Democratic pluralism as engagement and encounter:
asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism

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as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Politics
In May 2016

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Abstract

This thesis shows how democratic politics requires a commitment to pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness. I contend that it is necessary to commit to such an idea of pluralism because of the problem of incomplete understanding. I establish this premise by drawing on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s account of human finitude. Based on this premise, I argue that the instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness leads democratic politics to pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other. Further, I develop accounts of asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism as modes of democratic politics that instantiate the principle of openness.

In chapter 1, I establish discourse as a necessary element for democratic politics by drawing from the way Jurgen Habermas uses ‘discourse ethics’ to address the problems of understanding in plural societies. In chapter 2, I demonstrate how incomplete understanding poses a problem for discourse and gives rise to interpretive conflicts by drawing from Gadamer’s account of human finitude. Here I also develop an account of openness as a suitable principle for beings with incomplete understanding based on Gadamer’s idea of hermeneutical experience. In chapters 3-5, I develop accounts of asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism as modes of democratic politics that instantiate the principle of openness. I do so by drawing from Iris Young’s, John Dryzek’s, and Chantal Mouffe’s approaches to the problems that plurality poses to discourse ethics and democratic politics.
Preface

I became interested in this topic after reading Gadamer and Habermas as complementary thinkers. Originally, I intended to write on the critique of ideology by drawing from the Habermas-Gadamer debate. It was supposed to be a critique of ideologiekritik informed by Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and Habermas' turn from the paradigms of the first generation Frankfurt School to the theory of communicative action. I believed that modern ideologiekritik must involve a critical theory that is more focused on the way situated understanding and prejudices constitute self-consciousness. I believed that Habermas and Gadamer can help understand the kind of dialogical engagement in which people can become aware of their situatedness and prejudices.

However, reading the broader literature in political theory on Habermas made me realise that this research can help address the problem of plurality, which is the focus of such deliberative democrats as Young and Dryzek. Therefore, I became interested in writing on this topic with hopes that I could, perhaps, show how Gadamer can help contribute to addressing the problem of plurality in democratic politics.

I am very grateful to many kind people who have helped me in writing this thesis.

I am thankful to my parents, Haitjan Kerimova and Islam Kerimov, for their support and care. They have done everything to make education a possibility for their children. I dedicate this thesis to them.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors Andrew Schaap and Dario Castiglione for their support, understanding, patience, and everything they have taught me. Their guidance helped me in all the time of research and writing of this thesis.

I do not know words that express the enormous gratitude I owe to my fatherly friend and teacher Lance Tillman. I thank him for inspiring me, for loving me, for caring about me, for teaching me. I am very grateful to him for proofreading chapter 2 and giving advice.
I thank Iain Hampsher-Monk for his feedback during the upgrade procedure. It has helped clarify the research questions and the main argument. I thank Robert Lamb, who read my draft on Gadamer and gave the much-needed encouragement.

I am very grateful to Martin Moorby and Kemel Toktomushev for their friendship and companionship throughout the graduate program. I thank Martin for proofreading chapter 3 and other substantial bits of this thesis. I also owe him thanks for helping me correct my Russian syntax into English. I owe thanks to Kemel for his proofreading of chapter 1 and valuable advice on writing.

Most importantly, the completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the love, care, and support of my wife, Anastasiya. She has proofread the introduction and offered useful advice. More importantly, I thank her for our son Emil and the surplus of waking hours she took on so that her husband can work on his thesis.
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Introduction

People cannot coexist without understanding each other. One of the problems in plural societies today is that people often do not understand each other. This is most acute when they try resolving social and political affairs in a way that would be acceptable to all. When plurality of sources of understanding try to answer the question ‘what ought we do?’ disagreement and division emerge.

The pluralist argument clarifies this problem based on three theses. The first thesis claims the fact of plurality. There is a plurality of sources of values, ways of life, and ways of understanding the world. The second thesis claims incommensurability. These sources are incommensurable and cannot be rank-ordered. The third thesis makes a claim about the cost and value of conflict. There is always a possibility of conflict between sources. The conflict between sources is the stuff of politics because, in part, politics is about rank-ordering values. The problem is the fact that no form of politics can guarantee an outcome where one side does not gain at the cost of the other. There are many ways to manage such conflict in politics. Arguably, the best method so far is democratic politics. In democratic politics, conflict between sources becomes a value because a democratic way of contestation allows the inclusion of all voices and leads to wiser decisions that address the wider complexity of issues.

Yet, the problem of understanding does not make democratic politics an easy solution for the problem of incommensurability and conflict. Democracy is effective in resolving difference of opinions, not at reaching a common understanding. Understanding is more fundamental, it is part of one’s being and identity. Therefore, when there is a conflict between different understandings, often one’s being and identity are at stake. Since pluralism is, as Berlin defined, “the conception that there are many different ends that men seek and still be fully rational, fully men, capable of understanding each other and sympathizing and deriving light from each other” (1990, 11), democratic politics must approach this problem through a commitment to pluralism. The question I ask is what understanding of pluralism can help democratic politics in dealing with the problem of understanding in plural societies and how can such pluralism translate into politics?
This thesis shows how democratic politics requires a commitment to pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness. The thesis has multiple objectives. First, it will establish discourse as a necessary element for democratic politics that is committed to pluralism. This objective will be achieved by drawing from the way Jurgen Habermas uses ‘discourse ethics’ to address the problems of plural societies (Chapter 1). Second, it will demonstrate how incomplete understanding poses a problem for discourse and gives rise to interpretive conflicts in pluralism. This objective will be achieved by drawing from Hans-Georg Gadamer’s account of human finitude (Chapter 2). Third, it will establish Gadamer’s idea of openness as a suitable principle of disposition for beings with incomplete understanding. This objective will be achieved by drawing from Gadamer’s use of ‘hermeneutical experience’ in his philosophical hermeneutics (Chapter 2). Fourth, it will establish the ideas of asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism as modes of instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic politics. This objective will be achieved by drawing from Iris Young’s, John Dryzek’s, and Chantal Mouffe’s critiques and appropriations of discourse ethics in light of the problems facing democratic politics in plural societies (Chapters 3-5).

The idea of pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness is necessary today because, in politics, contestation on different values goes beyond the values. In part, politics is about rank-ordering values that everyone will follow. A democratic way to do that involves collective action and contestation that comply with the principles of freedom, autonomy, and equality. However, today, contestation in politics can quickly become contestation of the very being of the other, of the other’s right to be, contestation about our right to be, and our identity. Committing to pluralism as engagement and encounter can help in turning away from this kind of conflict and share the world with each other while preserving the value of contestation in the form of interpretive conflicts.

Interpretive conflicts are a kind of contestation in which parties engage and encounter one another respectfully and with openness. Interpretive conflicts value difference for its epistemic benefits. A different interpretation usually discloses something that changes current understanding. Therefore, in interpretive conflicts parties engage and encounter not despite but for their
differences. It is very hard to implement this idea in today's plural societies. The actual content and quality of political contestation between different others is testament to that.

Part of this reality is the fact of plurality and the challenge of incommensurability. Value pluralism has shown that there is no value that can have a rational priority for all people. The big challenge is, of course, sharing the world together in light of this fact. The more immediate challenge is in reaching some kind of agreement in a democratic way. This challenge is exacerbated by the nature of human understanding and the mistake people make about it. One's understanding is always already limited and incomplete. The mistake is in forgetting about this feature of understanding.

Deliberative democrats are right to note that the problems of disagreement and division in plural societies are attributable to incomplete understanding. However, they are wrong to assume that disagreement and division are due to incomplete understanding itself, as if this could be remedied by a more complete understanding. Incomplete understanding is a permanent feature of human understanding. People who disagree and divide forget about this nature of understanding. They usually assume that they know the truth, understand things better, and are convinced that it is ‘the other’ who has the incomplete understanding. The challenge of plurality is especially acute when some engage with the other as Joseph Heller’s General Peckem who “thought of himself as aesthetic and intellectual. When people disagreed with him, he urged them to be objective”.

It is necessary to ask how can beings with incomplete understanding engage and encounter one another in democratic politics. This thesis answers this question by positing that there is an interpretive dimension to all understanding based on Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics and by defining the normative requirements of pluralism according to Gadamer’s principle of openness. Gadamer helps clarify why beings with incomplete understanding must accept that their understanding is an interpretation that is limited within their hermeneutical situation. Building on that premise, he helps clarify why one must be open to ‘the other’, who has a different understanding. In order to expand understanding, one must be open to engaging and encountering the
other in their otherness. Based on these premises, it is possible to posit that Gadamer’s principle of openness leads to engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness. The benefits of this approach for democracy are gains in people’s disposition towards common good, equality, and expansion of democratic practices into the everyday experience of plurality in the life-world.

In this thesis, I argue that if we acknowledge the nature of incomplete understanding, then instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness leads democratic politics to pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness. Democratic politics can instantiate this principle through asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism. These must be understood as the modes in which the principle of openness can be instantiated in politics. The foundational assumption of this argument is the ontological dimension of human finitude, which makes understanding incomplete and situated within particularities that are contingent upon culture, historical moment, and social position. This type of reasoning contrasts with the type of reasoning that is based on detachment from particularity in order to achieve objectivity.

Adam Sandel (2014) has recently countered the argument for detached reasoning by making a distinction between two conceptions of judgement and understanding: the “detached” and “situated” conceptions (2-3). The detached reasoning is upheld by theorists of the Kantian persuasion such as Habermas, while the situated conception is upheld by theorists of Heideggerian persuasion such as Gadamer. Detached reasoning believes in attainability of objective and universally true judgment through the standard rules of logical inference. The ‘detached’ thesis posits that reason can transcend its context and is suspicious of any reasoning situated within cultural and historical particularities. By contrast, situated reasoning has reflexivity in the sense that it looks back into its own conditionality and context boundedness. The ‘situated’ thesis posits the ontological dimensions of finitude in understanding and is suspicious of reasoning that claims to have detached itself from its context. For those who support the argument for situated understanding, detached reasoning is impossible in virtue of the nature of understanding itself. The foundational assumption of this thesis will be contested by those who support the “detached” conception and accepted by those who accept the “situated” conception.
The dominant theories of democracy are of the Kantian persuasion. Therefore, they will reject turning towards pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness. They favour detached reasoning that transcends context and brackets difference and particularity. Thus, they cannot fully commit to engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness. For example, Rawls and Habermas view plurality and difference as an obstacle to consensus, the final legitimizing moment of democratic politics. They both require that participants transcend their context and bracket their particularity in order to engage in a rational deliberation aimed at reaching consensus. They would take issues with pluralism as engagement and encounter because it requires that participants take part in politics without bracketing their particularities and differences. Rather, it requires that they encounter one another’s difference and engage in a dialogue with one another in their light.

From the perspective of the ‘situated’ thesis, transcending and bracketing difference and particularity poses problems for democracy. Requiring such a thing contributes to democratic deficit in relation to common good and equality. To be sure, for Rawls and Habermas, an intellectual disposition towards the common good is a requirement. Participants take part in politics with an eye on what is good and just for all. However, it is the particularities and differences that are the best indicators of how the outcome affects all. Some groups may not be able to express their experience of injustice without a reference to their particularity, and so they may be excluded from consensus because they do not fulfil the basic requirement of transcendence and bracketing. Therefore, there can be democratic deficit in relation to the common good.

Next, there can be democratic deficit in relation to equality in democratic politics based on the ‘detached’ thesis. To be sure, Habermas avoids the substantive principle of equality. He uses a non-political principle of equality. It requires that every opinion is weighed equally, participants are given equal opportunities and time to state their case, that every participant receives equal attention from the rest, and that all participants are equally free from influences of power and coercion. However, detached reasoning may result in reinforcing the influence of one group of people over others because the standard rules of rational discussion may have exclusionary functions. Some groups may be deprived of equal opportunity to share their particular experience of injustice.
simply because they will not be able to abstract from their situation, or because current discourse lacks the means to disclose their situation (think how the language of sexism did not exist before women started sharing their particular experiences publicly). Therefore, not allowing encounter of difference and particularity contributes to deficit in equality in democratic politics.

Thus, Sandel's conceptions of "detached" and "situated" reasoning help distinguish between two ways of addressing the challenge of plurality. One is the argument that disagreement and division are better kept away from public matters, and therefore political engagement in plural societies must not involve particularities that are subject to historical, cultural (in the broadest sense), and linguistic contingencies. Here, pluralistic fragmentation is to be kept in the private sphere of each subject and protected by the principles of individual rights and freedoms that put constitutional constraints on political institutions. Habermas advocates for political deliberation in which subjects participate by abstracting from their particularities to achieve the perspective of detached understanding and judgement.

The second way of addressing the problem of plurality is based on the argument that understanding is always already influenced by prejudices and other particularities contingent to historical, cultural, and linguistic influences. For this reason, it is necessary to let particularities be expressed in deliberation by different groups. The premise in this argument is that it is impossible to abstract one's reasoning and assume the perspective of detached understanding and reasoning. This kind of assumption makes the problems of disagreement and division more acute. In each case, the abstract position can masquerade as something that is detached from particular interests and ways of life whereas it is actually prejudiced towards certain interests and ways of life over others.

This thesis takes Gadamer's hermeneutical perspective on situated conception of understanding. However, rather than taking position among the ranks of postmodern thinkers, it will be argued that Habermas' discourse ethics allows one to conceive a form of deliberative democracy that can address the problem of understanding from the hermeneutical perspective.
Habermas’ discourse ethics is valuable because of his reformulation of the Kantian “categorical imperative”. It has advantages over the other cognitivist derivatives such as Rawls’ because it establishes the “imperative” in a dialogical rather than monological fashion. Furthermore, the critical attention that Habermas has received shows that discourse ethics is amenable to appropriations that can accommodate the hermeneutical perspective. This thesis will draw on Young’s, Dryzek’s, and Mouffe’s critiques and appropriations of discourse ethics. These three theorists take into account the situated nature of understanding and appropriate discourse ethics accordingly. Based on their work, I establish that democratic politics can instantiate Gadamer’s principle of openness in the modes of asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism.

It is necessary to instantiate Gadamer’s principle of openness because of the ontological dimension of human finitude in understanding. Gadamer’s account of human finitude shows that understanding is incomplete in the sense of its situatedness within particular hermeneutical situation. Incomplete understanding gives rise to interpretive conflicts when different others engage and encounter one another. Since incommensurability leads to conflict, it is better to transform the conflict into interpretive conflicts in democratic politics. The reason we cannot rely purely on Habermas’ discourse ethics is because its requirements for rationality and detachment suppress interpretive conflicts. Gadamer’s principle of openness is a way to allow and approach interpretive conflicts. Therefore, democratic politics that relies on discourse as an element and makes commitment to pluralism possible must instantiate Gadamer’s principle.

Approach and rationale

The aim of this thesis is to show how democratic politics requires commitment to the idea of pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness and what a democratic politics committed to such an idea consists in. There are democratic theories that address the problem of plurality besides deliberative democracy. However, I claim that such idea of pluralism is compatible with the Habermasian deliberative democracy because it has the element of discourse.
Most democratic theories approach plurality by a commitment to what can be called the classical conception of pluralism. The classical conception was formed under the influence of the liberal discourse (Lassman 2011; Bevir 2012). It conceives pluralism in two senses: political pluralism and value pluralism.

Political pluralism conceives plurality as consisting in different interests. Its normative function requires neutral processes of government and state institutions in which different interests can compete. The most prominent theorist of democratic politics that is committed to political pluralism is Robert Dahl (1956; 1971). Dahl’s theory of democracy is known as polyarchy, which is driven by the dynamics between different interest groups. However, he was not interested in addressing value pluralism. For Dahl, there has to be consensus on the underlying values. Democratic politics can commit to pluralism only when there is cohesion in political culture and a sense of common direction that competing groups cannot violate (Dahl 1956, 132-3). Dahl’s democratic politics does not meet the requirements for pluralism because it lacks the element of discourse that could make such engagement and encounter possible.

