

Beyond the Dichotomy of Agonism and Deliberation: The Impasse of Contemporary Democratic Theory

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1. Introduction

How are we able to achieve consensus without exclusion in an open debate? What are the conditions required to reach a mutual understanding in terms of dialogue without compulsion? What process leading to a decision deserves the name of “justice”? While these questions around consensus or agreement are prominent in contemporary democratic theory, it might seem anachronistic to examine the significance of contestation, conflict, and antagonism in democratic society. However, if we see the real world as being replete with conflicts, and recognize that a perfectly harmonious society is as an impossible utopian vision, we should not simply dismiss this antagonistic dimension as unnecessary and eliminable.

“Agonistic democracy”, which is one strand of thought within radical democracy, attempts to address this issue. This model of democracy is generally contrasted with “deliberative democracy”, which examines the conditions for reaching an agreement through deliberation among participants.¹ However, as is also well known, there are multiple lineages even within “agonistic democracy”. The first purpose of this paper, then, is to provide a clear mapping for understanding the complexity and diversity of agonistic democracy. In order to do this, I shall focus on three representatives of contemporary agonistic theory: theorists who are influenced by the Arendtian model, Chantal Mouffe, and William Connolly. I would like to investigate what

kinds of democratic model each of them proposes, and show how different these are from deliberative democracy.²

Clarifying the characteristics of contemporary agonistic democracy leads to this paper's second purpose. Generally speaking, there is today an atmosphere that forces those who engage in contemporary democratic theory to choose the position of either deliberation or agonism, or consensus or disagreement. In the second section of this paper I would like to challenge this dominant dichotomy by examining some of the attempts to integrate agonism within deliberative democracy. If we look closely, we can observe that there are three types of perspective within these approaches. Through a careful reading of some of the most important works, I shall show how difficult it is for agonism to avoid being absorbed into the deliberative framework. I would like to point out here that my intent is not to defend deliberative democracy simply because it provides a more practical democratic theory. What I would like to indicate here, rather, is that the current agonistic theories fail to keep their position separate from the rational theory of consensus and that what appears to be a dichotomy between deliberation and agonism is indeed a counterfeit opposition.

2. Mapping Agonistic Democracy 1: The Arendtian Model

I will start by fleshing out Hannah Arendt's model, which is one of most influential strands of current agonistic democracy. Her renovation of the conception of politics and the public sphere in which political action takes place rejuvenated the agonistic tradition in democratic theory. A pertinent feature of Arendt's political thought is that she views politics not as a process by which to form consensus but as an activity to express men's plurality in our world.³ Her defense of *doxa* against the truth in the public sphere also emanates from this vision of politics,

because the truth, so far as it is true in itself, has imperative coercive power and necessarily destroys human plurality.⁴ Therefore, for Arendt plurality in the public realm can be maintained only when political actors express their opinions and show their performance through words and deeds among equals.

Some critics emphasize an agonistic ethos in Arendt's political thinking. Dana R. Villa, for example, argues the agonistic perspective in Arendt, attempting to detach her concept of politics from the Habermasian consensus model.⁵ Contrary to those who wish to draw a concept of politics based on the communicative and rational model from Arendt's thought, Villa argues that "the theory of political action presented in *The Human Condition* takes as its ideal an agonistic subjectivity that prizes the opportunity for individualizing action."⁶ According to Villa's re-reading of Arendt's works, her idea of politics shares an agonistic spirit with some post-modern theorists, like Foucault, Lyotard, and Baudrillard; therefore, Villa sees an Arentian public space as an agonistic place, in which plurality and political freedom come to fruition.⁷

Bonnie Honig tries to elicit a more individualistic agonistic politics from Arendt's thought than Villa does.⁸ While she criticizes Seyla Benhabib's attempt to reduce Arendt's political theory to consensus or an "associative model" of democracy, Honig manifests her position as "agonistic feminism." Honig's conception of agonistic action enables the performative emergence of an actor's identity, which cannot be reduced to any established and dominant dichotomy like men/women, sex/gender, public/private and so on. In other words, agonistic feminism resists any "homogenization and normalization" of identity and struggles for individuation and distinction. Honig notes:

The agonal passion for distinction, which so moved Arendt's

theoretical account, may also be read as a struggle for individuation, for emergence as a distinct self: in Arendt terms, a “who” rather than a “what,” a self possessed not of fame, per se, but of individuality, a self that is never exhausted by the... categories that seek to define and fix it.⁹

For Honig, the plurality and difference that Arendt defended in her political theory can only develop through the revelation of one’s “who”. Therefore, it is insufficient to interpret Arendt’s politics as associative, or deliberative in the way that Benhabib does. Not only is being with others but also against others needed to affirm the resistibility to any ruling norms and the new possibility of identity. Hence, Honig’s agonistic feminism invites us to think of politics as an unceasing “practice of (re-) founding, augmentation, and amendment”,¹⁰ through which a new political subject appears in the performative way.

