

**Culture, Community and Cognition:
A Vygotskian Foundation for a Republican Approach to
Deliberative Democracy**

By

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Introduction

Modern accounts of deliberative democracy have predominantly been defended from within the liberal tradition. The first generation of deliberative theorists, John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas and Amy Gutmann, all approached this subject from a philosophically liberal perspective.¹ Those that followed them and built upon their work, including James Bohman, Robert Goodin, Jack Knight and James Johnson, each approach deliberative democracy in a very similar way.² Meanwhile, theorists adopting alternative philosophical perspectives have often been quite critical of the deliberative project. Marxist, Chantal Mouffe suggests that citizens are emotional and passionate creatures, predisposed to violent and antagonistic behaviour rather than the consensual, rational behaviour that deliberative democrats expect.³ Communitarian, Charles Taylor (1993), claims that the universalistic and detached conception of judgment attributed to the liberal, deliberative citizen leaves them disconnected and isolated from civic virtue and the common purpose of their society.⁴ Whilst, Republican theorist Cass Sunstein describes a citizen who is simply not cognitively equipped for, or suited to, the kind of deliberative engagement that liberal theorists expect.⁵ The overarching theme one can instantly recognise within these criticisms is that the citizens which the deliberative project is built upon are simply not realistic. Many theorists have tried to take this into consideration and reinterpret deliberative democracy from an alternative philosophical perspective, most notably those defending republican 'contestation'.⁶ However, none as yet has been as powerful as the original Rawlsian or Habermasian accounts. Although these theorists have made important contributions to deliberative theory none has been able to properly distinguish and elevate itself above and beyond the liberal framework. Most importantly, republicans have not been able to reconstitute an original

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approach to deliberative democracy which explains how we are *more likely* to get citizens to participate effectively and competently in deliberative arenas. Although their approaches correctly identify that liberal theories of deliberative democracy are built upon an unrealistic and unsatisfactory portrayal of the citizen, they fail to take into account what educational and developmental assumptions support these optimistic claims about the citizen and what ultimately sustains it as a coherent and continuingly successful political framework.

These issues will be addressed within this paper in four stages. First, the ideal of liberal deliberative theory will be contrasted with what shall be called the 'internal-psychological critique' of the deliberative citizen. This will lead to a discussion of liberal deliberative theory and how poorly it responds to this critique and how alternative republican approaches might do otherwise. Second, the developmental foundation of the liberal approach will be outlined. This approach, provided by Jean Piaget, supports the assumptions that liberal theorists make about the development of citizens. Its portrayal of development as i) organic, ii) universal, iii) evolutionary and iv) encouraged by facilitative methods, will be set-out. The limitations of these features will then be discussed so to underline the importance of an alternative approach to development. Third, an alternative Marxist developmental approach will be offered. This approach, proposed by Piaget's great rival Lev Vygotsky has, so far, received no attention in the deliberative literature. It's portrayal of development as i) cultural ii) contextual iii) revolutionary and iv) encouraged by mediatory methods, could perhaps contribute toward a more effective approach to the development of deliberative citizens and offer a firmer foundation for a *republican* account of deliberative democracy.

1. Research Context: Deliberative Democracy and the Incompetent Citizen

Joshua Cohen provides one of the strongest defences of a liberal deliberative theory. He suggests that 'the notion of a deliberative democracy is rooted in the intuitive ideal of a democratic association in which the justification of the terms and conditions of association proceeds through public argument and reasoning among equal citizens.'⁷ The role of deliberative democracy in this liberal approach to politics is to provide an on-going association that equal citizens can exchange their pluralistic viewpoints and, through which, they can create legitimate law and ultimately preserve justice. As Rainer Forst points out though, 'the relation between the liberal principles [of

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justice] and democracy is a strained one: Liberalism needs democracy as the best means to protect justice, but it does not really trust it and designs certain constraints for it in order to reach the goal of principle-preservation.'⁸ One such set of constraints are the idealised procedural norms that these theorists outline. These suggest that within the arena, amongst other things, 'no force but that of the better argument must be exercised' and that 'everyone with the deliberative capacities has equal standing at each stage of the deliberative process. Each can put proposals on the agenda, propose solutions and offer reasons in support of or in criticism of proposals. And each has an equal voice in the decision'.⁹