Value pluralism conceives of plurality as consisting of a plurality of incommensurable values. When applied to democratic politics, it also requires a form of political pluralism that is instantiated in the liberal constitutional democracies such as John Rawls’ and deliberative democracies such as Habermas’. They address the fact of disagreement about values and moral division (see Lassman 2011, 96). Of course, the most notable liberal theorist who addresses these problems is Rawls (1993). From his perspective, political pluralism and value pluralism are intimately linked with liberalism and democracy. Here, liberalism acts as an idea over which there can be disagreement, and moreover, as a discourse which does not require agreement about itself. While democracy requires homogeneity and agreement on values, liberalism endorses discourse in which it is acceptable that people never reach agreement over ultimate values (Lassman 2011, 97). However, Rawls is in tension with value pluralism because, as Galston argues, he seeks to establish
“lexical priorities among heterogeneous goods” (Galston 2002, 7)\(^1\). For me, the problem with Rawls’ framework is that it cannot allow the inclusion of particularities into deliberation. By contrast, Habermas’ discourse ethics allows the inclusion of particularities because the discourse principle requires that people are present with their interests in the deliberative forum.

Across the Atlantic, there is a different conception of pluralism known as corporatist pluralism with a similar emphasis on decentralization and neutral processes of government as political pluralism. It was developed by Harold Laski (1925). Dahl was influenced by Laski’s work. Laski argued that corporatist decentralization of power would widen access and help fight economic and political inequalities. Despite some fundamental difference between Laski and Dahl – Laski thought in Marxist terms and understood groups more in class terms whereas Dahl understood groups as based on interest – they share a normative emphasis on the role of decentralization and sharing power and influence in plural societies. This too is not suitable as a democratic politics committed to the idea of pluralism as engagement and encounter because my emphasis on the problem of understanding the other requires a conception of discourse.

In Europe, Arendt Lijphart’s (1974; 1999) consociationalism deals with the challenges of plurality and has an element of discourse. Europe had a different experience of plurality. It was not only based on difference in interests and values but also difference based on significant historical, cultural, and linguistic contingencies. Lijphart asked: why isn’t there conflict in some of the most diverse countries in Europe while there is conflict elsewhere with similar conditions. For Lijphart, democratic politics could commit to pluralism through the processes of negotiations and bargaining between elite members of groups, whereas his Anglo-American counterparts emphasise the competitive processes of democratic politics. However, Lijphart’s democratic politics is geared less towards engagement and encounter of difference and values and more towards trading, bargaining, and trimming of plurality of interests and values in the process of negotiation between elite representatives.

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\(^1\) For Galston, Rawls’s *Political Liberalism* is an example of “monist” political theory because “it seeks to decouple political theory from other domains of inquiry while preserving the various lexical orderings defended in *A Theory of Justice*” (2002, 8).
None of the theorists are interested in pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness. They focus on conceiving democratic politics with difference (besides interests) bracketed, rather than engaged and encountered. As established above, bracketing difference is not useful in democracy because one’s particularities still inform and are taken up in one’s public and political life.

In part, politics is rank-ordering values. Political pluralism allows competition of interests by means of neutral institutions and processes of government and treats values as something that can be kept outside politics in the private sphere. But interests are not pre-given, they are subject to change in the process of competition as well as they are subject to initial conditions of one’s social, cultural, and historical position. Plurality of modern democratic societies is complex. It is necessary to acquire an ability to understand how plurality of interests comes about and bring the processes of formation of interests into democratic politics. It is necessary to focus, as deliberative democrats argue, on the process of formation of interests. With regards to values, it is necessary to focus on the way they influence understanding because democratic politics is inevitably an engagement between different others that must understand one another. Values influence the way people understand each other. Moreover, it is necessary to understand how values themselves are subject to change and so, just as with interests, it is necessary to be conscious of the processes behind the way values come about and the way they can change as a result of change in understanding between different people. These necessities mean that a different idea of pluralism is necessary, an idea of pluralism, the normative structure of which requires engagement and encounter that addresses these problems.

I follow the idea of pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other outlined in Diana Eck’s essay “From diversity to pluralism” (1997)\(^2\). There, she

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\(^2\) The essay is part of the Pluralism Project in which Diana Eck and a large research team consisting of students, faculty and staff at Harvard have been engaged since the 1990s. The project’s main focus is researching and gathering data on religions, religious groups, and religious practices across America from major ones to the most marginal and unknown. Its mission is primarily to answer the question ‘how to appropriate plurality to shape a positive pluralism’, in which they do not take the fact of plurality as the sole constituent of pluralism, by helping “Americans engage with the realities of religious diversity through research, outreach, and the active dissemination of resources”. One of the major outcomes of this project is the multimedia application On Common Ground: World Religions in America (Columbia University
insists that we distinguish plurality as a fact from pluralism as a normative idea that requires a kind of engagement “that creates a common society from all that plurality” (1997)\(^3\).

This argument leads her to conclude that “pluralism is the dynamic process through which we engage with one another in and through our very deepest differences” (Eck 2007, 267). Here she distinguishes pluralism as a response to plurality much different from other possible responses that, as she writes, have been practiced in history. The kinds of responses from which she distinguishes pluralism are exclusion, inclusion, and syncretism. Following Eck’s assessment, it is evident that these three ways to appropriate plurality are not democratic because “exclusion signals an inability or unwillingness to recognize or engage the religious or cultural other at all” while inclusion means “wanting the religious or cultural other to be included under the umbrella of one’s own world, on one’s own terms, in one’s own language, in the structures already made – by us” and “it stops short of effective agency for the included” (Eck 2007, 246). Finally, syncretism is a way of appropriating plurality by “seeking to fuse difference into a new creation” thus blurring the specific ways in which individual and group autonomy may manifest itself (Eck 2007, 246).

Inclusion and syncretism might have merit. However, it is not clear how these two ways of appropriation can overcome the problems that arise between mutually exclusive groups, especially, if they are designed for appropriating religious plurality. Much different is pluralism, which is about maintaining the integrity of the other and encountering the other in their otherness (Eck 2007, 246). It “does not require the shedding of distinctive cultural, religious, or political differences, but is the effort to create a society out of all these differences (Eck 2007, 246).

The normative idea of pluralism advocated here is democratic in character. It can be seen in the three normative criteria it upholds. First,
pluralism is “active seeking of understanding across lines of difference” and not
tolerance because tolerance “is too thin a foundation” for plurality and “it does
nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the
stereotype, the half-truth, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and
violence” (Eck 1997). Second, rather than seeing pluralism as bearing
resemblance to relativism, Eck argues that pluralism is about “the encounter of
commitments” because “the new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to
leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter
of commitments” (Eck 1997). Third, pluralism must be based on dialogue. For
Eck, “the language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take,
criticism and self-criticism” (1997). It is not necessary for the outcome of this
dialogue to be universal agreement between parties. What matters for the
dialogue is that it “involves commitment to being at the table with one’s
commitments” (Eck 1997)

Perhaps, not every democrat will agree to these normative demands as
costinctively democratic. The case with the third criterion is specifically
costentious. It is possible to see how it is democratic according to the
deliberative theory of democracy. However, if we conceive of democracy as a
form of government where all take part in decision making by some form of
participation, and if we accept that the demos now consists not in a single
identity but in plural, then we can see how these criteria promote participation of
all the groups. In other words, these criteria push for a more inclusive
democratic politics.

Eck’s idea of pluralism exemplifies what I am reaching towards with
Gadamer’s help. Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics helps to understand
why it is necessary to engage with the other in their otherness. He shows that it
has to do with the problem of understanding itself. I have kept in mind Eck’s
idea of pluralism when reading Gadamer in order to draw out the relevant
aspects of his philosophy. As Gadamer established, we read texts with a
particular question and interest, and with particular prejudices in the foreground.
Eck’s idea of pluralism has defined the question and interest in reading

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4 Reprinted at http://www.pluralism.org/encounter/challenges from Diana Eck’s “From
diversity to pluralism” in the revised 2006 edition of On Common Ground: World Religions in
America (Columbia University Press)
Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* for this thesis. It has helped draw Gadamer’s principle of openness from his account of hermeneutical experience.

In order to achieve the aim of this thesis, I have divided it into two main parts. In the first part, I look at Habermas’ discourse ethics and Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. In second part, I show the modes in which Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics can be instantiated in democratic politics.

In Part 1, I establish the role of discourse in democratic politics by adapting Habermas’ discourse ethics as oriented towards reaching understanding. Discourse ethics helps me secure the link between pluralism, discourse, and democratic politics. With Gadamer’s help, I establish the problem of incomplete understanding as it emerges in a discourse oriented at reaching understanding. Philosophical hermeneutics is particularly useful in clarifying how incomplete understanding complicates the commitment to pluralism as engagement and encounter. I also appropriate Gadamer’s principle of openness from the way he uses ‘hermeneutical experience’ as a type of genuine experience that shows one’s finitude and changes one’s understanding.

I am not pitting Habermas and Gadamer against each other. Rather, I think that they are close in articulating engagement in dialogical situations between people that have little in common but who encounter one another in a discourse to reach understanding. I treat them as mutually complementary and useful for thinking about bringing the ‘situated’ and ‘detached’ conceptions of reasoning together. Gadamer helps push discourse ethics towards taking into account the situated nature of understanding by providing an argument about the ontological dimensions of human finitude.

This might seem strange given that Habermas’ and Gadamer’s debate about methodologies in social sciences is well known and it is generally understood that these two thinkers represent two opposing schools of thought. I do not treat the fact that Habermas and Gadamer debated as grounds to conclude that they are on the opposite sides. Habermas’ discourse ethics is not opposed to hermeneutics. I follow Jean Grondin (2003, 310-311) who writes
about the aftermath of Habermas’ debate with Gadamer with a reconciliatory tone for the schools of Critical Theory and philosophical hermeneutics.

Soon after Habermas headed the second generation of the Frankfurt School, the platform of ideologiekritik has given way to his theory of communicative action. The theory of communicative action is not founded on the models of psychoanalysis and critique of ideology, based on which Habermas criticized Gadamer. As Grondin puts it, communicative action is formed “on the presuppositions embodied in the verbal understandings implicit in our life world” (2003, 310). This has led Habermas to abandon the “sociologically broadened psychoanalytical model” and connect “himself to the concrete dialogical situation” (Grondin 2003, 311). As a result, “Habermas can be viewed as approaching precisely the hermeneutical position he had criticized at the beginning of seventies” (Grondin 2003, 311). Habermas’ discourse ethics is now oriented more towards “the hermeneutic model of coming to an understanding” (Grondin 2003, 311).

Since understanding emerges as a central problem for democratic politics in its commitment to pluralism, I read Habermas and Gadamer as mutually complementary authors for addressing the challenges that democratic politics faces in its commitment to pluralism. Discourse ethics is a suitable approach for the problem of incomplete understanding because it provides a rationale for rank-ordering values in a world without a common measure of value. Since incomplete understanding is a permanent feature of human understanding, Habermas too cannot account fully for the problem of understanding. Gadamer is helpful in clarifying the problem that incomplete understanding poses for democratic politics. He is also helpful in suggesting how to address those problems, which is where his principle of openness comes in.

I draw Gadamer’s principle of openness from his account of hermeneutical experience. In Truth and Method, Gadamer argues that hermeneutical experience is the highest type of experience because it recognizes the situatedness of understanding and it is open to the otherness of the other. By appropriating this principle from Gadamer, I define its normative function in the following manner: openness starts with the recognition of one’s
finitude and incomplete understanding. Without this kind of self-understanding, there cannot be genuine openness to the other. Following such self-understanding, the other must be encountered by a question that comes from a genuine interest in the other’s otherness, and ends with an engagement where the otherness of the other challenges one’s prejudices and, perhaps, changes one’s self-understanding and understanding of the other. What one needs to be open for is precisely difference and otherness that challenges what one already knows, assumes, and understands.

It is necessary to pause here in order to establish what the concepts of ‘the other’, ‘understanding’, ‘engagement’, and ‘encounter’ mean and how they function in the thesis.

I appropriated the concept of ‘the other’ from Gadamer. For him, ‘the other’ has strangeness and alienation, which “is inextricably given with the individuality of the Thou” (Gadamer 2013, 186). This individuality is a product of the totality of life-experience of the Thou that cannot be reduced to any of its parts. It is not possible to fully overcome or appropriate this strangeness because the whole life-experience of the Thou cannot be reduced to one of its parts. It is also not possible to relive the totality of “the other’s” life-experience. Therefore, a genuinely open relationship with the other can only be the kind where the other discloses their otherness to us and we allow this otherness to confront us.

Thus, in this thesis, I do not limit ‘the other’ to the culturally, religiously, or ethnically different people. I use it more broadly as an entity that has an irreducible strangeness to “me” as a subject encountering “the other”. This encounter must not mean that “I”, the subject, encounter “the strange other”, an object. “I” must not appropriate the strangeness; on the contrary, “my” aim is to allow this strangeness to confront “me” in this encounter. This strangeness comes with the individuality of each person. In each and every case, the other is one whose otherness is his/her own. But “the otherness” between two entities is embedded in their relatedness because “the other” is strange in relation to “me”, not to itself. So the idea of pluralism as engagement and encounter requires that rather than stripping our differences, which breaks from this relatedness,
we need to engage and encounter one another as different others, i.e. in our otherness to each other. The encounter is between two subjects.

With regards to ‘understanding’, this thesis makes two claims on the concept of understanding. On the one hand understanding is always incomplete in virtue of the ontological dimension of human finitude as shown by Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. This is an ontological claim that underpins all forms understanding; it is the fundamental presupposition I make in using the term “to understand” or “understanding” in this thesis. Therefore, understanding is incomplete. On the other hand, pluralism requires that we always engage and encounter the other in their otherness to reach an understanding with them. Incomplete understanding means that there is never a point in engagement and encounter that can be identified as the final point in understanding. This renders the requirement of pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness a radical demand to always remain open for the other to assert their otherness.

Keeping in mind the fundamental presupposition of incompleteness, the concept of understanding operates in two modes in this thesis. First, it applies to the dialogical engagement about something that requires agreement. Here, understanding operates in its epistemological mode as a cognitive process of making sense of an object like a text or a speech-act. This mode of understanding involves interpretation, and therefore, understanding is interpretation of what the other is saying in a dialogue about something. Second, understanding operates in the mode of self-understanding, which enables one to have a world-view, an understanding of the world that comes from one’s hermeneutical situation. For Gadamer, it is one’s finite horizon; whereas for Habermas it is the perspective one holds, something that one has within the “provincial limits of their own particular form of life” (Habermas 1990, 202). Given the hermeneutical argument that understanding is conditioned by one’s hermeneutical situation, it follows that the epistemological mode of understanding directed at agreement is conditioned by self-understanding. Therefore, I subject understanding as it operates in the mode of self-understanding to the principle of openness at the level of pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness. I believe that openness to the otherness leads to a more critical self-understanding: a
hermeneutical awareness of one’s finitude and incomplete understanding, which leads to greater openness to what the other has to say. The understanding that is reached by engagement and encounter is a form of understanding that, in Gadamer’s case has expanded one’s horizon and in Habermas’ case has taken one beyond their “provincial limits”. There is no paradox in saying that coming to awareness of one’s finitude leads to expansion. An encounter with the other discloses the limits of one’s world-view, one’s incomplete understanding, one’s finitude. What the other discloses apart from their otherness to one’s self in this encounter are one’s prejudices that make up that finitude. It is precisely awareness of one’s finitude that leads one to be open for the otherness to assert itself against one’s prejudices and allows one to expand the limits of incomplete understanding.

The understanding to be reached by engagement and encounter in the context of pluralism is different from agreement, which is required in contexts where there is disagreement with the other about something. The principles of pluralism apply to engaging and encountering the other in their otherness, which is on a different level from engaging and encountering the other in order to reach an understanding about something. Reaching an understanding about something is usually an end of a dialogical engagement with the other on something about which there might be disagreement. Here, understanding conceived as agreement involves the epistemological mode of understanding whereby one understands the other’s point of view and what the other is saying by interpreting it. This mode of understanding, however, cannot extend to the level of pluralism and lead to understanding the other in their otherness in the form of cognitive reduction of the other and intellectual appropriation of their otherness. The ontological dimension of human finitude in incomplete understanding does not allow that. Ignoring this thesis and extending understanding the other’s point of view and agreement reached, or not reached, about something to understanding the other as such betrays the principle of pluralism.