On the other hand, Andrew Schaap argues for agonistic democracy from the point of view of “political reconciliation.” The question Schaap raises is how we can conceptualize reconciliation among ordinary citizens in a situation of mutual distrust, because he believes that reconciliation is an inevitable condition for democratization in a divided society. While some deliberative democrats like John Dryzek emphasize the importance of deliberation in such a situation, Schaap rather suggests an agonistic perspective for “the possibility of retrieving the concept of reconciliation from a state-sanctioned project of national building for a radical democratic politics centered on the possibilities for collective action and solidarity among citizens divided by a history of state violence.”¹¹

According to Schaap, as long as deliberation in divided societies always presupposes a communal moral consensus regarding the distinction of what is reasonable/unreasonable, it

fails to recognize that the conflict in such a situation occurs “between two political communities whose interests and values remain irreconcilable.”¹² Conversely, an agonistic perspective can suggest “an openness to listen to those who appear to us unreasonable and a willingness to question what counts as reasonable political speech”¹³ by transforming antagonism into agonism. Although this position is close to Chantal Mouffe’s agonism, as we shall see below, where Schaap seems to be in line with Mouffe he introduces the Arendtian perspective against Mouffe. In other words, Arendtian rather than Schmittian agonism, which is Mouffe’s theoretical position, is required in order to conceptualize agonistic pluralism and political reconciliation in divided societies. He explains:

It is here that a decisive difference emerges between Mouffe’s and Arendt’s agonism, which results directly from their different conceptions of the political. For Arendt, political agonism entails the clash between a plurality of perspectives that are brought to bear on the world by individuals.the Schmittian distinction between friend and enemy becomes anti-political to the extent that it prevents these other perspectives from emerging.¹⁴

The difference between Arendt and Mouffe emerges from their understanding of “the political.” As we see later, while Mouffe sees the political in conflict between friend and enemy, for Arendt the political is concerned with plurality and freedom in terms of political action. Therefore, according to Schaap, the Arendtian agonism enables commonality among antagonistic citizens and suggests the possibility of reconciliatory politics.¹⁵

As described above, whether we place an emphasis either on more individualistic dimension like Villa and Honig or on the communal aspect like Schaap, we can say that the gist of Arendtian agonism is to understand conflicts as a condition for

freedom and human plurality. As agonistic proponents maintain, this agonistic attitude seems to oppose a basic presupposition of deliberative democracy that holds consensus among participants as an important achievement of democratic procedure. For them, the anticipation for consensus is not so much an impossible as a harmful assumption as far as it suffocates the agonistic ethos, as well as the freedom and plurality that Arendt finds in politics.

3. Mapping Agonistic Democracy 2: Chantal Mouffe

I will now give an overview of Chantal Mouffe's agonistic democracy. Mouffe also emphasizes that we cannot avoid conflicts or antagonism in our societies and criticizes the deliberative model of democracy because of its neglect of an antagonistic dimension.¹⁶ In order to introduce this questionable political concept to democratic theory, she reactivates Carl Schmitt's concept of "the political," a friend-enemy distinction that has generally been considered incompatible with liberal democratic presumptions. Mouffe concurs with Schmitt who thinks that the moment of "the political" is engaged in a construction of collective identity, and furthermore agrees with his critique that there is no politics without accompanying inclusion/exclusion in terms of a "we-they" boundary line. In other words, as far as the construction of "our" identity depends on "their" presence, she acknowledges exclusions as inevitable for politics, which is exactly the aspect that deliberative democrats tend to overlook in formalizing their theoretical position.¹⁷

However, Mouffe ends up departing from Schmitt's "political theology," because she cannot follow Schmitt's assumption of "our" identity. That is to say, while for Schmitt the homogeneous "we people," which is a necessary condition for democracy, is constituted as something given or empirical, Mouffe sees "our"

political association as the result of political articulation. Therefore, what is important for Mouffe's agonistic pluralism is that a collective identity does not emerge from an essential or foundational homogeneity, but it is always already an effect in terms of political articulation in hegemonic struggle. Mouffe notes:

