; consequently, the most common mechanisms associated
with the model fail to offer inclusive opportunities for participation among those who, while
most definitely affected by an issue, do not possess certain virtues (at least relative to the norm in
question) that would enable them to constructively discuss and ultimately come to a decision
about that issue. In divided societies, the development of these virtues relative to contentious
issues must happen through processes of reconciliation amongst adversaries, processes which involve healing, trust-building, and other embodied experiences. For this reason, deliberative democracy must pay special attention to and more explicitly challenge the public-private dichotomy that taints theoretical predecessors on whose shoulders it stands, lest its prescriptions continue to keep out and inadvertently marginalize “overly-emotional” historically oppressed segments of the population under the guises of neutrality and consensus.

In my thesis, I have focused on a variety of ideas that are helpful for this case study. Historically, I traced the contemporary dominance of adversarial political actors back to a interpretive loop between supposed empirical facts discovered in social science research, normative arguments for economizing theories of democracy, and a hermeneutic feedback mechanism whereby people tend to act in accordance with how they are institutionally defined and in accordance with the opportunities offered them for political engagement. I argued that the interplay between mechanisms as realms of action and a model whose worldview is perpetuated through a variety of mediums may serve to re-create of a certain kind of person. Yet precisely because mechanisms are a realm of political action, they play a role in socializing the citizen, and so it may be possible to reverse these adversarial character traits by carefully constructing political spaces for communicative mechanisms that make this reversal their explicit goal. Such potential renders the empirical problematic of adversarial actors which manifests in the Appalachian MTR controversy a challenge to be reasoned through, rather than a reason to abandon the model that appears normatively desirable in a number of other respects.

A lack of emphasis on political mechanisms in the deliberative democracy strand of theorizing that serve this goal can be attributed to a failure to take seriously enough the feminist critique of public-private dualisms in normative democracy theory. Applying this critique to the
deliberative model gives rise to a more comprehensive theory that is better equipped to deal with adversarial political subjects, contentious issues, and divided societies. In Chapter III, I argued that the deliberative democracy model is indeed normatively desirable in an Appalachian context, if the empirical challenges I mention can be overcome. In Chapter IV, I argued that in order to address this reversal, the empirical problematic of adversarial actors must be reconceptualized. It is not that persons as characterized under a deliberative model do not exist; rather, they do not appear to exist in public, political spaces. Recognizing the political aspects of a range of human activities and experiences leads to a richer conception of political mechanisms that include processes aimed specifically at healing and reconciliation in divided societies.

With tensions raging in this region, movement toward civil society composed of respectful and open-minded citizens willing to work together to determine their collective future is extremely important. I have argued that for all their positive advancements in normative theory, deliberative theorists have paid far too little attention to the degree to which a rational choice model of democracy permeates the public consciousness and social imaginary. Because they’ve given this so little attention, they have failed to pay equal attention to those mechanisms that would help move us from a democratic public sphere that includes political actors as envisioned under rational choice, to one constituted by people as envisioned under the deliberative model, a failure that becomes obvious when one tries to apply the deliberative democracy framework to problems in Appalachia. This setting is wrought with controversy that goes back a long time and the communicative mechanisms commonly associated with the deliberative framework simply do not give us enough to work with for transforming these communities into ones which contain people willing to work together to deliberate about and determine the merits of MTR mining.
What is ultimately at issue here is this: the view of humans as solely motivated by self-interest may, in this day and age, be empirically accurate. This does not mean it is normatively desirable, nor does it mean that its opposite is empirically impossible. The goal is then to foster that moment or period of transformation through a carefully constructed process. What that process looks like will vary depending on context, and my future research will focus on a more nuanced analysis of exact requirements for this Appalachian case given the many contextual particularities it exhibits, an analysis that draws on insights from philosophy, psychology, and history, as well as a plethora of interdisciplinary fields of study. Overall, mechanisms of healing, trust-building, and reconciliation among deeply divided publics are of the utmost importance because of the deep divisions present in Appalachian communities. These mechanisms will likely stress embodied forms of communication such as storytelling that reveal the intricate and interconnected history shared by inhabitants of this region. We are a long way from the time when the population can put pressure on decision-makers to incorporate the citizen voice by employing mechanisms that are communicative, and are more strongly participatory and democratic. First, solidarity must be built to counter the “divide and conquer” strategy that the industry has employed to weaken the population and its influence on political decisions that regulate the coal industry. This solidarity can only be built through carefully constructed forums employing mechanisms that allow for trust-building and reconciliation. As deliberative theorists who want to see this normatively desirable framework succeed, we have an obligation to explore what such mechanisms would look like in a multitude of contentious situations across the globe. Drawing out character traits required for constructive collective decision-making through transformative processes of healing and reconciliation is the only way to make this work.


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