Liberal deliberative theory rests upon an assumption that citizens are competent enough to take part in this public exchange of reason. In his deliberative account, Habermas portrays a citizen who is 'enlightened about his irrationality [and] possess[es] not only the rationality of a subject who is competent to judge facts and who acts in a purposive-rational way, who is morally judicious and practically reliable, who evaluates with sensitivity and is aesthetically open minded.'¹⁰ In a similar vein, Rawls presupposes that citizens have two moral powers: a capacity for a sense of justice and a capacity for a conception of the good.¹¹ The latter is the ability to 'form, to revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of one's rational good or advantage.'¹² Rawls also suggests citizens have the higher order interest to be reasonable and to act on the fair terms of social cooperation, given that other people do as well. Admittedly both Rawls and Habermas consider these partial idealisations and highlight the burdens of judgment and distortions in communication respectively, to explain real world circumstances that will undermine rational deliberation. Nevertheless, given the right procedures, it is believed that citizens will have the capacity to exchange reason and, in doing so, create a just and more legitimate basis for governmental decision making.

However one of the central and recurring criticisms of the deliberative project is that this assumption about deliberative competence is simply misrepresentative of real world citizens. That the idealisation is so far away from the truth, regardless of any caveats, it provides a poor basis on which to build political institutions. These criticisms, which amount to an internal-psychological critique, fall in to three categories. First, some critics suggest that not enough citizens have the cognitive skills to take part in deliberative democratic institutions. Delli Carpini and Keeter for instance, suggest that many citizens do not possess the reasoning skills to evaluate competing policy programs and select one of them as superior.¹³ There is, as Arthur Lupia puts it, a 'democratic dilemma', where citizens are called upon to

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make decisions but do not have the reasoning skills in order to do so.¹⁴ Thaler and Sunstein (2009) support this claim suggesting that citizens are often biased in the assertions that they make, preferring the status quo and rarely weighing evidence in an even handed way.¹⁵ Meanwhile, other theorists have noted that citizens regularly misinterpret each other in political debate, and have poor memories for simple political facts and information.¹⁶ As Kahneman suggests, even when citizens do put together arguments, they are often incoherent and inconsistent. The list of cognitive flaws, identified by these authors and various others, is extensive and points towards a citizen who may struggle to deliberate in the manner expected by deliberative theorists.¹⁷

Second, it is argued by some critics that even if citizens do have the necessary skills they often do not have the motivational virtues which would lead them to employ these skills deliberatively. Schumpeter claimed that typical citizens may possess a wide range of cognitive skills but he 'drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyses in a way that he would readily recognise as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes a primitive again.'¹⁸ According to critics, citizens will also be overconfident in many of the judgments that they make. It will be common for citizens to believe that while they have 'proceeded in a logical bottom-up manner, from the available facts to reasonable construals and beliefs, those who hold opposing beliefs have done just the opposite (i.e. they have proceeded in a top down fashion, from pre-existing motives and beliefs to biased interpretations)'.¹⁹ In other words, citizens will stick dogmatically to what they know rather than consider other people's interpretations and be unwilling to learn new things from other people participating in deliberative arenas. All of this evidence points towards a habitual and predictable citizen who does not really consider, or deliberate about, new information.²⁰

Finally, some critics suggest that 'the public is largely passionate and therefore driven by intemperate and largely thoughtless impulses.'²¹ Empirical evidence also suggests that these concerns may be warranted as emotions have been shown to undermine cognitive consistency on a regular basis.²² In fact, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse suggest that 'real life deliberation can fan emotions unproductively...and can [therefore] lead to worse decisions than would have occurred if no deliberation had taken place'.²³ The Marxist philosopher Chantal Mouffe, however, has been the most influential proponent of this kind of critique of deliberative democracy. She suggests that the mistake of deliberative democrats and liberal political

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philosophy more generally is to 'ignore the affective dimension mobilized by collective identifications and to imagine that those supposedly 'archaic' passions are bound to disappear with the advance of individualism and the progress of rationalism'.²⁴ In short, human beings are animals of passion and instinct, and to deny this fact and to try to bury these passions beneath the veneer of rational deliberation, will only serve to exacerbate tensions between groups.

