

Liberty, Community, and Democracy: Sidney Hook's Pragmatic Deliberativism

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Political philosophy has in recent years been squarely focused on a collection of controversies regarding liberty, community, and democracy that have collectively come to be known, with considerable reluctance, as the “liberal-communitarian debate.”¹ As is common with philosophical disputes, the liberal-communitarian debate has undergone a number of significant mutations over the years. The ground of the disagreement, and the vocabularies in which the competing views are framed, have proven susceptible to the typical fluctuations.² Accordingly, the polemics most often have been awkward and shaky: liberals claim that the communitarian criticisms are irrelevant, while communitarians insist that their liberal opponents fail to understand the character of the communitarian critique.³

That the debate has continued for nearly twenty years with little hope of a resolution has led some to suggest that the issue simply be dropped and attention focused elsewhere. Hence Will Kymlicka, in a response to Michael Sandel, characterizes the debates between left-leaning liberals such as Rawls and Dworkin and left-leaning communitarians such as Sandel as “internecine” and “counterproductive.” Kymlicka laments:

People on the left who agree on 95 percent of the actual issues confronting our society spend all their time arguing with each other about the 5 percent of issues we disagree about, rather than fighting alongside each other for the 95 percent of issues we have in common. (134)

One can certainly appreciate Kymlicka's frustration, and he is certainly not the first to suggest that the contending parties have been merely talking past each other.⁴ However, it is not clear that the debate can be simply abandoned for political activism. Sandel has argued in response to Kymlicka that part of what is at issue in the liberal-communitarian debate is the distinction between "left" and "right" and the forms that political activism may take. According to Sandel, political advocacy cannot be entirely severed from political theory (Sandel 1998c, 328). To press Sandel's point more strongly, the debate is not merely a confusion to be dismissed or ignored; the issues are vital and worthy of our attention.

This is not to say that the dispute should continue in the terms in which it was originally or is currently posed. Enduring philosophical debate can often signal the presence of pressing concerns of great import. However, it can also indicate the limitations of the terms in which the contending positions are formulated. One of the defining characteristics of the philosophical approach generally known as pragmatism is its sensitivity to the vocabularies within which long-standing philosophical problems are discussed, and a willingness to criticize and reconstruct these vocabularies. In this paper I propose and develop a pragmatist reconstruction of the liberal-communitarian debate. Towards this end, I enlist the work of Sidney Hook, a pragmatist philosopher whose work is at present largely and, in my view, unfortunately neglected.⁵ Of course, problems are not solved by developing new proposals based upon the ideas of great minds from the past. Once formulated, a pragmatist approach to the current debates concerning liberty and community must be brought into confrontation with the other views active in the controversy. It would be an ironic betrayal of pragmatism to pretend that a pragmatist approach can put important questions to rest once and for all; the point, rather, is to develop a position from which future debate may be more fruitfully engaged.

That I propose to draw heavily upon Hook calls for some explanation. As I've already indicated, Hook's work is generally not well known among philosophers, even among those philosophers heavily involved with the pragmatist tradition. In this essay, I take an initial step in restoring Hook's standing among American philosophers. The following discussion will establish that Hook is *worth* restoring, that he has something of philosophical value to contribute to our understanding of democratic politics. However, my objectives are not confined to this promotional aim. I further contend that Hook's own political *action*, for which he is in many circles notorious, makes him an especially instructive figure insofar as he provides a clear example of the challenges and risks involved in living the democratic life.

The paper begins, then, with a sketch of the liberal-communitarian debate. Though it is but a sketch, this survey is important because it helps to identify in a general way the central issues that are at stake in the debate. With this background in place, I then turn to a brief discussion of what may be called the "deliberative turn" in the debate. Both liberals and communitarians have appealed to the idea of public deliberation as a way of meeting their opponents' challenges.

I shall argue that the turn to deliberation is accordingly incomplete; what is needed is a fully deliberative vision of democratic politics, one unhindered by a prior commitment to an antecedent political program that is itself not the product of deliberation. We find the beginnings of a fully deliberative vision of democracy in Hook. After developing the fundamentals of Hook's view, I close the paper with a brief discussion of the challenges posed to our current political practice by a deliberativist theory of democracy.

1. The Liberal-Communitarian Impasse

The debate between liberals and communitarians is in part a dispute about what democracy requires. Liberals insist that democratic self-government requires a fair and neutral political framework in which individuals can enjoy freedom and be treated as equals.⁶ As such, a democratic state must be as minimal as possible; its primary function is to maintain the social conditions and political institutions under which free and equal persons can live harmoniously together. Of course, liberals disagree about the proper boundaries of state action. Robert Nozick criticizes John Rawls's Difference Principle for being too intrusive, and Nozick is in turn criticized for reducing the liberal state to a night watchman. Despite disagreements over the details, liberals maintain that any state action that aims for something beyond protecting freedom and maintaining equal treatment constitutes unjust and unjustifiable interference with liberty (Dworkin, 64). Hence we may say with Isaiah Berlin that liberals accept a negative theory of liberty (1969).