Moreover, incomplete understanding means that the agreement itself cannot be final. This claim has radical implications when taken to its improbable extreme. For example, there is no disagreement about the constitutional essentials such as separation of powers, due process, rule of law, and freedom
of speech. These are all ideas that are capable of withstanding a debate on whether they are actually the right ideas for a democratic constitution. However, in keeping faithful to the ontological claim of finitude, it makes sense to render agreement on these constitutional essentials as not final and open for contestation. If we are to remain faithful to incomplete understanding, despite the rightness of our agreement, then all agreements, even constitutional ones, cannot have finality because they are achieved by beings with incomplete understanding. This does not amount to rejection of the binding character of the constitution or forfeit the idea of constitutionalism. Constitutional essentials, and the very idea of constitutionalism, I think, have a binding character only if they are capable of withstanding the challenge by an otherness, however radically other that otherness may be.

We reach an understanding with the other in pluralism through engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness. By engagement I mean holding a dialogue. The phrase “encountering the other”, however, requires a critical account of the way it is operating in the thesis.

In ordinary language, an “encounter” involves meeting, facing, or experiencing something unexpected. We can “encounter” an unexpected situation, a person, an experience, or a problem. Some people “encounter” death. If we follow language, the root word “counter”, coming from Latin contra, unavoidably points at one being against the other. Therefore, “encounter” denotes a coming upon, a meeting of an adversity, or an adversary, something that needs to be overcome right in the time and space the “encounter” takes place. Why then pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness according to the principle of openness? Does not encounter pre-define the form of engagement as hostile or at least adversarial? And how can such a denotation of “encounter” be associated with openness?

In this thesis, I show how encountering the other in their otherness enables hermeneutical experience that leads to hermeneutical consciousness. In chapter 2, I develop an account of hermeneutical experience as a negative experience that leads to expansion of one’s horizon based on Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. With Gadamer’s help, I argue that negative experience is a genuine kind of experience because it has the potential to
illuminate not only one’s misconceptions and misunderstandings, but also the particularity and situatedness of one’s incomplete understanding. Negative experience illuminates the prejudices of one’s understanding. Hermeneutical consciousness, on the other hand, is consciousness of one’s prejudices. It is a form of self-understanding that is aware of its finitude, particularity, and situatedness. Hermeneutical experience and consciousness lead to openness, but they are not possible without encountering the other in their otherness.

Encounter is, therefore, from the start a coming upon and meeting of other in their otherness because the otherness is part of the other’s individuality and that otherness is other only over and against what is my own self-understanding. In the encounter, we do not extinguish the otherness by adopting a neutral stance. It is ourselves that we put forwards against the otherness of the other. It is our prejudices we put to the challenge by the otherness, not the other as an adversary to us. And if this encounter and engagement is at all hermeneutical according to the principle of openness, then it must lead to revision of prejudices and a change in our own self-understanding if necessary, or a more enlightened awareness of the conditions of our own understanding.

The implication of such a notion of encounter precludes moral respect accepted in deliberative democracy in its Kantian formulation. An encounter is not neutral, we do not extinguish ourselves. If we do, the other ceases to be other to us; the relationality and belongingness between us is lost. Moral respect requires neutrality and extinguishing ourselves in order to take the other’s perspective. In chapter 2, I develop an account of “transposing” that falls short of the idea of moral respect. I develop this account based on Gadamer and suggest that encounter requires “transposing” of ourselves into the other’s situation. It is ourselves that we transpose into the other’s perspective in order to see them in their alterity, their otherness. We transpose ourselves with our prejudices and situated understanding. The other can present themselves as such and assert their otherness against our prejudices only if we foreground the prejudices of our hermeneutic situation that condition our incomplete understanding. It gives the other agency and autonomy. Moral respect robs them of this kind of agency and autonomy because by practicing moral respect we imagine and understand things for them.
In Part 2, I draw from Iris Young, John Dryzek, and Chantal Mouffe in order to politicise, concretize, and democratize Gadamer’s idea of situated understanding and principle of openness. In a certain sense, I establish how Gadamer’s account of hermeneutical situation and principle of openness translate into democratic politics. I show how Young’s concept of “social groups” and Dryzek’s conception of “discourse” gives a concrete and political expression to hermeneutical situation. I also show how Mouffe’s concept of “antagonism” shows the problems that can emerge when situated understanding is given its expression in politics. I appropriate “asymmetric reciprocity” from Young, “reflexivity” from Dryzek, and “agonism” from Mouffe as the modes in which Gadamer’s principle of openness can be instantiated in democratic politics.

Since Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics helps push discourse ethics towards recognizing the role of situated understanding and accepting particularities in deliberation, Young, Dryzek, and Mouffe help articulate the ways in which situated conception of understanding can be incorporated into discourse ethics. All three thinkers argue that the rationality of discourse ethics must be weakened in order to allow other forms of communication that let people express their particularities and situated understandings of social and political affairs. They also recognize the significance of interpretive conflicts in democratic politics, which is particularly useful given that I aim to preserve conflict between different others in the form of interpretive conflicts. I appropriate Young’s idea of “social perspective”, Dryzek’s idea of “contestation between discourses” and Mouffe’s “agonistic contestation” as modes in which interpretive conflicts can take place in democratic politics.

Now, while Young’s and Dryzek’s proximity to Habermas’ deliberative democracy is uncontested, serious concerns can be raised about including Mouffe among these theorists. Indeed, it is strange to include Mouffe here given that she styles herself as an opponent to the deliberative models of democracy and proposes an alternative model known as ‘agonistic pluralism’.

I argue that the terms and definitions of Mouffe’s agonism bring her closer to the core ideas of deliberative democracy than she is willing to admit. The core ideas of deliberative democracy are contained in Habermas’ discourse
ethics. I show that she needs to rely on the assumptions of discourse ethics in order to articulate an agonistic mode of contestation that requires a transformation of enemies into adversaries. By definition, agonism is a struggle between equal adversaries who agree to the same rules of contestation and engage with one another discursively based on a meta-consensus in the form of prior agreement on adherence to such principles as liberty and equality. These are procedural agreements that are at the core of deliberative democracy. They are made possible by discourse ethics. I show how Mouffe appropriates discourse ethics and has to rely on it in order to sustain agonistic contestation the way she intends.

Mouffe may not endorse this claim because agonistic democracy is intended and accepted as an alternative theory to deliberative democracy. In order to address this problem, it is necessary to clarify the version of deliberative democracy to which agonism will not bond. Agonism is an incompatible alternative to the forms of deliberative democracy that have not recognized her concerns about antagonism, consensus, and the deliberative procedures. For example, an agonism that emphasises passion is incompatible with deliberative democracy that is intransigent about its emphasis on neutral and rational argumentation; agonism that denies the very possibility of inclusive consensus is incompatible with deliberative democracy that binds legitimacy to consensus; an agonism that emphasises conversion is incompatible with a deliberative democracy that emphasises persuasion; and agonism that upholds the value of conflict as a resource for democratic politics is incompatible with deliberative democracy that upholds cooperation and compromise.

It must be evident that Mouffe’s theory of agonistic democracy is not compatible with Habermas’ model of deliberative democracy. This incompatibility, however, cannot extend to Young and Dryzek, who are critics of Habermas’ model, who are concerned with the rationalism, universalism, and the abstractions of Habermas’ discourse ethics, who have accepted consensus in a form that is open to further challenges by other groups, and who have explicitly shown how their appropriations of discourse ethics accommodate the agonistic criticisms of discourse ethics (see Dryzek 2010, 113; Young 2000, 49-50). Furthermore, given that philosophical hermeneutics shows how situated understanding gives rise to interpretive conflicts, it is valuable to read these
three thinkers as compatible in addressing different dimensions of this problem in politics and how the principle of openness can be instantiated in accordance with each. With Young, we come to understand that one of the dimensions of interpretive conflicts is group perspective that is a valuable resource for democratic politics in shifting the playing field and giving a more differentiated picture of the common, and that openness here must be instantiated as asymmetric reciprocity; with Dryzek, we come to understand that the other dimension of interpretive conflicts is the way particular discourses constitute politics, their role in including the lateral complexities of an issue and representing the whole system of interconnected elements in the social structure, and that openness here must be instantiated as reflexivity. With Mouffe, we come to understand that yet another dimension of interpretive conflicts is the way they allow for democratic outlets that express antagonism, which otherwise risks returning in the form of extremist populism and violence, and that openness here must be instantiated as agonism. Thus, these three thinkers show different but complementary aspects of democratic politics as they emerge when we accept the situated nature of understanding.

An additional question I aim to address with Mouffe is how to practice openness towards the other who challenges our basic principles and who might pose an antagonistic relationship to us. I develop an account of agonism as an instantiation of openness in cases of antagonism by building on Mouffe’s categorical distinctions between enemy and adversary and her theory of agonistic contestation. Her categories, I believe, allow us to distinguish between those against whom we will struggle while remaining open to their interpretations of the same principles, and those against whom (racists, sexists, extremists) we might engage in a struggle for the principles themselves and our rights to uphold them.

The main value that Mouffe offers this thesis is a way to envision an honest commitment to pluralism. If we are to remain committed to pluralism, then we must be ready to engage and encounter the kinds of others that deny pluralism its rightful place in democratic societies. Thus, in chapter 5, I consider how pluralism can still be possible if we acknowledge the antagonistic dimension of politics. Mouffe helps us observe openness when encountering others with whom we might have mutually exclusive claims, or others that deny
the principles that we abide by. In these cases, if democratic politics is committed to pluralism, then it is necessary to find an appropriate instantiation of the principle of openness. I worry that this principle does not give guidance about encountering the kinds of others that might deny the principle itself. I worry about people that claim ultimate truths and superior positions. I worry that these people can hijack the expression of particularity and situated understanding in deliberation and appeal to the principle of openness to threaten the very commitment to democratic politics and pluralism. Mouffe helps me answer the question ‘how can we practice openness towards the other that is our enemy, with whom we are in a conflictual relationship that entails mutual exclusion’. To answer this question, I appropriate ‘agonism’ as a mode of openness for engaging and encountering others who deny the very principles of openness and democracy.

**Outline of chapters**

The structure of this thesis consists in five chapters.

In Chapter 1, I establish the connection between pluralism, discourse, and democratic politics. Drawing on Habermas’ discourse ethics, I show the role of discourse as a required element of democratic politics that is committed to pluralism as engagement and encounter. I start with the general outline of the deliberative theory of democracy and identify incomplete understanding as one of the main problems in plural societies. I draw this problem from Gutmann and Thompson, who argue that moral disagreement and division are in part attributable to incomplete understanding. They describe this problem as part of the human condition. Given that I am pushing for the idea of pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other, understanding across differences is an important element to consider. Since incomplete understanding is part of the human condition, I posit it as the central problem that must be addressed by democratic politics committed to pluralism.

Habermas helps establish the role of discourse in addressing the problem of incomplete understanding in plural societies. For him, discourse is a problem solving mechanism for situations when understanding breaks down. In order to function as a problem solving mechanism, discourse must be deontological, cognitivist, formal, and universal. I show how discourse ethics
fulfils these requirements in virtue of its elements of rational discourse and consensus, and the discourse and universalization principles. Thus, I treat discourse ethics as consisting in the procedures and standards of rational communication through which incomplete understanding can be addressed.

From Habermas’ perspective, communication can break down because of incomplete understanding. Parties may misunderstand the general norm that underlines communicative action, or contest it. Democratic societies have discourse to fall back on in order to restore understanding. By contrast, non-democratic societies can resort to violence and coercion in order to restore understanding. Thus, discourse allows maintaining the link between democratic politics and pluralism. Given the plurality of values, communicative action and understanding are bound to break down because of misunderstanding or contestation. In these situations, parties fall into discourse mode of communication where they apply norms and principles of discourse ethics in order to restore understanding.

In chapter 2, I show why incomplete understanding is a permanent feature of human understanding that gives rise to interpretive conflicts and how to approach this problem in pluralism. I do so by turning to Gadamer, whose philosophical hermeneutics is helpful in clarifying how incomplete understanding complicates engagement and encounter of the other. Based on Gadamer’s account of the ontological dimensions of human finitude, I conceive incomplete understanding as partial and situated understanding within the hermeneutical situation.

With Gadamer’s help, I also establish the role of encountering and engaging the other in addressing the problem of incomplete understanding. I argue that an integral part of addressing incomplete understanding is self-understanding. Gadamer’s principle of openness suggests that a fuller self-understanding can be achieved by being open to encounter and engagement of the other in their otherness. I draw this principle from Gadamer’s use of hermeneutical experience and consciousness as constituting the structure of his ‘historically effected consciousness’ as a regulative idea in ‘fusion of horizons’. More specifically, I draw the principle of openness from Gadamer’s use of ‘hermeneutical consciousness’, which he regards as a genuine form of
experience that shows things in a new light and changes one’s self-understanding.

In the concluding section of the chapter, I show how interpretive aspects of understanding impact discourse ethics by drawing on Georgia Warnke’s hermeneutical critique of deliberative democracy. Given the hermeneutical view of incomplete understanding, encounter and engagement across differences can take the form of interpretive conflicts. Having shown that interpretive conflicts cannot be avoided, I argue that Habermas’ division between ethical and moral forms of discourse cannot be sustained because interpretive conflicts blur the distinction. The conclusion of this critique is that interpretive conflicts are unavoidable but are significant for democratic politics. Habermas resists admitting their significance, but it can be shown how discourse ethics can allow interpretive conflicts by drawing on his critics Iris Young, John Dryzek, and Chantal Mouffe. Therefore, in the chapters that follow, I turn to these theorists.

In chapters 3-5 I examine Young’s, Dryzek’s, and Mouffe’s critical appropriations of Habermas’ discourse ethics. My main aim is to establish how these theorists recognize the significance of interpretive conflicts and how Gadamer’s principle of openness can be instantiated in democratic politics. The common claim I make in these chapters is that if the hermeneutical argument on incomplete understanding is accepted, and if the critique of discourse ethics in light of the problem of interpretive conflicts is accepted, then it is necessary to turn to Young, Dryzek, and Mouffe in order to reckon with the problems of incomplete understanding and interpretive conflicts in pluralism.

In chapter 3, I develop an account of asymmetric reciprocity as a mode of instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic politics. To do so, I draw from Young’s account of “social groups” and “asymmetric reciprocity”. I establish three aspects of her work. First, I establish how Young’s concept of “social groups” expresses Gadamer’s idea of hermeneutical situation. Social groups, for Young, characterize the plurality in modern societies. They are different from other kinds of groups because membership in a social group is based on affinity rather than aggregation or association. One is a member of a social group in virtue of one’s social position, and one’s understanding of social and political affairs is situated within the social position. Second, I establish how
Young’s idea of social groups leads her to recognize the significance of interpretive conflicts. For Young, interpretive conflicts allow social group perspectives to be included as a resource for democratic politics. Discourse ethics comes short in including perspectives because of its requirements of rationality, universalism, and abstraction. Thus, Young offers procedural correctives that allow greeting, storytelling, and rhetoric as modes of communication through which social groups can disclose their social perspectives. I establish it as Young’s way of engaging and encountering the other in their otherness. Openness to otherness can be practiced by allowing the others to tell their stories and use rhetorical devices in ways that influence and change current understanding. Third, I establish Young’s asymmetric reciprocity as a mode of instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic politics. Asymmetric reciprocity is a mode of moral respect in which social groups present their perspectives through different forms of communication and challenge established prejudices. I appropriate it as a mode of openness that comes from recognition of finitude and allows the encounter and engagement of the other in their otherness.