What we need to do is precisely what Schmitt does not do: once we have recognized that the unity of the people is the result as a political construction, we need to explore all the logical possibilities that a political articulation entails. Once the identity of the people—or rather, its multiple possible identities—is envisaged on the mode of a political articulation, it is important to stress that if it is to be a real *political* articulation, not merely the acknowledgement of empirical differences, such an identity of the people must be seen as the *result* of the political process of hegemonic articulation.¹⁸

What has to be emphasized here is that a boundary drawn between friend and enemy can be neither final nor definitive. Put another way, to see collective identity as an outcome of political articulation means that the borderline dividing “us” from “them” is open to a recurrent re-constitution through hegemonic struggle. This perspective refutes the promise of “unanimous consensus without exclusions” made by deliberative democrats. As any consensus or political order is a temporary “expression of a hegemony, of a specific pattern of power relation,”¹⁹ it must be challenged and disrupted by an antagonistic force, which is excluded. Mouffe suggests her agonistic model in comparison with the deliberative model as follows:

[Agonistic pluralism] forces us to keep the democratic contestation alive. To make room for dissent and to foster the

institutions in which it can be manifested is vital for a pluralist democracy, and one should abandon the very idea that there could ever be a time in which it would cease to be necessary because the society is now ‘well-ordered.’...For this reason it [agonistic pluralism] is much more receptive than the deliberative model to the multiplicity of voices that contemporary pluralist societies encompass and to complexity of their power structure.²⁰

Hitherto, we have discussed Mouffe’s picture of a radical democratic project without distinguishing between agonism and antagonism in a half-intentional way. However, the hinge of her theory of agonistic democracy certainly lies in how we transform fierce antagonism into a more tamed form of hostility, because Mouffe thinks that democratic politics requires some kind of minimal framework or agreement to function well. Therefore Mouffe suggests that we must regard “them” not as enemies who absolutely confront “us,” but as legitimate “adversaries” who share liberal-democratic presumptions such as liberty and equality. This category of “adversary” that Mouffe introduces here still remains a hostile figure to “us,” but is not the Schmittian enemy we should demolish in contestation. According to Mouffe, the adversary pledges his/her allegiance to liberal-democratic values and participates in hegemonic struggles over ideal interpretation of those empty ideas as liberty and equality.²¹

4. Mapping Agonistic Democracy 3: William Connolly

Since William Connolly’s purview of concern covers a very broad range, more often than not it tends to confuse people who deal with his political thought.²² We can see that traces of a variety of thinkers, such as Spinoza, Nietzsche, Foucault, Deleuze and so on, intermingle with each other in Connolly’s thinking. Yet, if one recognizes that this wealth of topics and references develops

around central concerns or targets, it becomes much easier to find a way through the vast forest of Connolly's thought. For Connolly's thought the two overarching themes are the cultivation of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness to difference. These two critical concepts are fueled by the drive to the "new" pluralism, and therefore it is pertinent to start from here.

First of all, we can follow Mark Wenman who suggests, "the best entry point into Connolly's work is to return to his critique of conventional political science pluralism."²³ Connolly formulates his own pluralism, often called "pluralization", by differentiating it from "old" and conventional pluralism. As he notes, "conventional pluralist theory has not proceeded deeply enough into dominant presumptions within Euro-American culture about the character of the state, the nation, identity, responsibility, morality, monotheism, secularism, and sexuality"; conventional pluralism assumed closed diversity within settled areas like the state, but Connolly refutes this because it cannot address contemporary problems like the new social movements, which disrupt conventional presuppositions and require a quite new identity and recognition.²⁴ For this reason he attempts to conceptualize a "new" pluralism which calls for "the pluralization of pluralism."