Given the extent and power of this internal-psychological critique, it would be tempting to any political theorist (and particularly someone professing to be a *deliberative* theorist) to admit defeat and accept the project to be an attractive but ultimately impractical aim. However, deliberative democracy remains one of the most popular and widely endorsed frameworks in political theory. As such there are at least three types of response by deliberative theorists to the criticism of the citizen and their capacities outlined above. The first two are as follows:

- i) It is possible to suggest that institutions need to be radically reformed and made more deliberative so that, in turn, they will influence deliberative behaviour indirectly.
- ii) It is possible to suggest that individuals and groups should be educated with deliberative capacities more directly, through civics education programmes or schooling more generally.

Usually deliberative theorists apply a mixture of these two approaches in order to overcome (or at least to dampen) the fierce criticism they face, with different emphases placed on each option depending on their philosophical persuasion. Liberal deliberative theorists, such as William Galston and Stephen Macedo tend to be wary of the implications of pursuing option ii), as it can undermine state neutrality and pluralistic conceptions of the good.²⁵ As a result, liberal deliberative theory tends to pursue ii) weakly, ensuring only that children have 'a knowledge of their constitution and civic rights' and are aware of the value of political virtues like reciprocity and accountability.²⁶ Meanwhile, they place a stronger emphasis on option i), the power of properly designed institutions (guided by these virtues) to shape and improve citizens' deliberative behaviour over time.

Republicans offer their own version of deliberative democracy, which would object to such a weak approach to option ii). Civic humanist republicans such as Hannah Arendt, for example, recognised the need for strong institutions to avoid corruption and uphold political liberty.²⁷

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However, they also emphasise civic virtue and the wider deliberative capacities required for human flourishing as an intrinsically valuable part of the good life. Arendt and numerous others from this tradition, therefore, defended the need to directly educate and cultivate these capacities just as strongly as providing an institutional response.²⁸ This strong pursuit of option ii), clearly would require the state to take a position on a conception of the good and to promote a way of living, that would be unpalatable (or at least philosophically untenable) to most liberals.

In fact, modern accounts of republicanism, that are more sensitive to what Rawls calls 'the fact of reasonable pluralism', now provide a deliberative account that takes a less robust approach to option ii).²⁹ Philip Pettit and John Maynor defend a deliberative account built around contestation within institutions that provide a fair procedure for holding those in power to account and for minimising the opportunity for domination.³⁰ But when it comes to justifying the education of civic virtue, rather than defending it as some intrinsic part of human flourishing they instead find it valuable in consequentialist and instrumentalist terms, insofar that it enables free institutions. In this respect, this version of republican deliberative democracy (often referred to as civic republicanism) takes a middle route for option ii). It supports the education of civic virtue to the extent that it 'seeks to draw individuals and groups out of their narrow self-interested ways so that they themselves make the necessary contribution to their own non-domination.'³¹

It has been suggested that this retreat leads republicanism to become almost indistinguishable as a theory from liberalism.³² Although the gap between the two theories does undoubtedly become smaller, conflating these two philosophical traditions seems to me to be mistaken. It fails to pay due respect to the nuanced differences between the two perspectives and traditions, most importantly republicans' capacity to support the *active* and *direct* cultivation of citizens without having to worry as much about state neutrality. However, a problem does still exist. Not with the *capacity* to support these educational activities (which can theoretically be as strong as a civic humanist approach, albeit with a different justification), but with the general *attitude* and *inclination* of republicans to write about these activities. Maria Victoria-Costa begins to identify this problem when she suggests that Pettit's theory 'does not say much about the virtues of citizens or the policies the state may employ to encourage their development.'³³ Although there is no theoretical obstacle to identifying competences that may undermine the internal-psychological critique and no obstacle to outlining educational ideas

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to promote their cultivation, this does not occur in Pettit's theories and rarely occurs in modern civic republicanism.

It is important to stress however, that failing to address these issues runs deeper than republicanism recognising and arguably giving too much ground to liberal pluralism. Despite their weak approach to educationally cultivating capacities, and their overreliance upon strong institutions, liberal theories of deliberative democracy also pursue a third possibility when attempting to undermine (or at least justify a lack of concern with) the internal psychological critique. To this extent:

iii) It is possible to have an account of developmental psychology at the foundation of deliberative democracy which *describes* how children will (or at least can in the right circumstances) become competent deliberative citizens.