Asymmetric reciprocity contrasts with the Habermasian idea of moral respect, which requires one to take a moral point of view by hypothetically imagining the other’s point of view. I draw on Young’s argument that such moral respect is impossible because taking another person’s point of view requires reliving the totality of their life-experience, which is an impossible task. Asymmetric reciprocity comes from the recognition that the other poses a certain strangeness that cannot be reduced to any part of the totality of its lived experience. People are asymmetric with regards to their temporality and position. People are asymmetric in temporal sense because of the history of their position. I draw on Young’s argument that “each position brings to a communication situation the particular experiences, assumptions, meanings, symbolic associations, and so on, that emerge from a particular history, most of which lies at the background to the communicative situation” (1997, 51). In the mode of asymmetric reciprocity, history is always subject to retelling in new contexts and therefore, one cannot assume to view things accurately from another’s historical lived experience. There is also asymmetry with regards to what Young calls “specificity of position”, which is one’s social position.
“structured by the configuration of relationships among positions” (1997, 52). One cannot view things from the social perspective exactly as the other does. Therefore, one must approach the other in the mode of asymmetric reciprocity, which requires being open to the other sharing their perspective from their position. These features of asymmetric reciprocity are consonant with Gadamer’s principle of openness. Thus, I appropriate asymmetric reciprocity as a mode of instantiating Gadamer’s principle in democratic politics.

In chapter 4, I develop an account of reflexivity as a mode of instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic politics. I do so by drawing from Dryzek’s account of the constitutive features of particular discourses and the reflexive action that is required to counter these features. I establish three aspects of his work. First, I establish how Dryzek’s take on particular discourses is the expression of Gadamer’s idea of hermeneutical situation. Dryzek argues that particular discourses in part constitute politics and identity. Therefore, it can be established that one’s understanding is in part situated within particular discourses. Second, I examine the terms in which interpretive conflicts can take place when plurality is conceived in terms of particular discourses. For Dryzek, it is important that interpretive conflicts do not manifest as conflict between identities. Therefore, given his argument that discourses constitute identities, he proposes to conceive of interpretive conflicts as contest between particular discourses. Third, I establish reflexivity as a mode in which Gadamer’s principle of openness can be instantiated in democratic politics.

By drawing on Dryzek, I develop an account of reflexivity as a kind of (critical) reflectiveness that is induced by encountering the other. I develop it as a mode of self-understanding that makes one aware of one’s particular discursive space that has had a history of effect from past and present understandings, interpretive articulations, persuasions, prejudices, and traditions. A reflexive person is one who is aware that his/her understanding is always incomplete, who is aware that his/her understanding of the other is always subject to what one already knows/holds and therefore subject to change, and who is aware that his/her position is always from within hermeneutical situation, and who is aware that his/her reflexivity is induced and
supported by openness to the other. Also included in reflexivity is awareness that actions and practices constitute and reconstitute the world.

In chapter 5, I develop an account of agonism as a mode of openness towards the other, who might pose an antagonistic relationship. I do so by drawing on Mouffe's account of the ontological dimension of antagonism and her normative move from the category of "enemy" to "adversary" in order to transform "antagonism" to "agonism." I establish four aspects of Mouffe's work. First, I establish how in interpretive conflicts understanding between different others can break down and transform the relationship into a form of antagonism. Second, I show Mouffe's reliance on discourse ethics in order to make the normative move from "enemy" to "adversary". For her, we can transform our relationship as enemies into relationship as adversaries if we have a common political-ethical bond in our allegiance to such values as liberty and equality. I show why this move must presuppose discourse ethics. Third, I establish how agonism allows the recognition of significance of interpretive conflicts. Agonistic struggle between adversaries is by definition struggle between different interpretations of common political-ethical values. Fourth, based on these three aspects, I establish how agonism can be understood as a political instantiation of Gadamer's principle of openness that gives democratic politics capacity to protect the ideal of pluralism from those that deny the principle of openness and its instantiations in democratic politics.

I appropriate agonism as a protective mode of instantiation of openness. I appropriate it with its central category of "adversary", "the opponent with whom one shares a common allegiance to the democratic principles of 'liberty and equality for all', while disagreeing about their interpretation" (Mouffe 2013, 7). In this appropriation, I follow Wenman's suggestion (2003) that Mouffe offers a quasi-republican constitutional framework for democratic politics. In the mode of agonism, openness can be practiced against those who contest the very commitment to pluralism and democratic politics within set constitutional constraints. Agonism is a mode of openness in which engagement and encounter of the other takes place in light of a common ethical-political bond in adherence to such values as liberty and equality, and a common commitment to openness and reflexivity.
PART ONE

Discourse, incomplete understanding, and the principle of openness in pluralism
Foreword to Part One

Habermas and Gadamer help approach the problem of incomplete understanding through a conception of discourse that can be based on the presuppositions of ordinary use of language that does not require people to have a lot in common. I treat discourse ethics and philosophical hermeneutics as complementary with regards to the question of coming to understanding through discourse. Their apparent similarities have been noted before (see How 1995; Simms 2015). Gadamer expresses it himself during their debate: “I no longer know what we are arguing about” (1986, 286).

In this part, I will establish the problem of incomplete understanding as it is recognized in deliberative democracy. Then, by drawing on Habermas’ discourse ethics, I will show how the problem of incomplete understanding can be addressed through discourse without breaking the link between pluralism and democratic politics. In chapter 2, I will show how Gadamer helps clarify the way incomplete understanding complicates the commitment to engagement and encounter of the other in democratic politics. Drawing on philosophical hermeneutics, I show why incomplete understanding is a permanent feature of human understanding and how it gives rise to interpretive conflicts. Based on Gadamer’s account of hermeneutical experience, I will establish that his principle of openness is suitable for beings with incomplete understanding. On the basis of this principle, I will argue that discourse ethics must accept situated understanding in its partial and particular expressions in order to fully address the problem of incomplete understanding through engagement and encounter of the other.
Chapter I

Pluralism and Discourse

Introduction

This chapter aims to establish the connection between pluralism, discourse, and democratic politics. I argue that discourse is an indispensable element for democratic politics committed to affirming pluralism as engagement and encounter. This argument is possible from the perspective of deliberative democracy. In Section 1.1, I establish the way deliberative democracy characterizes the challenges of plurality in terms of incomplete understanding. In Section 1.2, I establish that the problem of incomplete understanding in plural societies can be approached through Habermas’ discourse ethics. In Section 1.3, I establish the role of discourse as a problem solving mechanism and medium for dialogical engagement in democratic politics committed to pluralism. Here, I will also question the extent to which Habermas’ discourse ethics is able to affirm pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other. I show that his conception of understanding and moral claim of intersubjectivity fall short in affirming engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness.

Deliberative democracy is often presented and understood in contrast to aggregative models of democracy. Deliberative democrats like Manin argue that aggregative models of democracy understand pluralism in terms of pluralism of the market (1987, 353ff). The general argument in deliberative democracy is that this pushes aggregative models to use the language and logic of the free market. A free market system requires a plurality of agents and products that compete for the consumer. Pluralism in the market keeps prices competitive and quality of the products reasonably high. It also means possibility of choice, which keeps the consumer free from suffering the consequences of a monopolized market. When applied to the political sphere, for deliberative democrats, it means that democratic politics operates in terms of the neoclassic economics. Just like producers compete for consumers in market pluralism, political pluralism consists in competition among different interests and preferences. According to the deliberative critique, political pluralism of the aggregative models inundates democratic politics with the logics and methods...
of bargaining, trimming, and negotiating among the different interests. This way, democratic politics operates in terms of the methods of appealing to those interests according to the market logic. As James Fishkin puts it: aggregative models assume citizens to make political choices the way they choose detergents (1991, 3).

The deliberative thesis offers a form of democracy in which the processes of formation of interests and preferences are also part of democratic politics. In Section 1.1, I establish the merits of the deliberative thesis for democratic politics. The aim of this section is to show that in the deliberative camp theorists engage with plurality in a way that is closer to the problem of understanding (they call it consensus). I focus specifically on Amy Gutmann and Denis Thompson’s version of deliberative democracy. Their work raises the curtain on the challenges of plurality that have to do with understanding. For them, acute problems in plural societies are attributable to incommensurable values and incomplete understanding. In response, they argue that democratic politics must include the principles of reciprocity and moral respect. However, I argue that their emphasis on deliberation as means to mitigate incomplete understanding is limited in addressing the problem of understanding for the idea of pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other. Gutmann and Thompson conceive of incomplete understanding as a having to do with human condition. It is an ontological claim.

For such a claim, their “deliberation” is too narrow for unfolding the problem of understanding to a fuller extent. I aim to establish discourse as a more suitable concept for this task. It is broad enough to include the technical procedures of deliberation, as well as other forms of engagement and encounter of the other. Discourse allows us to work out the challenge of incomplete understanding as part of the human condition.

Therefore, in Section 1.2, I turn to the way Habermas conceives of discourse as an element of democratic politics. For him, discourse is a necessary problem solving mechanism in democratic politics. He argues that when understanding breaks down, modern democratic societies resort to discourse in order to restore it. Here I will present the four requirements that Habermas thinks discourse ought to fulfil: namely, that discourse must be
deontological, cognitivist, formal, and universal. Then, I examine the elements and principles of Habermas discourse ethics, which fulfil these requirements. By doing so, I aim to establish the role of discourse in democratic politics that aims to affirm pluralism as engagement and encounter.

In Section 1.3, I establish the role of discourse in supporting pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in democratic politics. I argue that engagement and encounter of the other is a democratic practice because it allows greater autonomy. Engaging and encountering the other in discourse allows the other to disclose its otherness to us. I draw three relevant functions of discourse: first, I take discourse as a problem solving mechanism for cases when communication breaks down between different others; second, as a medium in which the problem of incomplete understanding can be unfolded more fully and mitigated; third, as a medium where engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness can take place. I conclude the section by highlighting two ways in which discourse ethics comes short in fulfilling these functions: first one has to do with the narrow definition of understanding in Habermas and second with the ambiguity that arises with the moral claim of intersubjectivity in light of our commitment to engaging and encountering the other in their otherness.

1.1 Deliberative Democracy: moral disagreement and incomplete understanding

Deliberative theorists of democracy usually contrast themselves with aggregative models and argue that “the source of legitimacy is not the predetermined will of individuals, but rather the process of its formation, that is, deliberation itself” (Manin 1987, 351; see also Bohman and Rehg 1997). One of the versions of deliberative democracy is advocated by Gutmann and Thompson in their seminal *Democracy and Disagreement* (1996). I think these two thinkers indicate the way in which we can begin to understand the challenge of plurality as also consisting in moral disagreement that can be due to incomplete understanding.

It is useful to look at Gutmann and Thompson’s work in the context of two common aspects that belong to deliberative theories of democracy: deliberation as a will formation process and the Kantian grounds for legitimacy.
It will help highlight aspects of Gutmann and Thompson’s theory that are important to us (incomplete understanding), and contrast it with Habermas’ strand of deliberative democracy based on discourse ethics. Gutmann and Thompson reject Habermas’ discourse ethics but remain on similar Kantian grounds with him. They rely on rational intersubjective deliberation and consensus as grounds for justification of decision-making in plural societies (1996, 17; 2004, 95-124). In this research, I take their emphasis on incomplete understanding as one of the sources of moral disagreement in plural societies but reject their solution.

Broadly defined, deliberative democracy includes “any one of a family of views according to which the public deliberation of free and equal citizens is the core of legitimate political decision-making and self-governance” (Bohman 1998, 401). The common argument in all deliberative theories of democracy is about grounding the legitimacy of democratic politics not on the procedural methods of aggregation of the wills but on the process of formation of wills – deliberation (Manin 1987; Bohman and Rehg 1997, ix-xviii). This makes deliberative theories more suitable to the demands of plural societies because legitimacy is grounded on the extent of fairness in the form of “rational legislation”, inclusiveness of its “participatory politics”, and autonomy of the deliberative process (Bohman and Rehg 1997, ix). Furthermore, in contrast to democratic theories that adhere to the classical doctrine of pluralism, deliberative theories of democracy do not take interests and preferences as given (see Dryzek 1990, 2002; Fishkin 1992; Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 2004; Habermas 1990, 1993, 1996; Macedo 1999; Manin 1987; Young 2000). Rather, they see deliberation as a process that can transform interests, change preferences, and form the collective will. Furthermore, they do not presume that citizens know and understand their needs fully. Therefore, the aim of deliberation is “to offer voters not only a range of solutions, among which they may choose according to predetermined needs, but also to enlighten them about their needs, and have them weigh the options presented by the parties” (Manin 1987, 355-356). By implication, deliberative democracy does not employ logic and methods of market economy in democratic politics. It does not
supplant its understanding of plurality in the political-deliberative forum with pluralism in the market⁵ (see, for instance, Manin 1987, 353ff).

Another common thread deliberative theories have is the Kantian grounding of legitimacy. They require deliberating parties to demonstrate that their interest is generalizable against the background of different other interests. Their move from plurality of interests to forming a collective will on one interest consists of the “incentives for generalization” that the deliberative process inherently has (Manin 1987; Gutmann and Thompson 1996). For example, Manin writes:

[...] universalism [...] is not assumed at the start. It seems rather to be the ideal term of the process. In truth, no party will ever become an actually universal party; there will always remain opponents; this is the core of political pluralism. Nevertheless the structure of the deliberative system usually makes the protagonists strive to enlarge their points of view and propose more and more general positions. There is a sort of competition for generality. The deliberative process never results in strictly universal proposals; universality remains the unattainable end, but the system provides an incentive to generalization (Manin 1987, 359).

Gutmann and Thompson develop their version of deliberative democracy in Democracy and Disagreement (1996). In Why Deliberative Democracy (2004), they define deliberative democracy as follows: “deliberative democracy [is] … a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives), justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in the future” (7). I highlight their emphasis on the way plurality

⁵ Consider Manin’s distinctions between the citizen and consumer, and, thus, between the political fora and marketplace (Manin 1987, 355-357). It is less common that the citizen is immediately aware of the scope of the social and political problems that surround him/her, whereas it is more common that the consumer understands and knows their own immediate problem. The decisions of the citizen as a voter do not give immediate results as do the decisions of the consumer. Furthermore, in the case of the citizen, decision indirectly affects contexts and groups beyond the immediate situation whereas the consumer's decision has direct effects on his/her own immediate situation. Unlike in the political fora, the exact knowledge consumers have on their needs allows them to choose from a plurality of options one that directly corresponds to their need. What aggregative models do is just collect citizen votes. By contrast, deliberative democrats argue the politics should involve a process for clarifying those needs and justifying them as well. Such a process potentially changes interests and preferences. In this sense I argue that deliberative democracy does not take plurality as a simple given but tries to go beyond into the processes that constitute plurality.
harbours moral disagreement, the sources of which can be traced back to scarcity of resources, human nature, incompatible values, or incomplete understanding. Their response pushes for deliberative democratic politics that consists in upholding reciprocity as the central principle, publicity and accountability as principles that complement reciprocity, and liberty and opportunity as constitutional constraints on deliberative politics.

Gutmann’s and Thompson’s basic conviction about plurality is that it harbours moral disagreement. They give four reasons moral disagreement will persist: scarcity, human nature, incompatible values, and incomplete understanding (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 18-26). Incompatible values and incomplete understanding are endemic to plurality. As far as Gutmann and Thompson are concerned, even if scarcity was not a problem and human nature was more generous, moral disagreement would persist because in plural societies different values can be incompatible, and people can never achieve complete understanding of each other. The way Gutmann and Thompson attribute moral disagreement to incompatible values and incomplete understanding raises the curtain on the complexity of plurality. It is possible that incompatibility of values and incomplete understanding are connected and in some cases incompatibility of values can be the result of incomplete understanding, or even misunderstanding.