This "new" pluralism requires us to confine our drive to achieve a total and pure identity, which was a focal point of Connolly's monumental work published in 1991, *Identity/Difference*.²⁵ In this important work, he points out our deep propensity to convert difference to otherness, which often evokes a violent exclusion of the others. Connolly calls this the "second problem of evil," which is "the evil that flows from the attempt to establish security of identity for any individual or group by defining the other that exposes sore spots in one's identity as evil or irrational."²⁶ Connolly often uses the term

“fundamentalism” to describe such an attitude. For him, fundamentalism is not only concerned with some doctrines, often religious, defining political issues in an absolute vocabulary of God, morality, or nature, but also covers, more generally, those who protect their fundamentals by “defining every carrier of critique or destabilization as an enemy marked by exactly those defects, weaknesses, corruptions, and naïvetés you are under an absolute imperative to eliminate”.²⁷

To overcome or alleviate the desire for a closed, exclusive identity, Connolly introduces to his democratic strategy the concepts of “agonistic respect” and “critical responsiveness”. Connolly explains the former as follows.

Agonistic respect, as I construe it, is a social relation of respect for the opponent against whom you define yourself even while you resist its imperatives and strive to delimit its spaces of hegemony. Care for the strife and interdependence of contingent identities, in which each identity depends upon a set of differences to be, means that “we” ... cannot pursue the ethic that inspires us without contesting claims to the universality and sufficiency of the moral fundamentalisms we disturb...²⁸

However, this is not an easy project, as Connolly himself recognizes. It is here that he incorporates “genealogy” and “deconstruction” into his arsenal, because both of them help reveal the contingency of identity and show how makeshift its “universality” is.²⁹ This experience of contingency enables what Nietzsche called the “spiritualization of enmity”³⁰ and opens up the possibility of bringing about the respect for difference and the space in which agonistic conflicts take place. Participants who accept the contestability regarding their ethical or moral sources can begin negotiating with each other with agonistic respect.

I will now move on to consider the second point. As

Connolly notes, “while agonistic respect is a virtue cultivated between partisans already on the register of public life, critical responsiveness is particularly appropriate to the politics of becoming”; critical responsiveness has an intimate relationship with what Connolly calls “the politics of becoming.”³¹ According to him, “the politics of becoming” is one that accepts that a new thing or moment can come into being:

By the politics of becoming I mean that paradoxical politics by which new and unforeseen things surge into being such as a new and surprising religion, a new source of moral inspiration, a new cultural identity within an existing constellation of established identities such as the introduction of the practice of rights into Christendom, or the placement of a new right on an existing register of recognized rights such as the right to doctor-assisted suicide.”³²

Critical responsiveness is an indispensable condition for the politics of becoming, because it is a “presumptive generosity” toward new emergent elements, which attempt to move from below established recognition to one or more of registers. The pluralism Connolly suggests depends on whether constituencies can cultivate this civic virtue or generous disposition toward new beginnings that can disrupt stable identities and customs.

Hitherto we have taken up three different currents of agonistic democracy. As I indicated, while these have several different aspects in their agonistic visions, at times through a closer analysis we can uncover some affinities between them. Firstly, they seek plurality or pluralism as a condition for politics or the political. For them, diversity among people is possible only through agonistic political action, and in order to enable this, they require us to render the others with heterogeneous value as adversarial equals.

This emphasis upon deep diversity brings us to the second affinity between them. The second point is that their agonistic models welcome, to a greater or larger extent, “contingency” in the political realm. This is particularly the case with Mouffe and Connolly.³³ On the one hand, for Mouffe any hegemonic articulation is contingent, and therefore no identity can be predetermined, as Schmitt suggested. On the other hand, Connolly’s agonistic respect and critical responsiveness require that we accept the contingency of our identity, beliefs and moral foundations. Hence, it seems possible to consider pluralism and contingency to be crucial factors which differentiate the agonistic model of democracy from the deliberative model. However, as I mentioned earlier, there have been some attempts to synthesize these two perspectives. We shall deal with these arguments in the next section.

5. The Syntheses of Agonism into Deliberative Democracy?

Some commentators claim that deliberative democracy has attempted to consolidate agonism with their rational democratic theories. Here I shall take up the arguments of some of these critics to survey their general features and examine how each of these succeeds in their attempts. In order to do this, I suggest categorizing deliberative democrats’ reactions to agonism into three groups.

First of all, following John S. Brady, we shall discuss what can be named the “accommodationist model.” According to Brady, this type of argument, such as that made by Simone Chambers, claims that “while the [deliberative] theory does not embrace political contestation for its own sake, it can certainly accommodate it within its theoretical framework.”³⁴ However, insofar as this perspective does not acknowledge any conflicts within the public sphere, it makes it appear as though the theory

of public sphere is neutral and has nothing to do with any conflicts. This insistence is clearly a theoretical position that neglects the claim of agonistic democracy. Therefore, though we can proceed to the second category without examining this position in the light of our context, if we have a quick word from the perspective of agonistic democracy, we can say that it is absolutely impossible to eliminate the trace of power relations and conflictual elements from the public sphere. If we imagine the public sphere as a transparent totality, it only conceals inevitable exclusions and voices of dissent.