The host of antiliberal views I'm collectively calling "communitarianism" are united in rejecting the negative theory of liberty (Taylor 1985b). On the communitarian view, democracy requires that individuals embody the virtues that make them capable of the true freedom of self-government (Sandel 1996, 6; Pettit, chap. 1), and that these virtues can be properly nurtured only within the context of a proper community. Therefore, the state in a democratic society must undertake the project of forming its citizens' characters by providing the necessary conditions under which communities, and hence the individuals who compose them, can flourish. A state that fails to embrace this formative role is illegitimate since it fails to provide the conditions necessary for freedom; it "cannot secure the liberty it promises, because it cannot sustain the kind of political community and civic engagement that liberty requires" (Sandel 1996, 24).⁷

Is either view correct? Communitarians argue that liberalism is incorrect because its conception of a minimal state rests upon a problematic theory of the self (Sandel 1982, 54–65). Liberals posit a self that is by nature autonomous and thus enters into social associations by voluntary choice.⁸ The democratic state is one among many associations that the self may choose to join, and it does so as a way of furthering its own interests. Accordingly, the democratic state must

remain neutral with regard to questions about what individuals *ought* to pursue in life, about what kind of life is good. The individual's capacity to choose a conception of the good for himself is the essence of liberty.⁹ The policies of a democratic state must therefore not presuppose any specific moral conceptions beyond those required for protecting the individuals it governs.¹⁰

Communitarians argue that such a view of the nature of the self is false. According to communitarians, selves are essentially tied to the social contexts within which they live.¹¹ Such contexts form the dispositions, desires, interests, and commitments of individuals. As these initial contexts are not the products of individual choice, selves are not essentially apolitical, autonomous, and free-standing; they are essentially "situated" and "encumbered" (Sandel 1982, 179f., and 1984, 18).

Since selves are formed by the social conditions under which they are born, raised, and live, communitarians argue that the state must see to it that the formative conditions are appropriate for developing the character traits necessary for self-government. The state must do more than protect the persons it governs; it must make these persons good citizens.

Liberals object: if the state is to undertake the job of forming the characters of its citizens, who shall decide what the appropriate character traits are? Liberals see in the communitarian proposal the dangers of oppression, coercion, and tyranny of the sort perhaps best exemplified in Plato's *Republic* and Orwell's *1984*. Any state more extensive than a liberal state, liberals maintain, must be an undemocratic state. Liberals conclude that communitarianism is essentially an undemocratic political philosophy (Gutmann, 131–33; Friedman, 106–9).

However, the liberals have not yet won the day since they have yet to answer the challenge regarding the nature of the self. Communitarians cite common experiences of unchosen moral commitments such as religious and familial duties to undermine the liberals' voluntarist image.¹² We all can cite examples in our own lives of actions we have performed because they were necessary from the point of view of some social relationship to which we were committed but did not choose. Students in my ethics courses often will cite their religious affiliations to explain their deepest moral convictions. However, the claim "I oppose abortion because I am a Catholic" explains one's opposition to abortion only if one's Catholicism is *not* a matter of choice. Students typically are puzzled by the question "But why are you Catholic?" Such a question has never occurred to them. This is because Catholicism, though unchosen, has formed them; being Catholic is integral to their understanding of themselves. To use the vocabulary of MacIntyre, my students' self-understanding is thoroughly embedded in the historical narrative of the Catholic tradition. The thought of renouncing Catholicism is the thought of becoming another person.

If the communitarians are correct in thinking that *who we are* is determined not by our autonomous choices but by the social associations that have formed our identities, then it is unclear why we should want a state that is neutral on questions of what is good (Sandel 1996, 18). If my conception of the good life

is an essential aspect of my identity, why should the state that governs me not take this into consideration when deciding policy?

Liberals respond that it is precisely because one's conception of the good is the product of the contingencies of chance that the state must not adopt any particular conception of the good. As persons raised within different social contexts will embody different conceptions of the good, there will be an irreducible plurality of these conceptions in any free society. Such pluralism is a "permanent feature" of a democratic polity (Rawls 1996, 36). The only way to respect the essential equality of these varied conceptions is to not privilege any particular one.¹³ As a democratic society must accommodate several competing conceptions of the good, a democratic state must be a morally neutral state. The communitarian critique has backfired; the insight into the nature of the self can be used to ground state neutrality. Or so it seems.