Gutmann and Thompson recognize incomplete understanding as a “human limitation” that makes up our human condition (1996, 25). It is so fundamental to our being that even if we were to live in a society where there is no scarcity and among people of best generosity, we would still have moral disagreement. That is because we lack a “perfect understanding” whereby “we would discover uniquely correct resolutions to problems of incompatible values” (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 25). They do not mean to “imply moral scepticism” by recognizing incomplete understanding as part of the human condition. For them, “it is fully compatible with the belief that there are moral truths, although it does not presuppose this belief” (1996, 25). There might be truths and some problems may have correct solutions “but at any historical moment our imperfect understanding, manifested in the fundamental disagreements among the most thoughtful and good-willed citizens, prevents us
from definitively distinguishing those that do from those that do not” (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 25).

The aim of deliberative democracy is to provide a forum in which we can make decisions in light of this aspect of our human condition. Gutmann and Thompson write:

a well constituted deliberative forum provides an opportunity for advancing both individual and collective understanding. Through give-and-take of argument, participants can learn from each other, come to recognize their individual and collective misapprehensions, and develop new views and policies that can more successfully withstand critical scrutiny. When citizens bargain and negotiate, they may learn how better to get what they want. But when they deliberate, they can expand their knowledge, including both their self-understanding and their collective understanding of what will best serve their fellow citizens (2004, 12).

With Gutmann and Thompson, I establish the role of incomplete understanding in moral disagreement. Accordingly, I agree with them on the role of deliberative forums in addressing the problem that incomplete understanding poses. However, in chapter 2, I will look at the problem of incomplete understanding from the perspective of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. Hermeneutics helps clarify the significance of incomplete understanding as part of the human condition. It will be established how incomplete understanding manifests itself not only as moral disagreement, but also as interpretive conflicts. Thus, this section draws from Gutmann and Thompson the notion of incomplete understanding as a recognized problem in deliberative democracy and chapter 2 takes this problem further with Gadamer.

For Gutmann and Thompson, engagement and encounter in the deliberative fora can be sustained by mutual respect through reciprocity. Mutual respect and reciprocity are possible in deliberative democracy, which harnesses “the capacity to seek fair terms of social cooperation for their own sake” (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 52-53). They understand reciprocity as “a form of mutuality in the face of disagreement” (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 14). It is a normative principle that regulates deliberation, in which “citizens should aspire to a kind of political reasoning that is mutually justifiable” (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 53). It presupposes that everybody has a right to expect that
the other will justify their claim in mutually acceptable terms (1996, 55). Mutual respect is understood as a disposition towards one another in the conditions of moral disagreement; that is, maintaining respect for one another preserves the possibility for further deliberation and cooperation in the conditions of disagreement (Gutmann and Thompson 2004, 1-63). The idea of mutual respect is recognized in various forms in deliberative theory. Chapter 3 will examine the benefits of Young’s notion of asymmetric reciprocity as a more pluralistic and inclusive idea of mutual respect and reciprocity. It will be established that asymmetric reciprocity entails practicing mutual respect and reciprocity in terms of genuine wonder at the otherness of the other expressed in the form of a question that allows the other to disclose its otherness.

By contrast, Gutmann and Thompson argue that reciprocity and mutual respect can be achieved and maintained by the procedural principles of publicity and accountability (1996, 95-127, 128-164). This is not to say that the two forms of engagement and encounter are mutually exclusive. The problem I have with Gutmann and Thompson’s version is that their terms do not conceive of deliberation as a transformative dialogue. It has no provisions for world disclosure, acknowledgement of difference, and a more inclusive deliberation. At least, they are not explicit. Reciprocity requires that the reasons and justification for one’s claims are public: “the reasons that officials and citizens give to justify political actions, and the information necessary to assess those reasons, should be public” (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 95). It also requires that each person is accountable to everybody else (Gutmann and Thompson, 129ff). Without publicity and accountability, reciprocity cannot be achieved and, thus, mutual respect has no basis. These elements do not guarantee

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6 See, for instance, Seyla Benhabib’s *Situating the Self* (1991). We will explore Young’s idea of mutual respect, which she calls moral respect in Chapter III. Habermas too presupposes the idea of moral respect to sustain engagement and encounter across differences.

7 It is also useful to note that they understand that accountability and publicity should be in a kind of deliberation that is fact regarding and “consistent with relatively reliable methods of inquiry” (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 56). Furthermore, the grounds for justification by appeal to authority must be accepted and understood by all in principle. This however, makes them ambiguous with regards to religious authority and they avoid the problem of rejecting religious authority just as ambiguously: “to reject moral claims that rely on implausible premises is therefore not to repudiate religion. An appeal to divine authority per se is thus not what creates the problem for a deliberative perspective. The problem lies in the appeal to any authority whose conclusions are impervious, in principle as well as practice, to the standards of logical consistency or to reliable methods of inquiry that themselves should be mutually acceptable” (1996, 56).
agreement where none is possible; however, deliberative democracy aims that these principles help mitigate deepest moral disagreements and maintain mutual respect for stable democratic politics at the very least. Their precepts help sustain the argument that deliberative democracy provides grounds for making choices in societies with qualitatively different conceptions of the good (value pluralism) and participants with incomplete understanding.

Though Gutmann and Thompson uphold reciprocity, publicity, and accountability as important procedural concepts for deliberative democracy, they do not support the idea that they alone determine the legitimacy of deliberation. They argue that what matters more than the deliberative procedure is the content it upholds. For them, all deliberation must uphold liberty and opportunity as constitutional values. Deliberation is legitimate not only based on procedures but also on the way it upholds and does not violate liberty and opportunity. This way of emphasising constitutional constraints, according to Gutmann and Thompson, marks their difference with the Habermasian strand of deliberative democracy. They criticize Habermas for prioritizing deliberation and founding legitimacy on the procedures alone (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 17; see also Gutmann and Thompson 2005, chapter 3). On this, Gutmann and Thompson write:

In the democratic search for provisionally justifiable policies, the content of deliberation often matters at least as much as the conditions. The deliberative perspective we develop here, then, explicitly rejects the idea, sometimes identified with deliberative democracy, that deliberation under the right conditions – real discourses in the ideal speech situation – is sufficient to legitimate laws and public policies. We open the door to constitutional principles that both inform and constrain the content of what democratic deliberators can legitimately legislate (1996, 200).

For the focus of this thesis, Daniel Weinstock’s (1997, 498) distinction between “radical” and “moderate” pluralism helps to understand the issue here. For radical pluralism, we cannot objectively know what values and which combination of values we must take up. Any value is replaceable by any other. We cannot have objective knowledge of any value by way of reasoning that is independent from it being taken up by a cultural group and objectified into an

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8 They write “Deliberative outcomes ... would have to respect basic liberty and opportunity as an ongoing condition of their own legitimacy” (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 17)
institutions. For moderate pluralism, philosophical inquiry and reasoning can establish some values as irreplaceable independently of them being taken up and objectified by a cultural group. Weinstock (1997) and Galston (1999), for instance, argue that Berlin was a moderate pluralist. For Berlin, negative liberty is a value that can be known objectively through reasoning and agreed as an irreplaceable value; that is, no conception of the good, no combination of values can override negative liberty.

Gutmann and Thompson’s advocacy for constitutional constraints should be understood in a similar manner. They too want to “moderate” pluralism so that some values, liberty and opportunity, are irreplaceable and that the outcome of deliberation does not override them. For instance, liberty as a guaranteed protection of personal integrity should be respected over public good (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 204). Furthermore, the outcome of deliberation must not violate person’s basic opportunities for life and a decent job (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 216). They argue deliberative democracy “cannot do without a principle of opportunity any more than it can do without a principle of liberty” (1996, 216). Thus, substance and procedures, according to Gutmann and Thompson, should not have priority over one another: “both need to be treated as morally and politically provisional” (2004, 25-6).

No form of democratic politics can sustain the radical idea of pluralism. Politics is a sphere of human activity, where values inevitably must be prioritised and ranked, in which ends are prioritized and ranked, and in which means are decided. In democratic politics this activity must be backed by reasons that are acceptable by those who are affected. However, it is impossible to come to an agreement between all who are affected by positive affirmation. Usually, affected parties assent to the outcome through negative affirmation. Here, ranking of values is crucial. The acceptability of an outcome often depends on it not violating certain values. Rawls (1996), for instance, ranks the values in the first principle of justice as the highest. Gutmann and Thompson prioritize liberty and opportunity in a similar fashion. Mouffe, a critic of liberalism, recognizes that there must be substantive constraints on the procedures of deliberative democratic politics too. For her, political engagement and contestation must respect common adherence to liberty and equality (Mouffe 1999; 2013).
Mouffe has more to offer on this subject. She shows us that constitutional constraints are important not only for the sake of coming to agreement in democratic deliberation, but also for keeping disagreement from devolving into a deadly antagonistic conflict. With her, the moral disagreement that Gutmann and Thompson take as a challenge can be transformed into a kind of conflict that has democratic value. Therefore, I examine the merits of Mouffe’s argument in chapter 5.

If we evaluate Gutmann and Thompson’s deliberative democracy against the criteria of engagement and encounter outlined by Eck, we see that it comes close to the ideal of pluralism. There is a sense of engagement across differences and encounter of commitments. Their notions of mutual respect and reciprocity have the “reason-giving requirement” (Gutmann and Thompson 2004, 3), which is a type of rational engagement in which participants seek mutual understanding by providing reasons that could be accepted by all equally. Participants also encounter one another’s interests because the procedural principles of reciprocity, accountability, and publicity require participants to be present at the fora with their interests. Furthermore, deliberative democracy also implies a dynamic process that allows reconsideration and re-examination and leaves the deliberative channels open for further engagement and understanding across difference.

However, Gutmann and Thompson’s deliberative democracy do not fully embrace pluralism as engagement and encounter. What we are looking for is a democratic politics that entails deliberative practices in which participants engage and encounter one another as others. Engagement across differences in Gutmann and Thompson does not entail that. We need not encounter one another as different others because our aim is to seek “fair terms of social cooperation for their own sake” (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 52-53). This implies that we have mutual respect for each other’s difference without the actual need for encountering it, without being confronted by it. According to Eck’s ideal, we actively seek understanding across difference, not just the terms for cooperation. Understanding, unlike cooperation, requires that we encounter one another as different others. Although Gutmann and Thompson’s principle of mutual respect could mean that participants reciprocate in respecting each other’s differences, their deliberative democracy is underspecified in terms of its
conceputal content for our purposes. Nevertheless, I would like to note how their work contributes this thesis.

Their argument on how moral disagreement can be the manifestation of incomplete understanding has raised the curtain on understanding as one of the fundamental aspects of human condition. Indeed, problems in engagement and encounter on social, political, or moral matters can come from incomplete understanding. Thus, from Gutmann and Thompson, we take incomplete understanding as a problem in plural societies. They accept it as part of the human condition and accept that we will always already have incomplete understanding of some object. I claim that this is not the full picture of the problem of incomplete understanding and turn to Gadamer in order to understand it and the challenges it poses more deeply. If it is part of the human condition, it must be one of the fundamental features of understanding. If we take incomplete understanding in terms of our inability to understand an object fully, it indicates a way forward for examining the nature of understanding itself and how it works. It points towards an ontology that Gadamer examines as having to do with human finitude. Chapter 2 shows how Gadamer’s account of human finitude implicates our understanding of pluralism.

Furthermore, it is necessary to consider Gutmann and Thompson’s critique of Habermas’ prioritization of procedures. If our goal is to understand what kinds of practices can constitute democratic politics that is committed to pluralism as engagement and encounter, then attention must be given to how certain values can be upheld over procedures. This is necessary to protect the ideal of pluralism and democratic method from racist, sexist, and extremist groups. This point resonates with Young, Dryzek, and Mouffe, all of whom agree that deliberative procedures must be constrained by such things as reasonableness, respect for other’s liberty, dignity, and person.

From Habermas’ perspective, this critique is trivial. The standards and principles of his discourse ethics have the means to constrain procedures from allowing such groups to have any impact on deliberation. However, what we need to agree on are more substantive principles that we all will respect; what Gutmann and Thompson call constitutional values that we will uphold over procedures. The reason for this kind of normative move is better explained in
Mouffe’s works. That is, we agree on upholding certain constitutional values because we do not want to endanger our way of life and being. Yet, Gutmann and Thompson’s move is underspecified on this matter. Therefore, I turn to Mouffe’s account on upholding certain constitutional values in chapter 5.

More generally, if the problem of incomplete understanding is to be acknowledged in a more fundamental way, then the idea of deliberation is not sufficient for addressing it. Deliberation is too narrow of a term. It includes terms that are relevant for formal political decision-making. While all forms of communication have some sort of a goal, deliberation represents a specific genus of communication that is aimed at making decisions. Deliberation must always come to an end and produce results. It does not require that participants leave with a transformed understanding in the broader sense. Ideally, deliberation results in a revision of pre-deliberative preferences or a compromise between parties. However, it would be hard to accommodate a kind of engagement in which parties can understand each other as different others.

In order to acknowledge the problem of incomplete understanding in a more fundamental way, a broader concept that can include more than what typically constitutes deliberative democracy is necessary. Discourse is a suitable candidate for such a task. Habermas’ conception of discourse found in his program of discourse ethics is most suitable. Although for Habermas discourse is a narrow term too, his discourse ethics help to understand discourse as an element of democratic politics that addresses the problem of incomplete understanding in a more fundamental way. Furthermore, discourse is a malleable concept and so is more amenable to critical appropriation and procedural amendments. As we will see in chapters 3-5, it can also serve as a suitable framework for articulating democratic politics in which the principle of openness can be instantiated as asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism. Below I present Habermas’ conception of discourse and the elements of his discourse ethics.
1.2 Discourse ethics

The concept of discourse is contested and the way it is used varies depending on the subject field. For Habermas, discourse is mainly a problem solving mechanism. It is a kind of activity for rational intersubjective reflection based on universal pragmatics of using language as a means to coordinate cooperation. As such, discourse is the domain where normative bases can be problematized and disputed between language users. We fall into discourse when the presuppositions of our normal mode of cooperation are disputed and we need to fall back from the ordinary mode of communication in order to restore them. It is a mechanism for restoring understanding, or what Habermas calls a consensus between subjects so that communication can resume. Thus, there are two distinctions to keep in mind: communicative situation and discourse situation. Communicative situation (and action) carries on while the validities of normative claims behind it are not disputed. Discourse situation arises when the normative claims are disputed (when understanding breaks down) and subjects enter into discourse as means to rationally restore understanding to restore communicative situation.

This distinction makes it necessary to review Habermas’ theory of communicative action because the two are inextricably linked (1990, 58; also see Thomassen 2010; Finlayson 2005). Habermas’ conception of discourse includes within itself what he calls the formal-transcendental rules of discourse ethics, which he outlines systematically in his Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action (1990). Discourse ethics, to which he refers as practical discourse or moral argumentation interchangeably, has within itself elements of rational discourse, consensus, and principles of discourse and universalization which are conceptually built on his theory of communicative action (see 1990, Chapter 3). It is important to understand that Habermas justifies these four elements based on the concepts of validity claim and communicative action that were developed before his discourse ethics were formulated in its mature form.

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9 See for instance, Howarth 2000. The concept is usually tied to the philosophy of language. Heidegger, for instance, argued that "the existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse or talk [rede]" (1962: 203). This view, however, inverts the relationship between language and discourse in what Heidegger called the "metaphysical", or the standard thinking in philosophy. Prior to Heidegger, it was understood that language makes discourse possible. In other words, learning a language makes discourse possible. From the point of view of Heidegger’s Dasein, we encounter discourse in the world first and then think about language in an artificial way – hence the field of philology.
Once we review the concepts of validity claim and communicative action, we will be able to understand the difference and relationship between communicative and discourse situations.

