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Abstract: ‘Deliberative Democracy and Republicanism’

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In this paper I tackle the issue of whether a republican theory of the most promising kind in a contemporary setting, which I have identified to run along the lines of Habermas’s arguments is nothing else than another sort of deliberative democracy theory. The similarities run indeed unmistakably deep. Deliberation does not necessarily play as important a role for instrumental republicans who choose to concentrate instead on the more formal and restricted notion of participation in the form of contestation, but it is intrinsically related to Habermasian arguments. A Habermasian brand of republicanism is bound to be very similar to one particular strand in deliberative democracy, since the latter is actually inspired by Habermas’s writings. This strand, which we may call, following Dryzek, discursive democracy is indeed very similar to what I claim to be the most promising version of republican thought, also as both share the bigger claim that democracy, if it is to last, requires legitimacy and political authority, and political authority requires deliberation.

Deliberative democratic arguments that are similar to Habermas’s ideas are part of the strand closer to radical democracy rather than liberalism and represent a form of macro-deliberation rather than micro-deliberation. In the end, it is hard to find any real differences between Habermas’s notion of deliberative democracy and arguments of deliberative democrats of the particular strand identified above, except to say that in republican arguments of the Habermasian type, the normative core of the theory may ultimately relate to the notions of legitimacy and especially political obligation, rather than deliberation as such. Ultimately, the crucial element that these strands of thought share, against a liberal version of public justification as in Rawls’s political liberalism, which represents the inspiration for the second strand of deliberative democratic arguments referred to as micro-deliberation is that “[p]olitical equality is better realized by allowing all to bring their deepest convictions to political decision-making.”¹ The sanitized version of Rawls’s public reason, where controversy in deliberation is avoided and the scope of deliberation as such is limited stands apart from Habermas’s extensively deliberative vision of society.

¹ Iseult Honohan, *Civic Republicanism*, Routledge, London & New York, 2002, p.228