Has the liberal met the challenge of the communitarian critique? Hardly. Communitarians are suspicious of the idea that the state can be neutral in the way liberalism requires. Consider the following objection: if the justification for state neutrality is that a democracy must accommodate the variety of competing, incommensurable conceptions of the good that is inevitable in a free society, then we should find in a liberal democracy many such conceptions flourishing. In fact, we do not. Contemporary liberal society is marked by a distinctive and pervasive conception of the good, namely, the vulgar materialism that Benjamin Barber has colorfully characterized as "McWorld" (1995). The prevailing conception of the good in liberal democracy is material wealth, and it is commonly pursued at the expense of other important goods such as friendship, family, and integrity. By disowning its formative function, the liberal democratic state has not provided for more freedom and greater diversity of conceptions of the good; it has, rather, allowed market forces to form its citizens' dispositions.

That is, under the guise of moral neutrality, the state has in fact, though perhaps unwittingly, endorsed a particular conception of the good. However, while widespread materialism is healthy for a market economy, it does not promote democracy. As a growing and fascinating social scientific literature suggests, liberal democracies are growing less capable of self-government and less interested in civic participation (Putnam 2000; Pharr and Putnam 2000; Barber 1998). Citizenship is replaced by consumerism, public spaces give way to shopping malls, political discourse is pulverized into sensationalized sound-bites. Like the drones in the *Republic*, individuals are the instruments of a social-economic order in which they do not participate; they sustain a social order, but they have no share in directing it. As persons living under a liberal regime,

[W]e find ourselves barbarized by an empty public culture, intimidated by colossal bureaucracies, numbed into passivity by the absence of opportunities for meaningful deliberation, inflated by absurd habits of consumption, deflated

by the Leviathans that surround us, and stripped of dignity by a way of living that far exceeds a human scale. (Beiner 34)

Though thoroughly embedded in a social context, liberal individuals are not properly citizens and thus are not free.

The communitarian argument that citizenship and civic participation are essential to the life of a democratic polity seems hard to deny. A politics exclusively focused on the rights and obligations of individuals will not manage to sustain a level of public-spiritedness and social engagement necessary for self-government. Yet even if the communitarians have won the argument regarding the self and the state, they have not yet won the battle. The liberal charge of oppression and majoritarianism still stands. How shall the communitarians respond?

Communitarian rhetoric does little to assuage the liberal charge of majoritarianism. Communitarian appeals to “civic virtues,” “shared values,” and the “moral voice of the community” (Etzioni 1993, *passim*) smack of the kind of traditionalism associated with the episodes in our history that we are least proud of and that are, hopefully, behind us. To make the point in a philosophical way, tradition has warranted some of the most unjust behavior known to history; communities can share morally defective values.

An exchange involving Amy Gutmann and Michael Sandel is worth mentioning. In response to Sandel’s call for a politics based upon “settled roots and established traditions,” Gutmann has argued that “[t]he enforcement of liberal rights, and the absence of settled community, stands between the Moral Majority and the contemporary equivalent of witch-hunting” (132). Sandel’s rejoinder that “intolerance flourishes most where forms of life are dislocated, roots unsettled, traditions undone” (1984) is not only flimsy but question-begging since it entirely overlooks Gutmann’s point: “forms of life” and “traditions” can be rooted in and characterized by intolerance, violence, and hatred. Traditions and common values thus cannot be taken as ends in themselves; the cure for intolerance and injustice is not necessarily more tradition and moral unity.

Whereas the communitarians have properly urged the need for a more robust view of citizenship and social connectedness, they have yet to propose a workable model of democratic community, one that can meet liberal worries of oppression and majority tyranny. In a similar way, the liberals have pressed the correct worries against the communitarian proposal but they have yet to develop an adequate and compelling view of citizenship and civic engagement. Communitarians contend that liberals cannot propose an adequate vision of democratic citizenship without abandoning the negative theory of liberty; liberals argue that communitarianism lacks the resources by which different forms of community may be morally evaluated. An impasse has been reached.

2. The Deliberative Turn

The “deliberative turn” (Dryzek, 1) in recent democratic theory is in large measure the outcome of the liberal-communitarian impasse. That the literature on deliberation admits of greater crossover and intercommunication between otherwise divided theorists provides a *prima facie* reason for thinking that the turn to deliberation marks a decisive *improvement* over the liberal-communitarian problematic. Nonetheless, I will suggest in this section that deliberativism has yet to transform the debate, and any optimism it has occasioned is premature.

Contemporary theorists of liberalism seek to mitigate the dissociative and deracinating tendencies of liberalism by promoting an “ideal of democratic citizenship” (Rawls 1996, 217) in which citizens come together in a “public political forum” (Rawls 1999, 133), a realm in which “free public reason among equals” (Cohen 1996, 412) can operate. Within this realm,

[P]articipants regard one another as equals; they aim to defend and criticize institutions and programs in terms of considerations that others have reason to accept, given the fact of reasonable pluralism and the assumption that those others are reasonable; and they are prepared to cooperate in accordance with the results of such discussion, treating those results as authoritative. (Cohen 1996, 413)¹⁴

Cohen’s invocation of pluralism is important. It is a fundamental feature of liberal deliberation theories that public reason be engaged under a specific set of constraints and restrictions. Particularly, liberal deliberativists assert that pluralism constrains public reason with respect to the *kinds* of reasons that can be employed in public debate. In the liberal view, one must avoid introducing reasons that presuppose or draw from one’s own private moral, philosophical, or religious doctrine. When deliberating, citizens must confine themselves to “considerations that others have reason to accept.” Reasons that derive from a particular comprehensive doctrine cannot win general acceptance in public debate and are therefore inadmissible.