**Communicative action**

Let us begin with an assumption that Habermas makes: the modern society can no longer coordinate its social activities by appeals to tradition or religion (see 1984; 2001, 147; 1990, 116). Modern societies are characterised by their rationalization, or what Weber referred to as “disenchantment”, and plurality of traditions, religions, and other commonly shared sources of values and worldviews. Given such complex and plural constitution of modern societies, something is still necessary to coordinate social action. Further, since coordination of any kind requires some form of communication, Habermas turns to examine modes of communicative action that coordinate social activities (1984, 274). In order to explain how exactly communicative acts “take on the function of coordinating action and make their contribution to building up interaction” (1984, 278), Habermas builds against the background of Weber’s theory of action three distinct types of actions: instrumental, strategic, and communicative (1984, 284). Based on their telos, he categorizes these actions to ones that orient themselves towards success (instrumental and strategic) and one that orients itself towards reaching understanding (1984, 286). Distinguishing and understanding concrete actions as one rather than another can be possible so long as the manifested attitude of the participants clearly indicates whether they are oriented to success or to reach an understanding amongst each other (1984, 286). Given that we are looking at the problem of understanding, we need to focus on the kind of action that is oriented towards reaching understanding – communicative action.

For Habermas, understanding has two distinct functions in communicative situation and discourse situation. For communicative situation, we must understand speech acts, whereas in discourse situation understanding brings about consensus. Communicative situation presupposes consensus, i.e. participants understand speech acts insofar as there is an underlying consensus on the validity of general norms. Understanding a speech act depends on the connection that participant makes between the act and the norm that underlies it. If there is no consensus, then participants do not
understand the speech acts. Therefore, if understanding breaks down in the communicative situation, it can only be restored by falling back to discourse situation where rational deliberation restores consensus. For Habermas, the structure of communicative action makes up the structure of both communicative and discourse situations. That is because his theory of communicative action describes the universal pragmatics that we share as language users. It describes communicative rationality that we share in our species-wide capacity as language users. We are able to reach consensus by means of our inherent communicative rationality. Communicative action involves precisely this type of rationality because it is a type of action where understanding must have a non-coercive cause. Habermas writes, “a communicatively achieved agreement has a rational basis; it cannot be imposed by either party, whether instrumentally through intervention in the situation directly or strategically through influencing the decisions of opponents” (1984, 287). Here we may observe the qualitative difference between the three types of action. Habermas wants to find a basis for the possibility of communicative action independently of any culture or tradition. For him, communicative action is possible to the extent of our competence and capacity as language users. However, having the capacity for communicative action does not imply the will for it. We can call an interaction “communicative when the participants coordinate their plans of action consensually, with the agreement reached at any point being evaluated in terms of the intersubjective recognition of validity claims” (1990, 58). The rationality of communicative action demands that what should be counted as “common” is reached and agreed upon through rational-argumentative deliberation, in other words, by the force of the better argument.

Another thing we need to highlight on this subject is the notion of ‘validity claims’. Through this concept we will be able to explain when a communicative situation becomes a discourse situation according to Habermas. Validity claims is a notion that is closely tied to the regulatory standard Habermas calls the “ideals of communicative action” and later on “ideal speech situation”. The features of Habermas’ “ideals of communicative action” are absence of any forms of coercion, equal opportunity to speak, absence of power relationships, …

10 Note that these two senses of understanding do not include understanding the other.
and that the speaker is as honest and truthful as possible in what he/she asserts. The speaker always makes claims to validity in communicative action and, when questioned, the speaker must be able to redeem them. Habermas describes three validity claims the speaker must satisfy: truth, rightness, and truthfulness. Respectively, they make a validity claim on the objective world, social world, and the subjective world. In a communicative action where “constatives” function as “representation of states of affairs”, the speaker must be able to redeem the validity claim of “truth” about the objective world to which he/she is referring (1984, 329). Similarly, in a communicative action that involves “regulatives” or normative bases which function for “establishment of interpersonal relations”, the speaker must be able to redeem the validity claim of “rightness” of the normative bases that serves to justify communicative interaction in the given social situation (1984, 329). Finally, “expressive” communicative actions that function for the purpose of “self-representation” must be truthful in its representation of the subjective world to which the performer of the communicative act in the given situation is referring (1984, 329).

Now we can identify the point at which communicative situation turns into discourse situation. We noted that for a speech act to be understood in a communicative situation, it requires consensus on the validity claims. While there is consensus on the validity claims that justify their respective communicative actions, communicative interaction carries on without interruptions as participants understand each other’s speech acts. Such interactions take place on a daily basis in situations such as a request not to smoke in a public place. For communicative interaction to take place, the participants must accept the validity claims of the other. This situation is a communicative situation. However, when the validity claims are disputed, participants need to restore the consensus on the validity of the norms. The type of communication that takes place in this situation is governed by what Habermas interchangeably calls discourse ethics, practical discourse, or moral argumentation. Until they reach an agreement on the validity of the normative bases, the participants remain in discourse situation. Discourse situation is inevitable for cases that require resolution of disputes on validity claims of “truth” and “rightness” because, according to Habermas, they are redeemable.
only discursively, whereas the claim for “truthfulness” is redeemable by “consistent behaviour” (Habermas 1990, 58-9). Thus, we have a concept of discourse with a role for repairing communication when it is broken by disagreement over the validity of one or more norms and/or normative bases for communicative action. Essentially, discourse is oriented towards repairing and reconstructing the conditions of possibility for reaching rational understanding and agreement for communicative interaction to resume coordinating social action of complex and plural societies of the modern world.

Four requirements for discourse in plural societies

Disagreement over validity claims rarely arises in homogenous societies (see Habermas 1990, Chapter 5). The more complex a society is, the more diverse groups it has, the more necessary discourse becomes in its function as a problem solving mechanism. Habermas argues that in plural societies, the more complex and diverse their plurality is, the more abstract and morally justified norms must be “to control the individual’s scope of action” (1990, 205). In order to fulfil its function as a problem solving mechanism in this context, Habermas argues that discourse must meet four requirements: it must be deontological, cognitivist, formal, and universal (1990, 116-88; 1993;)

In this section, I examine Habermas’ argument on the relevance of these requirements for deliberative democracy in plural societies.

Discourse must be deontological because when participants enter into discourse situation, they must reach a consensus based on what is right, not what is good. If the resolution of a dispute depends on the settlement of a certain conception of the good, then it is a discourse based on ethical concerns. It is teleological. The good is always part of ethics that belongs to a particular group with a particular culture and world-view. A group’s culture functions as the source of the values for the group. Their idea of the good comes from these values and therefore communicative interaction based on consensus cannot be restored by a teleological discourse. Discourse deals “not with value preferences but with the normative validity of norms of action” (Habermas 1990, 104). For this reason, discourse ethics should always prefer right over good. As such, discourse covers only practical questions, and this is why discourse ethics is often referred to as ‘practical discourse’ or ‘moral argumentation’. It comes

11 Also see Thomassen 2010, 85f for concise summary
into action when the participant supplements his/her question ‘what should I do in this particular situation’ with ‘what ought I do’. Here, Habermas’ deontological discourse ethics takes its orientation from Kant.

Nonetheless, Habermas differentiates himself from Kant and, by implication, from other Kantian thinkers like Rawls. Habermas argues that his “discourse ethics replaces the Kantian categorical imperative by a procedure of moral argumentation” (1990, 197). It is important to understand why he sees its significance as an element of democratic politics in plural societies. Whereas Kant’s categorical imperative is hinged upon the subject trusted to transcend the immediacy of his/her own life and reflect on the universal application of the norm, Habermas’ discourse ethics require intersubjective reflection. In other words, Kant’s categorical imperative can take place in a monological fashion and, therefore, cannot be part of the communicative interaction that takes on the function of coordinating social action. What one ought to do must be reached by means of rational consensus in a discursive manner by intersubjective reflection – there must be a dialogue between subjects. The rationalized, complex and plural characteristics of modern society requires norms that are not settled upon in a monological but dialogical fashion. For this reason, discourse ethics must be deontological in order to serve as a mechanism for regulating conflicts arising from broken communicative interaction and reaching rationally motivated consensus.

Discourse must be cognitivist in the sense that the reasons for actions must be understood independently from any tradition or culture. As Habermas notes, “only cognitivist basic assumptions can do justice to the phenomena and the experiences of a posttraditional morality that has detached itself from the religious and metaphysical contexts from which it arose” (1993, 39). For him, the justification of validity of norms must have a “rational foundation” in the sense that the participants in moral discourse should be able to define, understand, and explain the questions and solutions according to the standards of formal logic and rationality they possess in their competence and capacity as language users (see Habermas 1990, 120-2, 196-8; 1993, 41ff). In other words, a consensus achieved based on cognitivist assumptions should make sense to everybody affected by the outcome without a necessary grounding in shared ethics.
Given the existence of plurality of groups, which have different sources for their values, discourse must be procedural. Discourse must be a formal mechanism for resolving questions that arise from the encounter between different groups which outlines discursive procedure for redeeming validity claims of propositions. Habermas’ discourse can be characterized as formal, “for it provides no substantive guidelines but only a procedure: practical discourse” (1990, 103). In other words, discourse should not contain answers to moral questions and problems in plural societies. Rather it is a mechanism by which an intersubjective consensus can be achieved on the validity of norms that are applied to resolve moral questions. The formal-procedural nature of discourse requires that all those affected are included into the deliberation and everybody is given equal opportunity to speak without strategic or instrumental interventions.

Finally, for Habermas, universality of discourse is crucial for it to be considered as an element of democratic politics. As a formal mechanism for resolving conflicts and restoring consensus, it must not be defined and understood in terms of any particular culture, historical moment, or a value system (Habermas 1990, 120ff, 196ff, 205). It should transcend the particular so that the participants in discourse can have equal opportunity to participate and equal influence on the outcome of deliberation. For that to be possible, the formal-procedural principles must not be defined in terms of principles of the dominant community or tradition. Discourse should apply to all across their differences.

The elements and principles of discourse ethics

I now move on to the elements and principles of Habermas’ discourse ethics, which allow his conception of discourse to meet these requirements. The main elements of Habermas’ discourse ethics are: rational discourse and consensus, while the principles are what he refers to as the discourse (D) and universalization (U) principles. Together, they form a conception of discourse that is suitable as an element of democratic politics in plural societies.

Habermas’ theory of communicative action internally links rational discourse and consensus. The link is seen in the switch from communicative situation to discourse situation. Recall that for Habermas a conflict arises in
society when the validity claims are questioned. In these situations consensus breaks down and the participants seek to resolve their differences. In some societies, the dispute is eliminated by coercion, violence, and other means of inflicting pressure on those who dispute. In a free society with democratic institutions, disputants resort to discursive restoration of consensus. Thus, we can assume, as Habermas does, that discourse is inevitable in free plural societies because plurality does not allow justification based on metaphysics and tradition. Participants engage in a rational discourse whereby the one whose validity claim is disputed must offer a rational argument to redeem the claim. Once the argument is accepted and understanding is reached, discourse situation ends in a consensus and restores the condition of possibility for communicative action. Rational discourse and consensus are always already presupposed in discourse ethics.

Accordingly, a communicatively competent participant always already presupposes these elements. It would be a “performative contradiction” to deny them. A participant in discourse, by virtue of participating in the discourse tacitly accepts the presuppositions of rational discourse: equality of speech, rule of reason and rationality, and that no strategic or instrumental action is involved in redeeming the truth about the objective world, rightness of the intersubjective relations, and truthfulness of representation. Redeeming validity claims are part of the procedure of rational discourse and constitute communicative action as well. They constitute communicative action when they are consensually accepted to validate a norm which justifies certain action. Similarly, they constitute rational discourse where validity is redeemed by means of argumentation. For Habermas, communicative rationality and competence are presupposed in rational discourse and consensus to the degree that they are presupposed in one’s capacity as a language user\(^\text{12}\) (see Habermas 1990, 116-88).

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\(^{12}\) Rational discourse and consensus also serve developmental and educational functions insofar as they require constant employment of our species-wide communicative rationality and competence. Rational deliberation to reach consensus has a pedagogic function in the sense that it forces the speaker to present a better argument, hence defend his or her interest “in ever wider forums before an ever more competent and larger audience against ever new objections” (Habermas 2001, 36). We may remember examples of rational discourse and consensus from Platonic dialogues. Rational dialogue does not proceed to the next step in the argumentation until all the participants in the rational discourse assent to Socrates’ arguments and counterarguments during the dialogue. In other words, Socrates is only able to take the
The two principles, the discourse principle (D) and the universalization principle (U), help discourse ethics comply with Habermas’ four requirements for discourse in plural societies: deontological, cognitivist, formal, and universal. Below I examine their role in discourse ethics and the way they serve as elements of democratic politics that can affirm engagement and encounter.

There are some differences in Habermas’ definitions of (D) in different works. These differences have a technical significance. Initially, the definition of (D) was: “only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse” (Habermas 1990, 66). A slightly different wording can be found in Facts and Norms: “only those action norms are valid to which all possibly affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourse” (1996, 107). I would like to focus briefly on the part where “practical discourse” is replaced with “rational discourse”. There are two main works in which Habermas works out his discourse ethics systematically. They are his Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action (1990) and Justification and Application (1993). His other opuses either anticipate or presuppose the discourse ethics found in these two works. For instance, the two volume Theory of Communicative Action (1984; 1987) defines, understands, and explains the functions of speech acts in instrumental, strategic, and communicative interactions based on pragmatic and moral validity claims in anticipation of the elements and principles of his discourse ethics. Conversely, Between Facts and Norms (1996) presupposes the worked out elements and principles of discourse ethics in its development of a discourse theory of democracy where rational discourse, consensus, discourse principle, and universalization principle play a crucial role in bridging the conflict between justice and common good in democratic theory (see Habermas 1996, 448). In his earlier works (1990 and 1993) Habermas used the dialogue further when all participants understand and assent to the premises of the argument. The Socratic questioning presupposes that a consensus can be reached by means of rational discourse. He will not take any further discursive steps unless he and his collocutors accept the validity of the claims made. Confirming Habermas’ assumption, rational discourse and consensus are always already presupposed in discourse and one accepts them by the act of entering into one when communication breaks down because there is no understanding and agreement on the validity which justifies the propositions. “Performative contradiction” would occur if an interlocutor enters into discourse denying these elements because the speaker cannot deny them without presupposing that their denial depends on rational argumentation and consensus. That is, Socrates cannot undermine the Socratic method of questioning through the Socratic method of questioning.
terms “practical discourse” and “moral discourse” interchangeably. Their relation to rational discourse is presupposed in the sense that both are similar in their procedures because they both require compliance with the general rules of rational discourse.

Moral argumentation, or practical discourse, has to do with a type of discourse that resolves issues concerning “the right”, i.e. what is just for all. It is universal in character, for its outcomes should be accepted by all on rational basis. On the other hand, pragmatic and ethical discourses relate to dialogues about best means and the good respectively, and thus are context bound. However, the common thread in all discourses are that they all are rational discourses insofar as they involve the procedures of rational argumentation according to the transcendental pragmatic presuppositions of language, which we always already possess due to our competence and capacity as a species of language users that coordinate social action by means of communication. Whereas practical discourse refers to moral questions, “rational discourse” is an element in all forms discourses: pragmatic, ethical, moral. Thus, replacing “practical discourse” with “rational discourse” make (D) applicable to all forms of discourse that fulfil the function of restoring consensus in their respective spheres. For instance, issues that require pragmatic resolution do not necessarily require moral argumentation. However, when the means are questioned, a rational discourse on the best means is in order. By implication, the reformulated (D) in Between Facts and Norms (1996) characterizes the general conception of discourse in a way that is more suitable for democratic politics in virtue of the more inclusive notion of “rational discourse”:

rational discourse should include any attempt to reach an understanding over problematic validity claims insofar as this takes place under conditions of communication that enable the free processing of topics and contributions, information and reasons in the public space constituted by illocutionary obligations. The expression also refers indirectly to bargaining processes insofar as these are regulated by discursively grounded procedures (Habermas 1996, 108).