Ultimately, it is a developmental framework, inspired by Rousseau, Mill and Piaget, which allows liberal deliberative theorists to make a number of assumptions about the competence of citizens.³⁴ It explains why liberal theories of deliberation are not all that concerned with the internal psychological critique and assume that given the right conditions it would not be a significant obstacle for the practical realisation of deliberative democracy. However, given the pervasive influence that this Piagetian framework has had upon deliberative democratic theory, and the large role it plays, it has received relatively little scrutiny. It has been largely overlooked, even by those republicans who have criticised the deliberative project most and who have sort to re-invent it on firmer ground.

Modern civic republicans were correct to re-evaluate the basis upon which the cultivation of citizens is justified. However, in focussing on this and withdrawing from stronger conceptions of cultivation, they have failed to appreciate the necessity of re-evaluating the liberal developmental foundation. In failing to address iii) from a republican perspective they have failed to build their account of deliberative democracy on their own terms and their own foundations. They have failed to create a strong developmental foundation which supports the cultivation of citizens that can undermine the internal psychological critique. In fact, when it comes to iii), republicans either retain a dormant liberal developmental framework or simply have nothing at all. In short, republican theory fails to appreciate the essential role of developmental psychology at the foundations of the deliberative project. It is necessary, therefore, to take a closer look at this foundation and ask what role it currently plays for liberal accounts of

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deliberative democracy. It is important to consider whether this Piagetian account is representative of human development and whether any misrepresentations are acting as a restrictive block, not only to the evolution of liberal deliberative theory, but also to republicans as they try to reinvent the deliberative project.

2. The Piagetian Foundation of Deliberative Democracy

In the earliest accounts of deliberative democracy, proposed by John Rawls and Jurgen Habermas, the developmental theory of Jean Piaget plays an important role. His theory supports the assumptions and provides the foundations upon which deliberative democracy has subsequently been built. For Habermas this takes place in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, and for Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*, where each talks at length about the benefits of the Piagetian approach.³⁵ In subsequent accounts of deliberative democracy, Piaget has also been endorsed. Gutmann, for example, in *Democratic Education* defended a deliberative approach by explicitly (and rather uncritically) endorsing a Piagetian perspective.³⁶ Meanwhile, other deliberative theorists have subsequently adopted Habermasian and Rawlsian approaches to deliberative democracy and have done nothing to challenge these Piagetian foundations or investigate alternative theories about how children might develop into citizens who can competently deliberate in democratic arenas. In fact, as stated above, neither have opponents of these liberal accounts and as a result the theories of Jean Piaget have, in this context at least, gone largely unchallenged.

Piaget offers deliberative theory a foundation which is built around four key claims about moral development. First, development is *organic*. It is undoubtedly, at its core, a natural process.³⁷ It is guided by a self-regulatory biological mechanism called equilibration in which the child adapts and accommodates new information and knowledge as they encounter it. In the Piagetian account, therefore, capacities 'emerge inevitably in normal human ontogeny [individual development] through a combination of organism maturation and experience with the constant, universal properties of the physical world'.³⁸ By employing these capacities freely and regularly in a participatory environment children will develop into competent citizens. The second feature that Piaget offers deliberative democracy is *universal* development. *Every* normal child naturally develops his capacities in this way, through these specific biological processes, employing these techniques. In doing so, his developmental account assumes an 'epistemic subject that has no social class, sex, nationality, culture or personality'.³⁹

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Third, Piaget offers an account where development is *evolutionary*. Children develop their internal capacities through four distinct evolutionary stages.⁴⁰ According to his account the child does not, and cannot, skip stages of development. Nor can children regress into stages that they have already passed through.

Fourth, Piaget provides a developmental account wherein the best techniques to assist the child's development are *facilitative* methods.⁴¹ The facilitative approach was inspired, in part, by the philosophical writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau claimed that the parent or teacher should 'never command [the child] to do anything whatever, not the least thing in the world.'⁴² Instead, the guardian was to act as a much more passive symbol of authority and it was the child who should play the active role, interacting with, and adapting to, their environment, in recognition of their own natural development. In the Piagetian account of facilitation, therefore, the role of education is to provide environments where the child will encounter new experiences. In doing so, it is thought that the child will develop new, more mature ways of thinking, to represent these experiences through the organic processes of equilibration. Moreover, by developing these new ways of thought and by learning more about their surroundings, children will gradually, over the course of their education, evolve into fully socialised adults.