Hence, as liberals would have it, citizens must conduct public debate strictly in terms that neither promote nor presuppose religious or philosophical commitments. Consequently, the liberal places restrictions not only upon the *kinds of reasons* deliberating citizens can employ in public debate, but also upon the *kinds of questions* that are suitable for the public deliberative agenda. Questions and issues that cannot be debated in strictly “political” terms are removed from the political agenda. Rawls explains:

Faced with the fact of reasonable pluralism, a liberal view removes from the political agenda the most divisive issues, serious contention about which must undermine the bases of social cooperation. (1996, 157)

Thomas Nagel concurs,

[W]here no common standpoint is available at any level to authorize the collective determination by democratic procedures of policies about which individuals find themselves in radical disagreement because of incompatible values, it is best, if possible, to remove those subjects from the reach of political action. (1991, 166)

Liberal democratic deliberation is hence subject to what Bruce Ackerman calls “conversational restraints”:

When you and I learn that we disagree about one or another dimension of the moral truth, we should not search for some common value that will trump this disagreement. . . . We should simply say nothing at all about this disagreement and try to solve our problem by invoking premises that we do agree upon. In restraining ourselves in this way, we need not lose the chance to talk to one another about our deepest moral disagreements in countless other, more private contexts. (1989, 16–17)

Ackerman’s term, “conversational restraint,” is especially apt because it captures the dual aspect of the constraint: in liberal deliberation, conversation is restrained with respect to one’s reasons and with respect to the topics that can be deliberated about. As public debate must be conducted in terms that others “have reason to accept” (Cohen 1996, 413), it must eschew deep controversy at the level of citizens’ most fundamental commitments. Consequently, attempts to settle deep moral, religious, and philosophical disputes are removed from politics and relegated to the private realm.

Yet this is simply to reinstate the image of the “unencumbered” self to which communitarians have objected. The idea that an appropriate ideal of citizenship can be generated from the sterilized, artificial idea of “public reason” is plausible only if we accept the idea that the deepest commitments of individuals are always detachable and nonconstitutive. Liberal appeals to “public reasons,” the “precepts of reasonable discussion,” and “conversational restraints” are devices that are supposed to generate the common ground from which a plausible conception of citizenship can be formulated; however, as this common ground depends upon persons agreeing to leave their private doctrines—that is, *what they truly believe*—out of political discussion, it is fragile. Hence, the resulting vision of democratic citizenship is one that involves no actual *engagement* among citizens. Accordingly, the communitarian critique reemerges.

Communitarian conceptions of deliberation can likewise be shown inadequate. Whereas liberals insist that political deliberation avoid moral concepts and controversy, the model of deliberation promoted by communitarians is obsessed with morality. According to communitarian deliberative theorists, shared moral discourse among citizens is the means by which a fragmented

liberal community may “recover its civic voice” (Sandel 1996, 324), and participation in “public discourse” is the activity by which “*me* language” is transformed into “*we* language” (Barber 1998, 13). That is, the shared activity of “moral dialogue” *restores* community values by overcoming differences through an appeal to “overarching values” implicitly shared (Etzioni 1998, 186). Through such dialogue, citizens come “to affirm new, renewed, or some other set of values” (Etzioni 1998, 190). As Barber explains:

A public voice expressing the civility of a cooperative civil society speaks in terms that reveal and elicit common grounds, cooperative strategies, overlapping interests, and a sense of the public weal. (1998, 116)

Where liberals tend to construe disagreements among persons as necessarily insurmountable differences that are best removed from the public agenda, the communitarians are confident that commonality, shared purposes, and overlapping interests underlie all or most political disagreement. That is, while liberals tend to see agreement on fundamental matters as adventitious, artificial, and at best transitory, the communitarians take disagreement as inauthentic and temporary, maintaining that beneath the dissonance of public disagreement and conflict there is a latent harmony of purposes and interests. Public deliberation is the process by which this deep agreement, suppressed by liberal politics, can surface and come to flourish. Hence the value of deliberation lies in its power to realize the immanent sense of community among seemingly divided persons.