In discourse ethics, (D) “already presupposes that we can justify our choice of a norm” (Habermas 1990, 66). As such, it is part of the procedure of rational discourse by which the participants can come to consensus on whether the norm is valid or not (Habermas 1990, 103). In other words, (D) is a principle
which applies when communicative interaction breaks down. The principle applies to the procedure for discursive redemption of validity claims, i.e. according to the rules of rational discourse which presupposes communicative rationality. (D) makes it possible that “discourse ethics can properly be characterized as formal, for it provides no substantive guidelines but only a procedure” (Habermas 1990, 103). A dispute on validity claims, when resolved discursively according to (D) can be resolved only by two outcomes: either those affected come to consensus and the norm is valid or they do not come to consensus and therefore norm is not valid. It does not “generate” new norms (see Habermas 1990, 66, 103). Of course, the procedure relies on the communicative rationality and competence of the participants. It presupposes that the participants can redeem the validity of their positions based on the claims of truth, rightness, and truthfulness. More importantly, it relies heavily on the condition whereby rational discourse is conducted without strategic and instrumental interventions. We can connect this principle to the elements of rational discourse and consensus in the following way: (D) has, as its telos, a rational consensus which can only be achieved by means of rational discourse in which all affected were able to participate without coercion, they stated their positions without distortion and can, if necessary, redeem the validity of their positions in an environment free from strategic and instrumental actions.

I will now examine the universalisation principle (U) to understand its role in making discourse ethics meet the requirements of deontic, cognitivist and universalist discourse in plural societies. (U) contains criteria for determining whether norms are just. It is worth noting that (U) takes its orientation from Kant. It employs the criteria of universalizability in order to determine whether the norm is just or not. Habermas admits that it is similar to all cognitivist ethics of Kantian origin in the sense that it shares “the basic intuition contained in Kant’s categorical imperative” (1990, 63). However, it is different from Kant’s principle and the rest of the cognitivist versions in one crucial way. We need to define (U) to see the difference. Again, we may find definitions of the principle in both texts (1990 and 1993) with variations in wording (e.g. 1990, 65, 120; 1993, 32). For instance, initially the principle is introduced in the following way: a norm is valid when “all affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its general observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of everyone’s
interests (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities for regulation)” (1990, 65; emphasis as in the original). Later in the same text, the definition is offered as following: “for a norm to be valid, the consequences and side effects that its general observance can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the particular interests of each person affected must be such that all affected can accept them freely” (1990, 120). The latter definition can be found in Habermas’ later work (1993, 32) and is presupposed in his discourse theory of democracy (1996) with the added provision in parentheses of the earlier definition, namely, the provision that consequences are preferred to other alternatives. Thus, we will proceed with the latter definition of the universalisation principle (U).

To return to Habermas’ difference from Kant, Habermas argues that (U) has several advantages over the Kantian “categorical imperative” and its cognitivist derivatives (this includes the version of deliberative democracy by Gutmann and Thompson). First, the principle makes agreement possible, when it comes to discourses on moral questions, i.e. what is just (Habermas 1990, 57). For Habermas, the principle is distinct from “substantive principles or basic norms, which can only be the subject matter of moral argumentation” in that it is a procedure which yields universal answers rather than contains them (1990, 93). It is a “moral principle”, “which is conceived as a rule of argumentation and is part of the logic of practical discourses” (Habermas 1990, 93). Its role is for generating universal norms rather than discovering ones that already exist (see Thomassen 2010, 91f). Second, unlike Kantian “categorical imperative”, it “precludes a monological application of the principle” (Habermas 1990, 66). It does so because, Habermas argues, “first, (U) regulates only argumentation among a plurality of participants; second, it suggests the perspective of real-life argumentation, in which all affected are admitted as participants” (1990, 66). Whereas in the Kantian categorical imperative a maxim which prescribes the “ought” is valid if the agent wills monologically that everybody else does the same, Habermas’ test of the universalizability of the maxim depends on a dialogically achieved consensus. Third, unlike the Kantian derivatives like Rawls’ political liberalism, (U) does not ignore interest. (U) stipulates that moral norms are valid “if and only if equal consideration is given to the interests of all those who are possibly involved” (Habermas 1996, 108). In other words, (U) is a
procedure by which answers are yielded in the interest of all, i.e. “universalizable” interest. It presupposes that the participants do not leave their interests behind in discourse. It requires that interests are present in discourse because arriving at a “universalizable” interest is linked to the presence of particular interests. For participants to arrive at a consensus in a moral discourse, they should be able to take into account particular interests of all and the procedure stipulated by (U) requires that each participant is able to take into account the interests of the other participants “from the first-person plural perspective” (Habermas 1993, 49). A norm is universal when each person can accept it individually and the way (U) makes agreement possible in moral argumentation partially depends on the condition that “each of us must be able to place himself in the situation of all those who would be affected by the performance of a problematic action or the adoption of a questionable norm” (Habermas 1993, 49). The implication of inclusion of interests in discourse and the stipulations of (U) suggest that interests are not just given. They also can be formed or acquired as a result of moral argumentation in moral discourse.

Forms of discourse

In this section, I examine Habermas’ distinction between three different forms of discourse that can take place depending on the nature of the question. I am interested in how these forms are internally linked and how Habermas relegates difference and particularity within them. I also highlight how the tripartite division of forms of discourse recognizes the constitutive role of historical and cultural contingencies as well as values and interests. This means that in discourse ethics difference (such as interests) are not treated as given. Rather, it has the resources for recognizing that understanding can be finite within a certain particularity and allows political inclusion of how different persons and groups perceive themselves in the ethical formulations of such questions as ‘who are we’ and ‘who we want to be’. But, as we will see in the following chapters, this requires certain changes in the way Habermas separates three forms of discourse and relegates particularities between them. Also, here I clarify the application of (D) and (U) to the three forms of discourse. In the end of the section, we will be able to understand the significance of discourse ethics for our purposes and also parts that, I argue, need to be
adjusted in order to promote a fuller engagement and encounter across differences in democratic politics.

Practical discourse is a form of reflective communication that answers practical questions such as ‘what ought we do’. It has the communicative structure of rational discourse. Rational discourse presupposes communicative rationality and competence of each participant in their capacity as language users. Every participant, if necessary, should be able to redeem the validity claims for every proposition or position put forward, and the speaker should be able to do so freely, without coercion or any kind of manipulation aimed at distorting the truth, rightness, or truthfulness of a claim. Furthermore, recall that justification is presented on rational grounds and accepted on rational grounds and that the meaning of “ought” and the decision with regards to “what” following the propositions must also be assented to in the form of rational consensus among those who are affected. With regards to the meaning of “ought”, we now come to Habermas’ differentiation between three forms of discourse:

the meaning of ‘ought’ remains unspecified as long as the relevant problem and the aspect under which it can be solved are undetermined. I want to specify these aspects along the lines of pragmatic, ethical, and moral issues. The standpoints of expediency, goodness, and justice each define a different use of practical reason (1996, 159).

The standpoint of expediency speaks from the pragmatic perspective; the standpoint of goodness speaks from the ethical perspective; finally, the standpoint of justice speaks from the moral perspective. For Habermas, each of these corresponds to different forms of discourse (1993, 1-17; 1996, 157-62). The same question can be posed from different perspectives and we can often find that it can shift between the three perspectives. For example, the answer to the ‘ought’ question from the pragmatic perspective can be challenged by the ethical perspective, and discourse shifts to ethical perspective whereby the pragmatic answer is subjected to questioning from the ethical perspective. Similarly, the answer to the ‘ought’ question from the ethical perspective can be challenged by the moral perspective resulting in a shift of discourse to the moral perspective, where the ethical answer is subjected to moral questioning, i.e. whether it is acceptable to all. Sometimes the most expedient solution to a
pragmatic problem is not always ethical in terms of its compliance with how the person sees him/herself, how he/she wishes to be perceived by the others, or even moral in terms of its compliance with whether the agent wishes it be practiced by all. Thus, “the question ‘what should I do?’ takes on a pragmatic, an ethical, or a moral meaning depending on how the problem is conceived” (Habermas 1993, 8). It is, therefore, instructive to differentiate between discourses depending on the pragmatic, ethical, and moral perspectives that alter the way the problem is conceived. These discourses are ranked hierarchically. In ascending order: pragmatic is subordinate to ethical discourse, which, in turn, is subordinate to moral discourse.

For Habermas each tier of discourse presupposes consensus in the higher one (see 1993, 1-17; 1996 159f). Pragmatic perspective presupposes consensus on ethical level, which, in turn, presupposes consensus at the moral level of discourse. Thus, coordination of social action from, say, pragmatic standpoint is seamless and straightforward when the rational discourse about the best means in strategic and instrumental terms is not questioned from ethical or moral standpoints. Participants seek to come to rational consensus on the best means among the alternatives based on their knowledge of the contingencies of the given context, their own preferences, possible outcomes, and other alternatives. Only (D) applies here because the validity of the decision on the best means depends on the assent of all those affected in their capacity as participants of rational discourse. The reason to speak of pragmatic discourse in terms of Habermas’ discourse ethics is that when there is a deliberation on choosing the best course of action or means, justification is required for each proposition. Put in another way, strategic and instrumental action halts when there is no consensus on a means to an end. Therefore, participants enter into pragmatic discourse in which “technical or strategic recommendations ultimately derive their validity from the empirical knowledge on which they rest” (Habermas 1993, 11).

However, as we often see in the democratic politics of Western countries, pragmatic discourses can often be challenged because they conflict with the established value consensus at the ethical level. Thus, “of course, as soon as the orienting values themselves become problematic, the question ‘what ought we to do?’ takes one beyond the horizon of purposive rationality”
Value pluralism makes this problem more acute because there might be a dispute over appropriateness of the value in question compared to other equally applicable values. At this point, discourse shifts to the ethical perspective and, thus, becomes ethical discourse. In this shift, pragmatic discourse is subordinate to ethical discourse (Habermas 1996, 164-5, 167). According to Habermas, ethical discourse clarifies the existential questions “or any question touching on political culture” (1996, 165) and in terms of democratic politics: “ethical-political questions pose themselves from the perspective of members who, in the face of important life issues, want to gain clarity about the shared form of life and about the ideals they feel should shape their common life” (1996, 160). Here, the singular pronoun “I” is replaced with plural “We” (1996, 160) in the sense that it becomes a public ethical reflection. This ethical reflection must be a public deliberation (Habermas 1993, 23) in the form of ethical discourse where the deliberation is conducted according to the communicative structure of rational discourse. (D) also applies here since ethical questions of value and, thus, the good that orient deliberation about ethical-political self-understanding must be assented to by all affected in their capacity as participants of rational discourse. Habermas’ ethical form of discourse has affinities with communitarian theories in the sense that here participants discuss what is good for them as a group in relation to their shared tradition and way of life. Here, Habermas reconciles his deliberative democracy with the republican versions of deliberative democracy because in ethical discourse participants pursue ethical solutions from given values and assume that their given values provide sufficient grounds to solve the problem. To follow up from our discussion of pragmatic discourses, ethical clarification and consensus restores the possibility of purposive rational deliberation of the pragmatic discourse. However, deliberation on the question “what ought we to do?” can shift to the moral level too.

Pragmatic and ethical discourses are subject to consensus at the level of moral discourse. Habermas offers a good summary of the former two

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13 For republican versions of deliberative democracy, the moral claim for deliberation depends on the communitarian view. Here, deliberation is important for choosing a shared way of life. Eder (1992) argues that deliberation can be justified by appealing to already existing values in political culture. For Beiner (1989), such things as autonomy, mutual respect are part of particular political cultures.
discourses and an explanation of the moment when participants enter into moral discourse. Quoting him at length is instructive:

In pragmatic discourses, we test the expediency of strategies under the presupposition that we know what we want. In ethical-political discourses, we reassure ourselves of a configuration of values under the presupposition that we do not yet know what we really want. In this kind of discourse, we can justify programs insofar as they are expedient and, taken as a whole, good for us. An adequate justification of policies and laws, must, however, consider yet a further aspect, that of justice. Whether we should want and accept a program also depends on whether the corresponding practice is equally good for all. This shifts the meaning of the question “what ought we to do?” yet again\(^{14}\) (1996, 161; emphasis as in the original).

(D) applies in pragmatic and ethical discourses. When we move to moral discourse, (U) applies because at this level we consider what is right or just for all. Whereas in ethical discourse “those taking part in argumentation cannot work themselves free of the form of life in which they de facto find themselves”, “in contrast, entry into moral discourse demands that one step back from all contingently existing normative contexts” (Habermas 1996, 163). Thus, Habermas requires that moral discourse is not bound by context, tradition, or metaphysics. These include particularities and differences based on historical and cultural contingencies. In a stricter sense, moral discourse requires detachment from all particularities that constitute identity. It is not bound to any subject but is rather intersubjective, as we have discussed in the section on (U). Since (U) operates here, moral discourse is about the participants partaking in ideal role-taking by which they assent to a moral norm not just from their own subjective point of view, but from the point of view of other participants as well\(^{15}\) (Habermas 1993, 52). Unlike pragmatic and ethical discourses, moral discourse

\(^{14}\) It is in this shifting that I detect a problem concerning understanding and interpretation from the hermeneutical perspective in the next chapter.

\(^{15}\) Young’s notion of asymmetric reciprocity corrects this. It normatively requires that we do not look at things from the others’ points of view assuming that we can understand things as they do. Her idea pushes more towards asking questions that disclose the other’s point of view, rather than assume. Of course, Habermas’ discourse ethics also requires that participants speak for their own points of view. This is the main way he is different from other Kantian cognitivists. However, in moral discourse he prohibits particularities whereas Young’s asymmetric reciprocity is more about bringing particularities to the fore so that the strangeness of the other is present.
is deontological. The principle of moral argumentation (U) does not decide on what is good, rather on what is right or just.

Therefore, in moral discourse we decide on universal answers to practical questions. Sometimes, we might realize that in disputes over pragmatic questions the ethical values are at stake. When this occurs, society needs to clarify its ethical-political self-understanding: “such questions call for discourses that push beyond contested interests and values and engage the participants in a process of self-understanding by which they become reflectively aware of the deeper consonances in a common form of life” (1996, 165). However, in the conditions of value pluralism, ethical discourse may take issues with moral maxims or with compatibility between ethical and moral maxims, or dispute over compatibility between several moral maxims. As Habermas notes, “we approach the moral outlook once we begin to examine our maxims as to their compatibility with the maxims of others” (1993, 6). This is where we enter the domain of moral disagreements in plural societies. We enter into moral discourse to test the generalizability of particular maxims, and hence in plural societies moral discourse cannot be replaced with ethical discourse (see Habermas 1996, 165, 167) because only in moral discourse can we appeal to (U). As Habermas argues, “for the justification of moral norms, the discourse principle takes the form of a universalization principle” (1996, 109).

For an agreement to be possible in a moral discourse, (U) requires that participants take a “moral point of view”, which “requires that maxims and contested interests be generalized, which compels the participants to transcend the social and historical context of the particular form of life and particular community and adopt the perspectives of all those possibly affected” (1993, 24). Thus we see that plurality makes discourse necessary. Habermas’ discourse ethics and tripartite distinction between forms of discourse is useful in thinking about the role of discourse as an element in democratic politics in plural societies. As Habermas puts it:

modern life is characterized by a plurality of forms of life and rival value convictions. For this reason - and not on account of the empty misgivings of moral theorists – the traditional, established knowledge of concrete ethical life is drawn into a dynamic of problematization that no one today can elude (1993, 22).
The “dynamic problematization” of “concrete ethical life” requires from participants a certain extent of reflectiveness. Unreflective participant is usually one who holds on to his/her view as ultimate, we call them dogmatic. Unreflectiveness closes any possibility for discourse as a problem solving mechanism for restoring consensus and communicative action. Given that plurality is a permanent condition in modern societies, we can conclude along with Habermas that “there is no route back from reflectiveness” (Williams qtd. in Habermas 1993, 22.).