Our second category is one that recognizes the conflictual moment within the process of deliberation. Patchen Markell argues that Habermas' deliberative democracy not only accepts but also needs an agonistic dimension to develop the whole range of the theory of the public sphere in the context of postmodernism. By analyzing Habermas' communicative theory closely he attempts to show that Villa's dichotomy between Arendtian agonism and Habermasian consensus stems from misrecognition of the consensus model and argues, against Villa's formulation, that "Habermas's and Arendt's models of the public sphere are neither opposed nor identical, but complementary."³⁵ To delineate this claim Markell focuses on two aspects of Habermas' discourse ethics: "the fallibilistic nature of validity and the reflectivity of discourse."³⁶ According to his re-reading:

on the one hand the fallibilism of Habermas's account of validity means that the outcome of the discursive procedures of the public political sphere have only a "*presumption*" of rationality and are always open to further contestation; on the other hand, the reflexivity of discourse means nothing is immune to contestation in the public sphere, not even the nature of the procedures by which public discussion is conducted.³⁷

In terms of this interpretation of discourse ethics, the distinction between Arendt and Habermas becomes more equivocal than it appears at first sight. Namely, insofar as Habermas accepts the fallibilistic nature of validity and the reflectivity of discourse and sees the public sphere as a place open to dissent, the difference between these two thinkers is reduced to that of tone and emphasis, since Arendt also not only defended plurality but also emphasized the significance of commonality. Consequently, the only remaining problem between deliberation and agonism is, according to Markell, a very liberal one of “how much dissensus a political community can tolerate.”³⁸

Yet, even if we accept Markell’s account of Habermas’ discourse ethics, we can still respond to this challenge to synthesize in two ways. Firstly, as Gürsözlü argues in a recent essay, the type of agonism Markell describes is a tamed version of agonistic political action.³⁹ That is, although it acknowledges that some disagreements can remain even after consensus, Markell overlooks the more untamed agonistic action in terms of “expressive, contestatory, disruptive speech and action”.⁴⁰

Our second response is that Markell’s re-interpretation of communicative theory does not take into account the dimension of “contingency,” which is a necessary condition for agonistic pluralism. Even if Markell emphasizes fallibility and reflectivity in the Habermasian model and constantly opens to a new deliberation, this procedure of reconsideration would be held in the sphere governed by rationality. As far as the Habermasian public sphere goes, there is no room for contingency to come into being, and so Markell’s model cannot avoid the label of “fundamentalism” in Connolly’s sense. For the above two reasons, we can still distinguish agonistic democracy from deliberative critique. We will now move to the third category, which seems to be the most persuasive.

The third group consists of those who argue that agonism cannot help but presuppose a sort of deliberative framework. We can take up Andrew Knops' article as a representative of this perspective.⁴¹ Focusing on Mouffe's democratic theory, Knops attempts to clarify why agonism implicitly depends on deliberation. As we noted above, Mouffe acknowledged that her agonistic democracy needs at least some minimal ethico-political principles like liberty and equality or refusal of subordination, and presupposes a framework within which an adversarial relationship is possible. However, according to Knops, in formulating this adversarial model she does appear to accept "the kind of open fair exchange of reasons between equals that deliberative theorists promote."⁴² In other words, insofar as Mouffe's model sets up an arena with some conditions for democratic interaction, she is faced with the dilemma that while agonistic democracy maintains the impossibility of consensus, at times it must nevertheless be reliant upon a kind of consensus itself. From this recognition, Knops points out a "mutually dependent" relation between the agonistic and deliberative models and he concludes:

In all these senses, her agonistic theory of democracy can be seen to be deliberative. However, we could equally argue that deliberation, and rational consensus, can be seen as agonistic.⁴³

While Knops argues for the articulation of agonism and deliberation from the point of view of "consensus," Eva Erman raises a similar, but stronger argument from the perspective of "conflict." Against Mouffe's criticism that deliberative democracy neglects the dimension of conflict in the political sphere, Erman repeatedly maintains that "deliberation is constitutive of conflict."⁴⁴ Following Knops, Erman argues that the adversarial relationship Mouffe insists on as an alternative

democracy to deliberation necessarily requires deliberative presuppositions between adversaries. However, Erman attempts to take the argument one step further: she shows that not only the notion of agonism but also antagonism itself is dependent upon deliberative frameworks. Here we will take a closer look at her argument.