Although the communitarians promote an optimistic and even gratifying picture of human society, the problems with their doctrine remain. Like their liberal counterparts, the communitarian theorists have not really addressed the fundamental difficulty facing their view. They turn to deliberative politics as a way of meeting objections concerning majority tyranny and the other forms of oppression, yet their account of deliberation presupposes that fundamental agreement at deep levels *already exists* among persons who merely *seem* to be divided. Thus, deliberation is not a process by which persons confront real differences and try nonetheless to cooperatively forge common ground; on the communitarian view, all differences are merely apparent, and common ground can always be *found*. This commitment to an immanent, though as yet muted, “we-ness” simply reengages the liberal worries about majority tyranny and oppression.¹⁵

In their appeals to deliberation, both liberal and communitarian theorists have put the cart before the horse. Beginning from within a given political framework with antecedent commitments and principles, theorists from both camps have conscripted the idea of public deliberation to help repair weaknesses in their general framework of political philosophy. Not surprisingly, we have found that the resulting conceptions of deliberation merely reinstate or rehearse the difficulties that deliberation was supposed to alleviate. Deliberativism has yet to be understood as a political theory in its own right. Accordingly, one finds in the vast literature on deliberative democracy few ideas, precepts, and principles that are

themselves products of public deliberation. More important, one finds surprisingly little about *what deliberation is*, how deliberative processes *work*, and what deliberation *requires* of citizens.¹⁶

The deliberative turn in contemporary democratic theory is as yet incomplete. What is needed is a deliberativism that is not precommitted to liberal or communitarian goals. We cannot rely upon deliberation to complete an otherwise faulty political program. That is, a viable account of deliberative democracy must be a political theory *in its own right*: it must begin neither from the view that selves are liberal agents of *ex nihilo* self-creation nor from the communitarian view that we are essentially and helplessly ensconced in social contexts. It is clear that the communitarian insight that selves are socially *emergent* does not entail that selves are *reducible* to their social relations. Similarly, the liberal view that selves are capable of autonomous agency does not entail that all social relations can be explained in terms of rational choice. A pragmatist reconstruction of the debate begins to emerge once it is realized that the concept of deliberation, when appealed to in its own terms, allows one to cut across the liberal-communitarian problematic and thus to develop a new and independent democratic vision. I contend that the beginnings of such a fully deliberativist view can be found in the work of Sidney Hook.

3. Hook's Pragmatic Proposal

We begin with Hook's insight that the conception of political democracy itself implies a certain way of life.¹⁷ Democracy can flourish only within a certain kind of community; it therefore *presupposes* such a community. To see this, consider a simple, textbook definition of democracy: "a democratic society is one where the government rests upon the freely given consent of the governed" (1938, 285). Certainly, if a government is to rest upon the governed's consent, there must be various procedural mechanisms in place by which the governed can regularly express their approval or disapproval of proposed government action and policy. Hence, we typically associate a democratic state with various procedures such as open popular elections and referenda. However, it is clear that such procedures are insufficient:

An election held in the shadow of bayonets, or in which one can vote only "Yes," or in which no opposition candidates are permitted is obviously one which does not register freely given consent. (Hook 1959b, 54)

That is, even in the presence of the necessary apparatus, democracy may be subverted by procedural obstructions. A democratic community must therefore take steps to ensure that the procedures required for democracy operate without hindrance.

There are other forms of obstruction. Hook observes that “there are few things to which a starving man will not consent” (1959b, 32). We may speak of economic threats to democracy: “A threat to deprive the governed of their jobs or means of livelihood, by a group which has the power to do so, would undermine a democracy” (1938, 286). Additionally, Hook notes that economic power may be employed in even more subtle ways:

Differences in economic power make it possible for the more powerful economic group to exercise a much greater influence upon decisions that affect public welfare than their numbers or desserts warrant. (Hook 1959a, 54–55)

Since democracy requires that the governed’s consent be freely given and since economic power can be wielded in ways that *manufacture* consent, a democratic community must protect itself against economic threats to free consent. As such, a democratic community must subject its economic system to democratic planning and control (Hook 1938, 286).

Last, we may note that democracy can be undermined by epistemological factors: “consent is not free if it is bound or blinded by ignorance” (Hook 1959b, 38). If one is denied access to relevant information regarding some political proposal, one cannot possibly freely consent to it. Conversely, one’s consent to it is free only in the degree to which one is *informed* with regard to the meaning and relevant implications of enacting the proposal. Since information is necessary for free consent, a democratic community must implement and maintain institutions by which citizens may have unrestricted access to information.

However, unrestricted access to information does not in itself guarantee free consent. A collection of facts regarding the likely impact of enacting and rejecting the proposal will not necessarily settle the question of whether it ought to be enacted. By “information” we mean a collection of propositions that need to be interpreted. Unless citizens are capable of evaluating information, the cannot freely consent to any proposal; information is no substitute for inquiry.