Adopting a Piagetian account allows deliberative democrats to assume that the psychological development of all children is *primarily* (albeit not exclusively) regulated by natural and biological mechanisms. Like Habermas and others within the Frankfurt School such as Louis Althusser, Piaget offers a version of the dialectics without contradiction.⁴³ Through the use of equilibration and biological, organic mechanisms he ultimately eliminates the struggles of opposites that exist within language and in the developmental process. This is the basis of consensus within the liberal deliberative model of politics and it is also what allows these theorists to assume a type of politics which avoids the kind of permanent class struggle, involving an "us" vs "them" dichotomy, which is so characteristic of both Marx and later radical democrats like Chantal Mouffe.⁴⁴ A simple assumption about the resolution of conflict both internally to the citizen and externally within political forums make it easy to assume that organic and evolutionary development will occur and that interventionist and more direct methods are simply unnecessary.

As a result, liberal deliberative democrats have their justification for pursuing only a weak or non-interference approach to directly cultivating the capacities (ii). Piaget's theory enables a laissez-faire attitude towards the

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development of skills, virtues and emotional intelligence and allows liberal deliberative theorists to assume that the biological mechanisms within children will do most of the work. Ultimately, this is reflected in the lack of attention paid to education (particularly early years' education) in the deliberative literature. However, there are serious problems with such an approach. If the development of these capacities is not so straightforward i.e. development is *not* the natural, or inevitable, outcome of these organic processes, then serious problems may arise. The failure to pay more attention to how the internal capacities can *directly* be developed or cultivated in the minds of young citizens may in fact compromise the deliberative project. Therefore, we should reconsider the appropriateness and plausibility of this organic account of development in the context of a theory of deliberative democracy.

In addition to this, the universalistic characteristics of Piaget's approach are also reflected in the work of Habermas, leading to similar problems within his deliberative approach. First through the notion of universal consensus- in which it is assumed all citizens can (and will) over time converge on the 'best argument'- and second through Piaget's correspondence thesis. This latter idea suggests that the development of societies is similar to that of individuals, organically developing into increasingly rational and decentred organisms, ultimately able to consider issues from a universally principled stand-point.⁴⁵ In each case, on the individual and social level, the engine of this eschatological process of development is considered natural and internal. It is driving progress forward over the years. As a result, deliberative democracy is mistakenly viewed as a context-independent political framework, that rather than developing out of a particular society and cultural tradition is the reflection of something universally appropriate and given. This, in turn, encourages an assumption about an underlying capacity within human beings to be able to switch to such a deliberative and participatory model of government if only these arenas are in place and if only they are allowed to do so.

In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls' "veil of ignorance" plays a similarly universalistic role.⁴⁶ With striking resemblance to Piaget's own approach, the veil hypothetically removes factors like sex, nationality and culture from considerations about the principles of justice in society so that agreement on basic issues becomes more likely. Rawls has since modified this approach to take into account greater pluralism in society. In *Political Liberalism* he develops a form of public reason for deliberative democracy that is necessarily applied by citizens on public issues but not on private ones.⁴⁷ It

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enables an overlapping consensus to emerge on constitutional essentials and issues of basic justice whilst allowing disagreement to persist within the private realm. This has led a number of critics to suggest that liberal deliberative theory of this kind is exclusionary, as it silences individuals and groups who cannot elaborate their constitutional concerns from within the boundaries of liberal public reason.⁴⁸

This is a fair criticism of Rawls, as public reason 'crowds out' arguments from other philosophical positions before the debate even begins. It reduces the opportunity for contestation by simply declaring certain thoughts and speech inadmissible. Too often overlooked, however, is the exclusion and domination that this public/private distinction might create for children within society. Although we might hope that they will grow up to value free participation in which they can elaborate ideas critically and competently, children are placed on the private side of this distinction. They are left primarily to what Rawls calls the 'just institution of the family' and, influenced by Piaget, it is merely assumed that they will organically develop capacities.⁴⁹ However, this clearly puts too much faith in universal development and overlooks the contextual domination and repression that children can receive *within* families and communities that may, in turn, undermine their future capacity to participate freely in just institutions.⁵⁰