Erman questions Mouffe's presupposition that there is no common symbolic space regarding an antagonistic relation. According to Erman, even if people never share any ideas as to which value is the most important, or which reason should be crucial for deciding who is right or wrong, insofar as "the actors involved can only identify an antagonistic conflict as such through some common presumptions about each other as *subjects*", we have to say that they have entered into the some kind of symbolic space.⁴⁵ In this sense, no conflict can exist as such without a minimal shared framework within which participants recognize each other as enemies; this is the reason why Erman affirms that deliberation is constitutive of conflict.

Erman delves into the same matter from another perspective; she focuses on Mouffe's democratic project of the transformation from antagonism to agonism, which is indeed, as we have seen, a crux of Mouffe's agonistic democracy. While Mouffe does not provide enough explanation about how this conversion is possible, we cannot imagine any form of this transformation without positing some shared understanding of common presumptions because, without such a point of common reference, they cannot accept any ethico-political principles in the moment of their transformation. Hence, if we consider the changeover Mouffe emphasizes, we have to conclude that an agonistic relationship, by definition, must presuppose a shared symbolic space, in other words, some kinds of deliberation. Finally, Erman closes with a critical comment on the propensity of contemporary democratic

theories:

In fact, I see a possible danger in the tendency within contemporary political theory to start out from the ideas of ‘incommensurable conflict’ and ‘fact of pluralism.’ If these ideas are not carefully elaborated, they might prohibit a deeper understanding of conflicts, both concerning how they emerge and what they consist of⁴⁶

For Erman, the agonistic democrats’ assumption that conflicts cannot be reconciled is not simply wrong, but also unattractive for the real participants who are involved in intersubjective communication. They “try to do something about them in order to improve the possibility of reaching understanding or a reason-based substantive compromise of some sort”⁴⁷. However, arguments like Mouffe’s that attribute ethical conflicts to ontological fact cannot contribute to these real negotiations at all, or more likely, they would lead to a danger that destroys people’s hope.⁴⁸

The critiques of Knops and Erman are here directed toward Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism. However, we can also apply these criticisms, in principle, to other kinds of agonistic theories, since these necessarily require a common framework to enable agonism between conflictual identities. For Arendt, this symbolic space is the public sphere, for Connolly it is a non-fundamentalist ethos, which bolsters, as a minimal condition or consensus, their theoretical positions. Thus, we can suppose that these critiques which state that “deliberation is constitutive of conflicts” are aimed at agonistic democracy in general.

We have seen three kinds of attempts to integrate agonism into deliberative democracy. As I indicated, the first two critiques are inappropriate or insufficient for their purpose, and we can regard only the third category as persuasive. In the conclusion, I would

like to consider the significance that this critique could have for democratic theory.

6. Conclusion

If it is nearly impossible to imagine that a perfectly harmonious society could come to realization in our increasingly complex and accelerated world, one cannot avoid considering the conflicts we are facing today and will face in the future. Contemporary theories of agonistic democracy have addressed this conflictual dimension as a necessary condition for democratic theory and to create distance from the consensus model by deliberation. As I have tried to show in this paper, however, their projects are jeopardized by some of the attempts to integrate both sides from the perspective of deliberative democracy. Against this tendency, to be sure, there are some critics who resist the integration and insist that it is overly hasty to bridge the gap between these two perspectives without careful consideration.⁴⁹ However, in my view it seems very difficult, if not impossible, for agonistic democrats to neglect these critiques. In other words, insofar as theories of agonistic democracy must necessarily presuppose a symbolic space in which to transform brutal antagonism into an agonistic relationship, they cannot avoid depending on a minimal degree of consensus or a kind of achievement of deliberation. Obviously, all of the agonistic democrats I took up in this paper reject the presumptions of deliberative democracy; but considering them from a more macroscopic view, we notice their secret reliance upon consensus.⁵⁰

I would like to conclude this discussion with two points. Firstly, the dichotomy between deliberation and agonism, or consensus and conflict, which is currently a dominant theme in democratic theory, has to be counted as invalid. If we include one or more minimal conditions for conflicts in a sort of deliberation,

agonism cannot definitely avoid consensus as a result of deliberation. For this reason, we must abandon this dualism.