How can citizens go about evaluating political proposals? How can the understanding required for free consent be gained? We come to understand proposals through free critical discourse modeled according to the experimental methods in the natural sciences (Hook 1940, 7–8). That is, by engaging in open discussion in which ideas are advanced, criticized, reformulated, defended, and further criticized, we come to understand what a proposal means and what its enactment implies. I say that we model our discourse according to scientific methods because democratic discourse, like scientific inquiry, is experimental: proposals are hypotheses that are adopted solely on the basis of evidence and that are always subject to reexamination and, when necessary, revision or even abandonment. Moreover, like scientific inquiry, democratic discourse requires certain character traits; perhaps we may call them deliberative virtues. Among these is the capacity to proportion belief to evidence, the ability to suspend judgment when evidence is lacking, a willingness to change one’s mind when evidence

requires, healthy skepticism and distrust of authority, and an eagerness to examine claims critically and cooperatively.

Hence “the logic of the democrat’s position compels him to go beyond the limited conception of political democracy” (Hook 1944, 50). The textbook conception of democracy with which we began is deceptively simple. A democratic society’s commitment to free consent requires something beyond the presence of procedural mechanisms because the mechanisms themselves presuppose a certain kind of community. A democratic community is a community committed to a certain method of deciding policy, settling controversy, and fixing belief. This method is discursive, requiring wide and perpetual participation of citizens that embody the requisite intellectual virtues. This is to say that democracy can flourish only in a community that is perpetually engaged in cooperative, experimental discourse. Therefore, a democratic community is essentially a community of inquiry.

One immediate implication of the idea that democratic communities are communities of inquiry concerns the formative role of a democratic community. Hook agrees with the communitarians that the state neutrality of which liberals speak is impossible; the state must play a formative role. However, unlike communitarians, who maintain that the state must perform the decidedly *moral* function of making its citizens good, Hook takes the state’s formative role to be primarily epistemological. That is, a democratic community must develop within its citizens the intellectual habits that experimental, cooperative discourse requires. This shift away from the moral character of the citizens and toward the intellectual techniques they will employ in fixing their beliefs avoids the liberal objection of coercion and tyranny. In Hook’s view, the state’s job is not to make its citizens morally good, but to develop in its citizens the habits of mind requisite to serious inquiry into moral goodness. The state is not to provide answers to questions such as “How shall we live?,” “What policies shall we adopt?,” and “Shall we repeal antidrug laws?” Instead, the state must develop within citizens the ability to take such questions seriously. That is,

What is required to live prosperously and peacefully together is not a fixed common doctrine or a fixed body of truths, but a common method or set of fixed rules under which we can live with our differences. (Hook 1959b, 37)

Hook characterizes this method by means of ten “rules” for democratic discourse:

1. Nothing and no one is immune from criticism.
2. Everyone involved in a controversy has an intellectual responsibility to inform himself of the available facts.
3. Criticism should be directed first to policies, and against persons only when they are responsible for policies, and against their motives or purposes only when there is some independent evidence of their character.

4. Because certain words are legally permissible, they are not therefore morally permissible.
5. *Before* impugning an opponent's motives, even when they legitimately may be impugned, answer his arguments.
6. Do not treat an opponent of a policy as if he were therefore a personal enemy of the country or a concealed enemy of democracy.
7. Since a good cause may be defended by bad arguments, after answering the bad arguments for another's position present positive evidence for your own.
8. Do not hesitate to admit lack of knowledge or to suspend judgment if evidence is not decisive either way.
9. Only in pure logic and mathematics, not in human affairs, can one demonstrate that something is strictly impossible. Because something is logically possible, it is not therefore probable. "It is not impossible" is a preface to an irrelevant statement about human affairs. The question is always one of the balance of probabilities. And the evidence for probabilities must include more than abstract possibilities.
10. The cardinal sin, when we are looking for truth of fact or wisdom of policy, is refusal to discuss, or action which blocks discussion. (1954, 122)

In Hook's view, then, democracy is in its very essence deliberative, and a democratic community is one that offers to citizens a "perpetual invitation" to "sit down in the face of differences and reason together, to consider the evidence, explore alternative proposals" (1959b, 38).

4. Objections and Prospects

It may be objected that the shift away from morality to epistemology does not respond sufficiently to the contention that communitarianism cannot provide sufficient protection of the individual from the tyranny of the majority. A community may, through processes of the kind of deliberation Hook is advocating, arrive at conclusions that are, in fact, morally problematic. We can perhaps imagine a community concluding that certain books should be banned or that newspapers should not be allowed to criticize the government. That the community employs a certain method in deciding policy does not guarantee that it will never arrive at bad policies.

There are two responses to be made to this objection. First, we note that certain policies constitute a violation of the experimental method. Consider a democratic community's decision to censor books and newspapers. It is clear that this policy is problematic from the point of view of experimentalism since it attempts to subvert an essential requirement for inquiry, namely, information.