Piaget's evolutionary understanding of development, coupled with the organic and universal mechanism that drives this process, allows and encourages deliberative theorists to portray the emergence of internally competent citizens as an *inevitable* part of an open and free democratic society. It buys into and builds upon the proposals of Mill and his belief that greater democratic participation would limit citizen's 'selfishness' and improve their 'comprehension' and 'conduct'.⁵¹ This may be, in part, true. However, as the 'civic' Mill might himself accept, there are no guarantees that all citizens will reach the highest stages of development primarily through these methods. Piaget, a great admirer of Mill, personally acknowledges that many people will not progress past the third of the four stages which he outlines.⁵² In this sense, although Piaget accepted that some would fall below the highest levels of development, liberal deliberative theorists have tended to assume that a more democratic society would facilitate progression. This, in turn, would ensure that citizens more accurately approximate the ideals that they have built their theories around. In doing so, they have failed to adequately address the other methods that might be employed to augment and enable this evolution over time, so that the true potential of individual citizens can be realised.

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Alternative models of development suggest that for citizens to obtain the highest and most complex capacities they must be created or moulded over time with more direct or mediatory methods. As section one suggests republicans are less constrained and (occasionally) more willing than their liberal counterparts to endorse more direct methods to achieve this, but as suggested previously, little work has been done in this area. As a result, republicans have been building their own version of deliberative contestation on top of these rather unsuitable Piagetian foundations. What may be required, therefore, is an alternative approach to developmental psychology, one which can offer a much more applicable and a much more accurate account of development for the creation of deliberative democratic citizens. The approach proposed here is provided by the Soviet developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky. The third section will now discuss the four corresponding features of his approach and consider what they might offer to a deliberative account that wished to take a more proactive approach to developing deliberative citizens.

3. A New Vygotskian Foundation for Deliberative Democracy

Two accounts of developmental psychology have dominated the field of study in recent years. The first of these accounts, as we have seen, was developed by Jean Piaget and is called *cognitive constructivism*. The second account was first proposed by the Marxist-Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky during the 1930s and is commonly referred to as *social constructivism*.⁵³ Although they share similar assumptions about the dynamic and interactive nature of development they have important differences and implications for deliberative theory which shall be drawn out and addressed further in this section. Vygotsky remained largely unknown in the West until the 1960s when some of his work was translated into English for the first time. This may be one of the key reasons that his lesser-known theories were not, and have not, been taken up earlier by deliberative democrats wishing to defend a slightly different approach to cultivating citizens. Vygotsky's work has gained a wider audience in the West over the last three decades but it has still not had a noticeable influence in political theory. Given the impact it could have and the positive role these ideas could play, this should not be the case.

Vygotsky's approach to developmental psychology can be summarised through four key characteristics. First, development is *primarily* cultural rather than organic. Vygotsky suggested that the mind is social in origin and

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that higher mental functions in particular are 'socially acquired, mediated by social meanings, voluntarily controlled and exist as a link in a broad system of functions rather than just as an individual unit'.⁵⁴ In short, the development of these capacities takes place not through natural or biological mechanisms but through culture and more specifically through the use of socio-cultural tools. These include technological tools such as computers or ploughs and psychological tools such as language or signs more generally. The tools begin as external processes that children encounter in their everyday lives. For example, they may witness the virtuous behaviour of an older peer, demonstrating signs of great humility at a time when it takes courage to back down from his or her convictions. Over time, however, these processes will be internalised. The growing child will 'extend the boundaries of their understanding by integrating socially elaborated symbols [signs] such as social values and beliefs, the cumulative knowledge of their culture, and the scientifically expanded concepts of reality) in to their own consciousness'.⁵⁵ As they internalise these cultural tools, they will become increasingly capable individuals.⁵⁶

Second, owing to its cultural characteristics, development is contextual not universal. Vygotsky suggests that the psychological development of children will always be relative and contingent upon the needs of a society in a specific time and space. The society, whether it is Marxist, liberal or traditionally conservative, will unavoidably, by conscious or unconscious reproduction, shape the capacities that are being internalised by its children. Cultural tools will be drawn from a society's politics, their arts, entertainment and various other sources to encourage a society actively to celebrate or reaffirm (in this present context) the most *deliberative* aspects in its institutions, its laws, and its allocation of public funding. Third, development is revolutionary rather than evolutionary. Rather than a smooth evolutionary process of development Vygotsky defends revolutionary and crisis ridden development. He suggests that these 'ages of stability are interrupted by ages of crisis. And these latter [ages of crises] are the breaks and turning points in development, again confirming the thesis that the development of the child is a dialectical process, a process in which the transition from one stage to the next occurs not through evolution, but through revolution'.⁵⁷