However, though this is my second point, this conclusion does not necessarily lead us to think that a deliberative democracy demonstrates advantages over an agonistic one. Rather, this bottleneck of agonism, at the same time, invites us to re-think the relationship between exclusion and democracy in another way. Therefore what is required today in democratic theory is not to decide which democratic model prevails against the other, but to re-constitute the question regarding consensus and *dissensus*.

Notes and References

1. Generally speaking, theories of “radical democracy” can be divided into two groups according to their inheritance from tradition: one is an approach inspired by critical theory, and the other by post-structuralism. For discussion of the commonalities and differences of these two theoretical approaches, see Aletta Norval, “Radical Democracy”, in P. B. Clarke and J. Foweraker, eds., *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, London: Routledge, 2001. In this paper, except that I shall mention comparatively, I cannot closely treat the theory of deliberative democracy because of a space constraint. For arguments from multifaceted perspectives about this democratic model, for example, see, Jon Elster, (ed.), *Deliberative Democracy*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
2. Since the beginning of this century, some critics have attempted to categorize agonistic democracy. While my present argument owes much to these works, I shall suggest a different set of categorization from those works in order to distil common concerns in contemporary agonism. See Mark Wenman, “‘Agonistic Pluralism’ and Three Archetypal Forms of Politics”, *Contemporary Political Theory*, 2, 2003, and

- Andrew Schaap, "Introduction", in Andrew Schaap, ed., *Law and Agonistic Politics*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.
3. See, Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
 4. Hannah Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics", in *Social Research*, Vol.57-1, 1990.
 5. Dana R. Villa, "Postmodernism and the Public Sphere", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol.86, No.3, 1992.
 6. Ibid., p.717.
 7. James Tully also interprets the agonistic dimension of Arendt's political thought from a similar perspective to Villa, but he emphasizes that Arendt's political activity involves agonistic contests for "recognition." See, James Tully, "The Agonic of Freedom", *Economy and Society*, Vol.28, No.2, 1999.
 8. There was a controversy over Nietzsche's influence on Arendt between Villa and Honig, which is also very important when considering Arendtian agonistic politics. Briefly speaking here, while Villa eventually decouples Arendtian agonism from Nietzsche, Honig accuses him of oversimplifying the picture and describes a more complicated relationship between these two thinkers. See, Dana R. Villa, "Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action", *Political Theory*, Vol.20, No.2, 1992. Bonnie Honig, "The Politics of Agonism: A Critical Response to 'Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action'", *Political Theory*, Vol.21, No.3, 1993.
 9. Bonnie Honig, "Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity", in Bonnie Honig ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, p.159.
 10. Ibid., p.160.
 11. Andrew Schaap, "Agonism in Divided Societies", *Philosophy*

- and Social Criticism* Vol.32, No.2, 2006, p.258. For the importance of deliberation in divided societies, see, John S. Dryzek, “Deliberative Democracy in Divided Societies: Alternatives to Agonism and Analgesia”, *Political Theory*, Vol.33, No.2, 2005.
12. *Ibid.*, p.267.
 13. *Ibid.*, p.269.
 14. Andrew Schaap, “Political Theory and the Agony of Politics”, *Political Studies Review*, Vol.5, 2007, p.70.
 15. Here Schaap depends on Sheldon Wolin’s interpretation. See also, Sheldon S. Wolin, “Fugitive democracy”, in Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
 16. See, Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, London: Verso, 1993.
 17. Needless to say, some deliberative critics also pay attention to the possibility of exclusions pertaining to democratic politics. However, while for them exclusions is regarded as a limit of inclusion, Mouffe considers it as a vigorous condition for democracy. See, Jürgen Habermas, “Religious Tolerance- The Pacemaker for Cultural Rights”, in Lasse Thomassen, ed., *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006, p.197.
 18. Chantal Mouffe, “Carl Schmitt and the Paradox of Liberal Democracy”, in Chantal Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, London: Verso, 1999, p. 51.
 19. Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, London: Verso, 2000, p.99.
 20. *Ibid.*, p.105.
 21. *Ibid.*, pp.101-02. For a conception of adversary, see also, Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political*, London: Routledge, 2005,