Since democratic inquiry requires information, any policy that attempts to restrict information is antidemocratic. A democratically sanctioned restriction on information is impossible, for such a policy is inconsistent with democracy, and any community that seeks to adopt such a policy has to that degree abandoned democracy. To make the point more generally, the epistemological model of democratic community can provide sufficient protection of the individual because the method of democratic discourse requires that individuals be protected in certain ways. That is, to be committed to democracy is to be committed to establishing, preserving, and maintaining the conditions under which experimental discourse can flourish. Discourse can flourish only where individual participation in an open exchange of ideas is unrestricted and criticism is allowed. Any policy that undermines these conditions, or seeks to restrict participation in some other way, is inconsistent with democracy: "in a democracy, the process of intelligence . . . must be supreme" (Hook 1977, 236).

For our second response, we acknowledge that the liberals are correct to point out that a discursive democracy will make mistakes. However, we are quick to remind ourselves that fallibility cannot be laid at the door of democracy, for it is the prevailing condition of mankind! A democratic community is bound to err. Nevertheless, "the cure for the evils of democracy is more democracy" (Hook 1938, 292). That is, the experimental conception of democracy tries to compensate for the imperfections of human deliberation by demanding *continued* inquiry, *perpetual* debate, and *constant* examination. In this way, democracy is self-corrective. As long as the agencies of experimental inquiry are operative, "democracy, with all its imperfections, possesses the instruments by which it can move towards the realization of the promise of equality and freedom" (Hook 1959a, 58).

Consideration of a second kind of objection is instructive. Twentieth century political theorists such as Walter Lippmann, Joseph Schumpeter, and, most recently, Russell Hardin, have given a modern articulation of the ancient objection according to which democracy is too demanding for the typical citizen. The world of politics is vast and complex, and the task of keeping oneself informed of recent developments and of cooperatively deliberating with others is too much to expect from individuals. The average person is simply not up to the challenge of democratic self-government. Therefore, a democratic community must resign itself to a kind of mild oligarchism. A class of "power elites" will govern; we should "sit back and allow government to govern without much attention from us" (Hardin, 124).

At first glance, this view may seem compelling; however, with a little analysis it can be shown to miss the essential meaning of democracy as a way of life. In Hook's view, we can no longer think of democracy as primarily a collection of political arrangements and power relations. What characterizes a democratic community is not essentially who holds political rule, but rather the methods it employs in making its decisions, fixing its beliefs, and settling its disputes. In this sense, "democracy is a matter of degree" (Hook 1959a, 56). A community

is democratic in the degree to which it seeks to expand the methods of experimental, discursive inquiry to all forms of human association: the home, the school, and the workplace.

The insights of Lippmann and the others are well taken. We acknowledge that citizens are easily diverted, bewildered, and manipulated. They are vulnerable to empty rhetoric and too quick to adopt beliefs and undertake drastic action. Democratic inquiry is easily derailed. But this is not necessarily an indication that democracy must be abandoned; it is simply to say that our democracy has been failing and needs to be revitalized.

How can democracy be revitalized? Perhaps the greatest strength of Hook's deliberativist proposal lies in its guidance on this score. Like Dewey before him, Hook maintains that democracy begins at the school. There are specific but modest educational reforms that can begin to effect the desired results. First of all, we must work to improve the character of our discursive practices. Classroom discussions on topics of wide public concern tend to quickly follow the manner of afternoon television: students tenaciously maintain their positions, dismiss any opposition by means of rhetorical subterfuge, and generally refuse to engage in reasoned debate. What is required, then, is a pedagogy which emphasizes the *methods* by which propositions are examined, critiqued, and revised. Hook writes:

[We] must not only teach the facts, but how to test them, how to relate them to problems, and how they bear upon relevant alternatives. [We] must also stir imagination and sensibility in envisaging the effects of proposed modes of conduct on the human situation. (1973, 291)

In addition to this pedagogical shift, we must introduce certain institutional reforms. In particular, we must work to reunite the school and the community. This is achieved not only by expanding community involvement within the school, but also by reconnecting the academic community with the community at large. Academics should attempt to return to the arena of public discourse; the notion of a "public intellectual" must be resuscitated. We must seek to address broader audiences on topics of wider concern through more accessible channels. This is not to say that intellectuals should pose as the vanguards of a free society; it is rather to suggest that we must relinquish our current role as sound-bite experts and adopt those of discussant, essayist, and critic.

These moderate reforms are by no means sufficient in themselves for full democratic revitalization. Further, more sweeping, reforms are necessary in the areas of economics, the media, and business. However, the more drastic changes cannot be undertaken until the fundamentals of the democratic way of life are in place, for the latter reforms must be directed by democratic methods of inquiry.