Fourth, according to Vygotsky, facilitation is not the most effective way to promote development. Instead, guidance for children should come in the form of mediatory techniques. The easiest way to understand mediatory techniques is to outline a concept which Vygotsky called the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD). The ZPD works by predicting future growth

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in the child by concentrating on the 'buds' of development rather than the already available 'fruits'.⁵⁸ Rather than focusing on how the child performs by themselves, unaided in a given task or test, Vygotsky and his followers focused on how much more the child could achieve with subtle mediation and guidance by older peers or adults. The Vygotskian account suggests that this developmental process is mediated by cultural tools and the more successfully a child is socialised into a world of these tools, the easier it is to use techniques of mediation to develop the child's capacities to their full potential.

The cultural developmental perspective has potentially significant ramifications for deliberative democracy. If we adopt the Vygotskian account, a culture or society actively *creates* internally competent deliberative citizens. In this sense, children are immersed in a distinct political community with its own unique culture. They are individuated from this community by drawing on particular cultural tools that promote deliberative behaviour. This contrasts with the Piagetian account, which suggests that children are inducted into their society - they are initially separate from it and are socialised into it over time as they participate and interact. The difference is significant: in a Vygotskian account the 'true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social [as it is in Piaget], but from the social to the individual'.⁵⁹ Clearly the former of these is better suited to a liberal theory of deliberative democracy, as the individual is the primary unit. Institutions are built around facilitating and enabling the induction of these individuals into the political system by providing them with an opportunity to discuss issues.

Civic humanist republicans like Arendt, meanwhile, may feel much more at home with a developmental theory like Vygotsky's. Arendt put a greater emphasis on Aristotelian conceptions of the Greek 'polis' into which citizens are born and through which culture acts immediately shaping their ideals and their virtues. Arendt suggests that the polis 'is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be...[and that to]...be deprived of it means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance'.⁶⁰ A Vygotskian account of development speaks more directly to this model of deliberative theory that finds intrinsic cultural value in a particular way of living. Although Rawls has its own idea of a 'background culture' and Habermas has his own conception of 'lifeworld', neither of these are as culturally thick or consciously developmental upon citizen's

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characters and actions.⁶¹ Neither goes as far as supporting a culture that 'rewards virtue with public esteem', for example, or a culture in which individuals are directly cultivated. Indeed, many writers are concerned with such an approach to democracy due to the implications it may have for the exclusion of cultural minorities and vulnerable groups such as women.⁶²

Civic republicans are aware of the need to balance liberty, pluralism and cultural reproduction. Maynor, for example, suggests that 'by bringing agents out into the political environment, modern republicans not only want to check the power of the state and reduce the threat from factions. These republicans also want the citizenry to forge closer ties with each other and explore similarities and differences as they help to form a common goal'.⁶³ In order to do so pragmatically, however, all citizens should subscribe to a common culture which enables them to contest, and value this contestation, as an essential element of their political institutions. This common culture, of a much thinner variety of the kind defended in civic humanist approaches but thicker than in liberal accounts, might provide a route - a middle ground - towards enabling capacities that would undermine the internal psychological critique enabling citizens to participate and deliberate more effectively. There is, of course, no compulsion for citizens to participate on every issue.⁶⁴ It is more of a case of 'episodic participation' through which 'new ideas and viewpoints are constantly injected into the open and inclusive forums'.⁶⁵ In this sense, it also reflects Vygotsky's concern for contextual significance, and the specific needs and requirements of citizens within a community. Ultimately, it fulfils what Peterson calls the primary aim of 'the [republican] political process...to allow the interests of citizens to be publicised and tracked in order that freedom, understood as the absence of arbitrary domination be minimised'.⁶⁶

Vygotsky's account of mediation also has much to offer a republican theory of deliberative democracy in creating critical and reflective citizens. Unlike Piaget's facilitative and laissez faire approach to development, it emphasises the importance of *purposefully* designing educational interventions, or mediatory tools, that promote internal deliberative capacities. If we wish to create citizens who can participate effectively in deliberative arenas this must be an essential element of an account of deliberative democracy. If we make the decision (as a political community) to endorse mediation, it allows us to utilise cultural tools and implement policies that encourage this deliberative model of thinking both in the classroom and beyond. For example, we can begin by proposing examples of good deliberative practice for children to emulate and aspire towards, highlighting great thinkers, films or artists that represent or exemplify

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internal deliberative capacities in different ways. We can also re-direct public funding to support art projects and community groups that incorporate, celebrate and reaffirm these essential deliberative characteristics.