- Ch.2. Some criticize Mouffe's category of adversary because it only results in producing a new set of inclusion/exclusion. For example, Aletta Norval points out Mouffe's theoretical shift. "On the one hand, Mouffe affirms with Laclau, that 'antagonism proper' is constitutive of politics. On the other hand, the democratic relation demands that this primary antagonism be turned into agonism, into adversarial relation.... Once we move onto this terrain, and it is an important shift, antagonism now is something to be overcome." See, Aletta J. Norval, *Aversive Democracy: Inheritance and Originality in the Democratic Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp.158-59. See also, Joel Olson, "Friends and Enemies, Slaves and Masters: Fanaticism, Wendell Phillips and the Limits of Agonism", in Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd, eds., *The Politics of Radical Democracy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.
22. For how broad a range Connolly's thought covers, see, Morton Schoolman and David Campbell, "Introduction: Pluralism 'Old' and 'New'", in David Campbell and Morton Schoolman, eds., *The New Pluralism: William Connolly and the Contemporary Global Condition*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, especially pp.10-11.
23. Mark Wenman, "'Agonistic Pluralism' and Three Archetypal Forms of Politics", p.170.
24. William Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, p.xix. For an explanation of the "old" pluralism Connolly criticized, see also, Mark Wenman, "What is Politics?: The Approach of Radical Pluralism", *Politics*, Vol.23, 2003.
25. William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

26. Ibid., p.8.
27. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, pp.105-06.
28. William Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault", in *Political Theory*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1993, pp.381-82.
29. For more details about the role of genealogy and deconstruction in Connolly, see, Morton Schoolman, "A Pluralist Mind: Agonistic Respect and the Problem of Violence Toward Difference", in *The New Pluralism: William Connolly and the Contemporary Global Condition*.
30. Ibid., p.382.
31. William Connolly, "The Ethos of Democratization", in Simon Critchley and Oliver Marchart, eds., *Laclau: A Critical Reader*, London: Routledge, 2004, p.177.
32. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, pp.175-76.
33. Needless to say, Arendt also insists that the public sphere is the place exposed "unpredictability." For her, politics is nothing but the activity that escapes the corporeal necessity. See Arendt, *The Human Condition*.
34. John S. Brady, "No Contest?: Assessing the agonistic critiques of Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere", *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol.30, No.3, 2004, p.334. See also, Simone Chambers, *Reasonable Democracy: Jürgen Habermas and the Politics of Discourse*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996.
35. Patchen Markell, "Contesting Consensus: Rereading Habermas on the Public Sphere", *Constellations*, Vol.3, No.3, 1997, p.378.
36. Ibid., p.391.
37. Ibid., p.392.
38. Ibid., p.395. For a further instance of the second category, see, Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and*

Disagreement: Why Moral Conflict Cannot Be Avoided in Politics, and What Should Be Done About It, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996.

39. Fuat Gürsözlü, “Debate: Agonism and Deliberation: Recognizing the Difference”, *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2009, pp.363-64.
40. Ibid., p363.
41. Andrew Knops, “Debate: Agonism as Deliberation – On Mouffe’s Theory of Democracy”, *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol.15, No.1, 2007.
42. Ibid., p.117.
43. Ibid., p.125.
44. Eva Erman, “What is Wrong with Agonistic Pluralism?: Reflections on Conflict in Democratic Theory”, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol.35, No.9, 2009, p.1045.
45. Ibid., p.1046. For a similar point, Lasse Thomassen also points out that antagonism is not only the limitation of social space, but rather paradoxically presupposes and constitutes the symbolic system. See, Lasse Thomassen, “Antagonism, hegemony and ideology after heterogeneity”, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 10(3), 2005.
46. Ibid., p.1057.
47. Ibid., p.1055.
48. This point is relevant to the significance of deliberation in a divided society; see, John Dryzek, “Deliberative Democracy in Divided Societies: Alternatives to Agonism and Analgesia”.
49. See, for example, Ilan Kapoor, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism? The Relevance of the Habermas-Mouffe Debate for Third World Politics”, *Alternatives*, 27, 2002. Fuat Gürsözlü, “Debate: Agonism and Deliberation: Recognizing the Difference.”
50. Ernesto Laclau’s following statement is also relevant here.

“...forces which have constructed their antagonism on a certain terrain show their secret solidarity when it is that very terrain which is put into question. It is like the reaction of two chess players to somebody who kicks the board.” Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, London: Verso, 2005, pp.140-41.