5. Some Tentative Conclusions

The analysis has shown that Hook offers a fully deliberativist vision of democratic politics. Of course, such a view places before democratic citizens the considerable task of perpetual discussion, cooperation, engagement, revision, and experiment. As Dewey aptly observed, “the democratic road is the hard one to take” (1938, 154). Perhaps the greatest challenge to citizens posed by a deliberativist model of democracy is that it requires a radical departure from our present understanding of politics and a rejection of the terms and categories of contemporary political discourse. On our current, nondeliberativist conception, democratic politics is simply the arena in which opposing parties compete for citizens’ votes. This competition is engaged, it is presumed, at the level of individual “preferences” and “interests”; each party attempts to persuade the electorate that its proposals will best serve the electorate’s wishes. As such, our political environment is dominated by platforms and sound-bite rhetoric; citizens are encouraged to “sound off” and “be heard” by adopting one among a few prepackaged slogans and party lines. The result is an impoverished and dichotomized politics of Right against Left, Conservative against Liberal, and Us against Them that forecloses the possibility for open, rational political discourse.

A fully deliberativist view rejects this common image. Placing the processes of public discourse at the heart of democratic community, the deliberativist contends that “More important than any belief a man holds is the *way* he holds it” (Hook, quoted in Capaldi, 18). It is the way our political commitments are formed, not the content of the commitments themselves, that is decisive for democracy. This principle suggests a politics which transcends platforms and party agendas; it suggests a politics in which a democratic community can grow.

I do not pretend to have here laid to rest the liberal-communitarian and deliberative democracy debates. I take it to be an important strength of the kind of view Hook is promoting that it is suspicious of quick and professedly final solutions. Hook’s deliberativism certainly cannot resolve the tensions that arise between liberty and community; these tensions are a permanent feature of democratic politics and a lasting concern for democratic citizens. What Hook’s deliberativism does offer is a persistent reminder that we always must begin right where we are—in the middle of things, but on the move. Thus, political questions must always be open questions. In good pragmatist fashion, Hook seeks a politics of tentative and workable public policies within the context of continuing democratic discourse, and a political community that is committed to providing the conditions under which such discourse may flourish.

Notes

1. Complaints regarding the title “liberal-communitarian debate” are legion. See Sandel 1998b; Beiner, 28f.; and MacIntyre 1998, 243–46. Many, including Sandel and Pettit, have abandoned the “communitarian” label for “civic republican”; others have adopted the vocabulary of “civil society” and “civic virtue.” For convenience, I here use “communitarian” to cover the broad range of antiliberal democratic views deriving from thinkers such as Sandel, Walzer, Taylor, and Barber.

2. See Rawls 1985 and 1996 for such fluctuation; see also Hampton 1989 and 1993. Sandel 1998a provides a nice canvass of the mutation from “comprehensive” to “political” liberalism. See also Talisse 2001, and Mulhall and Swift 1996.

3. For charges that one or the other party has missed the point of their opponents’ view, see Gutmann, Nussbaum, and Caney.

4. See Taylor 1989.

5. Of all the current work on American political philosophy, I have been able to find only one substantive citation to Hook in the work of a philosopher. That citation is found in Stuhr 1993. Historian Christopher Phelps (1997) has recently published an intellectual biography of Hook (1997), but, as I’ve argued elsewhere, this falls short of a reliable philosophical study (Talisse 1998). One should also consult McCumber’s *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* for a possible explanation of the profession’s silence on Hook’s work and legacy.

6. This is the intuition that is captured by Rawls’s device of the original position (1971, 102), and the traditional notion of a social contract. See also Dworkin: “Democracy is justified because it enforces the right of each person to respect and concern as an individual” (69).

7. Cf. Sandel 1982, 1; 1982, 175–83; 1984, 28; 1998c, 319–20.

8. I take this to be a central implication of contractarianism. Rawls maintains that the theory of justice is a part of “rational choice theory” (1971, 15), and that the parties to the contract are “autonomous, and the obligations they recognize are self-imposed” (1971, 12).

9. Cf. Mill, “The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way” (17); Kant, “No man can compel me to be happy after his fashion . . . everybody may pursue his happiness in the manner that seems best to him” (74); and also Rawls, “individuals find their good in different ways. . . . In a well-ordered society, then, the plans of life of individuals are different . . . and persons are left free to determine their good” (1971, 448).

10. Hence, Dworkin writes that in a liberal society, “political decisions must be, so far as possible, independent of any particular conception of the good life, or of what gives value to life” (64). The idea of liberal “neutrality” lies at the heart of the current debate. See Sher for an especially comprehensive study.

11. See MacIntyre 1981, chap. 15; Taylor 1985, 1985b, and 1990.

12. A considerable portion of Sandel 1996 is devoted to raising examples of such commitments; see especially Sandel’s analysis of Robert E. Lee (1996, 15–16).

13. This consideration is the principal motivation behind Rawls’s “political, not metaphysical” liberalism and his concept of an “overlapping consensus” (1996, chaps. 4 and 5).

14. Cf. Rawls 1996, 218.

15. See Cohen’s discussion of Sandel (1998, 222–24).

16. A similar point is made by Bohman (1996, 24–25).

17. As Hook himself notes, he owes the idea that democracy is a way of life to Dewey. See Talisse, *On Dewey*, for a fuller discussion (2000, chap. 5).

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