Mediation of this kind can already be found in the republican literature. For example, 'nudge' theory proposed by Sunstein and Thayer is essentially a mediatory process that encourages certain behaviours without legislation.⁶⁷ In this respect, it is not direct instruction, which developmentally would be equated to disciplinarian or authoritarian approaches. Moreover, it is not facilitation, as it is not simply enabling individuals to fulfil their desires within the confines of the law. In this sense, civic republicanism tries to secure individual political liberty through what Sunstein and Thaler have called libertarian paternalism.⁶⁸ As they explain, 'the libertarian aspect of our strategies lies in the straightforward insistence that, in general, people should be free to do what they like-and to opt out of undesirable arrangements if they want to do so'.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, the paternalistic aspect of the term 'lies in the claim that it is legitimate for choice architects to try to influence people's behaviour in order to make their lives longer, healthier, and better'.⁷⁰ In short, it is acceptable to mediate decision making so that individuals are statistically more likely to make deliberative, and by extension wiser, decisions.

However, Sunstein, like many republicans, remains sceptical about the practicalities of liberal models of deliberative democracy and any perfectionist notion that assumes the development of capacities to achieve this. However, Vygotsky seems to offer republicanism a developmental basis from which it can begin to construct an alternative deliberative approach built around choice architecture and contestation. It can build the oppositional forces of argument and compromise, competence and incompetence, individual and collective, in to a vibrant democratic arrangement. The Vygotskian approach to development is able to capture and explain a particular period of a young person's life where they are being prepared or cultivated into individuals that can flourish within the republic. This means recognizing that children are born into a culture and a society, and that through mediatory methods, it is necessary to develop their reflective and critical capacities so that the institutions of society can flourish, contestation can be maximized and domination can be minimized. As these characteristics are necessary for upholding political liberty within free institutions, it is justifiable to educate children on the kind of consequentialist basis defended by modern civic republicans. Ultimately,

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however, it is not a straightforward process. It requires a revolution in how we teach our children. Not in what they argue about, but *how* they argue and *how* they deliberate with each other.

Conclusion

There is a clear reason why liberal political philosophy dominates deliberative democratic theory. That reason is the fundamental assumptions made (with the support of Piaget) about the nature of development and human nature. If we replace this Piagetian foundation with a Vygotskian one, it opens up a number of new possibilities for deliberative democracy. It allows us to consider new political philosophies and to consider how they might make deliberative democracy a more practically realisable political framework. This need not be limited to republican theory, as Vygotskian ideas may apply just as strongly to communitarians defending deliberative democracy or potentially (and perhaps most logically) to a Marxist strand of deliberative theory yet to be established. The primary purpose of this article, however, has not been to elevate Vygotsky as the new developmental messiah of a new republican deliberative theory. The primary purpose has been to question the unchallenged position of a Piagetian theory at the heart of deliberative democracy and to show how important a developmental theory of this kind can be. That being said, it has also been my aim to revive the Vygotskian theory in a new setting and demonstrate how relevant this Marxist approach can be in a mainstream debate about participatory democracy. Too often Marxism finds itself on the periphery of such debates, allowing liberals to dominate discussions about a political framework that has huge emancipatory and revolutionary potential. Vygotsky is a new pathway into this debate that I hope many Marxist scholars will utilise to its fullest.⁷¹

Notes

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- ⁷¹ I would like to thank Derek Bell and Peter Jones for discussing issues within this paper on numerous occasions and for making very helpful comments on previous (and quite different) drafts. I am also grateful to Ian O' Flynn, Graham Long, Albert Weale, Paul Reynolds, Mark Edward Matthew Johnson and Norman Geras for their insightful comments.

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