It is important to retain the idea of reflectiveness for our purposes. In chapter 4, I argue that Dryzek’s idea of reflexivity is a more appropriate form of reflectiveness of for us. The normative function of Dryzek’s term retains and fleshes out Habermas more general idea of reflectiveness, which deliberative democrats value because it is the way to induce change in attitude and reassessment of who one is. It is a principle that enables discourse to “push beyond contested interests and values” (Habermas 1996, 165). The shifts between pragmatic, ethical, and moral discourses can cause change in attitudes and change in the way society defines itself. The reconstitution of identity begins occurring because “insights promoted in ethical-political discourses can change a group’s hermeneutically clarified self-understanding and, along with this, its identity as well; in justifying serious value decisions, acts of resolve are induced by insights, for here arguments meet up with the striving for an authentic way of life” (Habermas 1996, 163). In this way, Habermas discourse ethics can fit in the hermeneutic emphasis on transformative dialogue, which I outline in the next chapter. The chain between three forms of discourses can illuminate change in attitude induced by reflective communication in discourse situation causes, and it can illuminate change in one’s self-understanding.

1.3 Discourse and Pluralism

So far with Gutmann and Thompson, we saw that incomplete understanding poses a fundamental problem to democratic politics in plural societies as part of the human condition. Based on this argument, we can assume that incommensurability of values can be the result of incomplete understanding to some extent. From the point of view of value pluralism, incomplete understanding can manifest as moral disagreement. With
Habermas, we saw that incomplete understanding can result in the breakdown of communicative action. His distinction between communicative and discourse situations is helpful for us in understanding the role of discourse in this context. Communication can break down as a result of misunderstanding or incomplete understanding of general norms that underpin communicative action. This breakdown results in a shift from communicative to discourse situation. In discourse situation, discourse functions as a problem solving mechanism through which understanding of the general norms can be restored in the form of rational consensus.

Given the challenge that incomplete understanding and incommensurable values pose for plural societies, we took from Habermas that the challenges of plural societies leave us “no alternative except to locate the normative basis for social interaction in the rational structure of communication itself” (Habermas 1993, xx). For Habermas, a democratic approach to problem solving in plural societies must have a conception of discourse as he outlines it because a democratic approach in plural societies cannot appeal to particular traditions or community values. If by democratic approach we mean respect for autonomy, inclusive procedures, and equality between different participants, then discourse is the way to go. It makes a moral claim based on the universal pragmatics of language. Otherwise, we would either need to coerce different people or resort to the principles of majority rule and popular will, which might clash with our commitment to value pluralism. On this, Habermas argues:

there is only one reason why discourse ethics, which presumes to derive the substance of a universalistic morality from the general presuppositions of argumentation, is a promising strategy: discourse or argumentation is a more exacting type of communication, going beyond any particular form of life. Discourse generalizes, abstracts, and stretches the presuppositions of context-bound communicative actions by extending their range to include competent subjects beyond the provincial limits of their own particular form of life (1990, 202).

If, as Gutmann and Thompson contend, incomplete understanding has a temporal and situated feature, that is, our understanding is bound to the historical moment and our epistemology in that moment, then Habermas’ conception of discourse is a means to overcome this temporality and
situatedness. We reviewed Habermas’ argument that in order to fulfil this role in
democratic politics in plural societies, discourse must be deontological,
cognitivist, formal, and universal. We also examined how the elements and
principles of discourse ethics fulfil this role of discourse and make his discourse
ethics a useful resource for democratic politics.

Thus, from a Habermasian perspective, democratic and plural society
maintains its stability through communicative action. Seamless communicative
action is possible when there is a general consensus on norms and values. It
requires consensus on norms and values at ethical and moral levels. However,
given that incomplete understanding and incommensurable values are inherent
to plural societies, communicative action is bound to break down as a result of
misunderstanding or contestation of norms and values. Without some form of
discourse, the breakdown of communicative situation can result in violent,
manipulative, corrupt means to restore consensus. So long as we can contain
moral disagreement and deep division within discursive terms, and so long as
there is a possibility for conflict to be manifested in discourse and resolved by
means of discourse, pluralism and democratic politics can be maintained. This
signals to us that pluralism, discourse, and democratic politics are
interdependent in the context of modern politics. They presuppose one another.
Therefore, with Habermas, we establish that discourse is an important element
in democratic politics committed to pluralism as engagement and encounter.

There is hardly an equivalent element in democratic politics for this
purpose. Take, for instance, the alternative model to deliberative democracy –
aggregative models. We can consider Dahl’s theory as an example. He too is
concerned with the way difference is engaged. He argues in favour of a
“neutral” democratic politics in which difference is protected in the private
sphere by respect for individual liberty. In this context, engagement and
encounter takes a competitive form. Political pluralism makes sure that the
political institutions do not favour particular groups. This is a good idea insofar
as we understand pluralism as Dahl does in terms of political pluralism, or as
Galston (2002) does in terms of value pluralism. In both cases, we confine the
normative function of pluralism to limiting power and processes of government.
They do not have an element that would push different groups to engage, for
instance, in a transformative dialogue. They do not have the means to include in
democratic politics active seeking of understanding between these groups. The risk of this limitation is that it can result in entrenchment and isolation of different groups.

This risk is a democratic problem. Engaging and encountering one another as others is a way to support individual autonomy. The other has greater scope for autonomy if his/her otherness is given its right and engaged with and encountered in their otherness. Otherness, as I will come to show with Gadamer, comes with one’s individuality. Therefore, we need to commit to engagement and encounter of the other as other. Discourse, it seems to me, enables us to do so. Furthermore, if inclusion is also a defining feature of democracy, then supporting Habermas’ claim for discourse is important for the way we engage and encounter the other democratically. Finally, through discourse, difference needs not fear relativism or nihilism. Discourse can be a kind of engagement where what Habermas calls a “we perspective” is possible. Discourse ethics provides the elements and principles for deliberative procedures to carry on “from the first-person plural perspective, that is, in each instance, ‘by us’; for normative validity claims are contingent on ‘our’ recognition” (Habermas 1993, 49).

Politics requires that even in the conditions of radical value pluralism, fragmentation, moral disagreement and division, we define a certain moral world to which we are all subject despite our differences. In politics, we come together to agree on things that we all will follow. I agree with Habermas that this moral world can only be intersubjective. That is, the “categorical imperative” is not enough for politics; especially, if we accept the argument on incomplete understanding. Intersubjectivity presupposes discourse, engagement and encounter. The extent of isolation and entrenchment of different groups is the measure of the weakness of our moral claims. Nonetheless, we need to be sure that we do not reduce isolation to exclusion and non-involvement of some groups from politics. The “categorical imperative” is also a form of isolation. It implies a sense of privileged position in its justification for taking the “moral point of view”, which Habermas argues, “initially appears to be advantageous because it promises to liberate the observer from the perspectival interpretations of the disputing parties, has the disadvantage that it isolates him in a monological fashion from the interpretive horizons of the participants and
denies him hermeneutic access to an intersubjectively shared moral world that reveals itself only from within” (1993, 49).

Thus, we take discourse as an important element in democratic politics committed to pluralism and can understand the role of discourse in its following functions thanks to Habermas. First, we understand discourse as a problem solving mechanism for situations when communication breaks down because of incomplete understanding, misunderstanding, or contestation. There are several tiers of discourse that we can fall back on to restore understanding: pragmatic, ethical, and moral discourses. The form of discourse we fall into depends on the nature of problem and question that we need to resolve. Consensus in pragmatic discourse is subject to consensus in ethical discourse, which in turn is subject to consensus in moral discourse. Participants can shift from one to another. Second, we can understand discourse as the means through which incomplete understanding as Gutmann and Thompson describe it can be mitigated. We take from Habermas that in discourse participants can go “beyond the provincial limits of their particular form of life” (1990, 202). In these two senses, discourse provides the required intersubjective medium for engagement and encounter across differences. It does so because it “excludes surreptitious privileging of individual viewpoints and demands the coordination of all of the interpretive perspectives that tend toward individualism and pluralistic fragmentation, at least in modern societies” (Habermas 1993, 52). Third, discourse is the medium in which engagement and encounter takes place. We saw in Eck that active seeking of understanding and encounter of commitments must take place in a dialogue. Similarly, for us engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness must take the form of dialogue. It is through dialogue that the other discloses its otherness. We can take discourse more generally as the medium, or the field, in which the other discloses its otherness. Dialogue takes place within a discourse where we share the world. However, Habermas’ discourse ethics comes short in affirming pluralism as engagement and encounter. Some of them will be highlighted with Gadamer’s help in the next chapter. We will revisit this discussion in the last section of chapter II. Nevertheless, for now I can identify two points at which discourse ethics comes short for our purposes.
First one has to do with Habermas’ notions of understanding and discourse. Habermas’ conception of discourse as a problem solving mechanism confines understanding within a limited definition. For him, understanding involves understanding a speech act and coming to a consensus on general norms. On this basis, discourse ethics is limited in promoting active seeking of understanding across differences in its function as a problem solving mechanism. If we are to commit to pluralism, we also need to expand the concept of understanding to include engagement and encounter of the other. This expansion purchases discourse a function besides problem-solving. It also functions as a medium for disclosure of the other and coming to understanding (accord) with the other.

Second, if we argue that in our pluralism we need to engage and encounter the other in their otherness, then Habermas’ procedures for intersubjectivity are limited for supporting this. To be sure, Habermas’ argument that intersubjective engagement is means for people to transcend “the provincial limits of their own particular form of life” (1999, 202) tackles the problem of incomplete understanding as Gutmann and Thompson define it. However, discourse ethics requires the kind of transcendence that betrays our ideal for engaging and encountering the other in their otherness. By definition, the other is other to me. Habermas must still rely on the Kantian “moral point of view” as a principle that allows one to see things as others do. That may eliminate the other as an active participant in the dialogue. To be sure, assuming another person’s perspective involves some form of engagement. Habermas highlights that the moral claim of his position is that it is dialogical in contrast to Kant’s monological principle. Still, taking the other’s perspective implies a certain overcoming of the other as other; it is a form of appropriation that betrays engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness.

The final point I wish to draw attention to is the problem that Gutmann and Thompson identify with Habermas’ prioritization of procedure over constitutional values. I think that this is not so much a weakness of discourse ethics in light of our ideal of engagement and encounter as it is a difference of positions depending on one’s concern and perspective. I do not think that Habermas’ priority of procedure overlooks the role of constitutional values as constraints on deliberation. He does not specify which values should be
constitutional constraints, because that is the point of discourse ethics. These values are to be agreed on by means of rational discourse and consensus. Again, Weinstock’s (1997) distinction between “radical” and “moderate” pluralism is useful for our argument.

The radical thesis argues that reason cannot arrive at an objective knowledge of any value independently of particular groups taking them up. The moderate thesis argues that reason can arrive at objective knowledge of values independently of any particular groups. Given Habermas’ discourse ethics, I assume his position is close to the moderate thesis. Given that Gutmann and Thompson uphold liberty and opportunity as irreplaceable values, their position is also moderate. However, Gutmann and Thompson deny the procedures of discourse ethics the capacity to arrive at objective knowledge independently of any groups by assuming the position of the radical thesis against Habermas. They argue in favour of their deliberative democracy by assuming the position of the moderate thesis. Assuming the position of the moderate thesis implies use of reason that Gutmann and Thompson understand as standard rules of logical inference, reason-giving, and argumentation. They just establish liberty and opportunity ahead of the procedure that would validate them, whereas Habermas’ position is the reverse. For him, we prioritize procedures that validate, for example, liberty and opportunity as irreplaceable values we all agree to respect.

Nevertheless, I claim that we need to take into account the point that Gutmann and Thompson make about constitutional values as constraints. The concern and perspective that motivate me have to do with the risk that the ideal of engagement and encounter pose for pluralism and democratic politics. My concern is: if we are to engage and encounter the other in their otherness, what about the kinds of otherness that are undemocratic, sexist, racist, extremist, or even monist as Berlin defines\(^\text{16}\). How should we go about engaging and encountering them? From my perspective, engaging and encountering these kinds of others rarely takes the form of a transformative dialogue because they deny the very principles according to which we are in discourse with them. I will

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\(^{16}\) Berlin’s 1949 essay on “Democracy, Communism, and the Individual” suggests that the philosophical foundations of totalitarianism can be called monism.
come to this problem again through Gadamer in the next chapter and then appropriate ‘agonism’ from Mouffe as a way to approach it in chapter 5.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we took from Gutmann and Thompson that some of the challenges of plurality in the form of deep division and moral disagreement can be attributable to incomplete understanding. This chapter showed that discourse is an indispensable element for democratic politics that looks to affirm pluralism as engagement and encounter. Through Habermas, we accepted the argument that democratic politics needs a certain conception of discourse as an element of democratic politics. Discourse is the medium in which democratic politics can affirm pluralism as engagement and encounter across differences. For Habermas, discourse is the problem solving mechanism that restores communicative action by restoring consensus/understanding of the validity of norms. He argues that in order to take on this role, discourse must be deontological, cognitivist, formal, and universal. I have looked at how Habermas’ discourse ethics fulfils these requirements in virtue of its elements of rational discourse and consensus, and the discourse and universalization principles. This has allowed me articulate the internal connection between pluralism, discourse, and democratic politics as mutually presupposing one another. However, Habermas’ discourse ethics works with a narrow definition of understanding limited to understanding speech acts and consensus on general norms. I also highlighted how the moral claim of intersubjectivity becomes ambiguous when looked at with a view towards engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness. In the next chapter, I turn to Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics as a resource for thinking about the problem of understanding in pluralism, the role of discourse in democratic politics, and how the limitations of discourse ethics can be approached in their light.
Chapter II

Incomplete understanding, openness, and interpretive conflicts

Introduction

Incomplete understanding gives rise to interpretive conflicts in the idea of pluralism as engagement and encounter. The previous chapter established that the problem of incomplete understanding can be approached in democratic politics through discourse. Gadamer helps clarify how incomplete understanding complicates engagement and encounter of the other in democratic politics. Based on Gadamer’s account of human finitude, this chapter establishes that incomplete understanding is a permanent feature of human understanding. Following this premise, it will be argued that democratic politics cannot avoid interpretive conflicts and, therefore, should instantiate Gadamer’s principle of openness. Gadamer’s principle does not resolve interpretive conflicts. It entails a certain disposition that is suitable for beings with incomplete understanding. Those who want to commit to pluralism must be open to engaging and encountering others in their otherness.

Gadamer demonstrates how incomplete understanding comes from the ontological dimension of human finitude. Finitude is an ontological and permanent feature of human understanding. Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics demonstrates human finitude through the concepts of hermeneutical situation, consciousness, and experience. I examine how these concepts draw our attention to the fundamental role of incomplete understanding for the challenges of plurality and how they point towards conflict of interpretations in pluralism that cannot be avoided in democratic politics of pluralist societies. The previous chapter demonstrated the role of discourse ethics in dealing with plurality and incomplete understanding in democratic politics. Here I draw the implications of philosophical hermeneutics on discourse ethics without having to work them out in democratic politics. I work out the problem of incomplete understanding and interpretive conflicts in democratic politics in Part II.
To support the argument, I proceed in three stages. The first stage shows how the problem of incomplete understanding in plural societies can be understood from the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics. It will be argued that incomplete understanding is a permanent and fundamental feature of human understanding because of the ontological dimension of human finitude. I establish my premise in Section 2.1 by looking at how hermeneutical situation constitutes human finitude through such notions as situation, horizon, and prejudice.

The second stage shows the role of encountering and engaging the other in addressing the problem of incomplete understanding from the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics. It will be argued that an integral part of addressing incomplete understanding is self-understanding. Gadamer’s principle of openness suggests that a fuller self-understanding can be achieved by being open to encounter and engagement of the other in their otherness. I establish my premise in Section 2.2 by looking Gadamer’s notions of hermeneutical experience and consciousness and draw his principle of openness from them.

The third stage shows how philosophical hermeneutics sheds light on the interpretive aspects of understanding, which means that encounter and engagement across differences can take the form of interpretive conflicts. Having shown that interpretive conflicts cannot be avoided, it will be argued that Habermas’ division between ethical and moral forms of discourse cannot be sustained because interpretive conflicts blur the distinction. I establish my premise in Section 2.3 by drawing on Georgia Warnke’s critique of Habermas.

It took Gadamer many years to work out his idea of philosophical hermeneutics. We can learn about it from his monumental volume titled *Truth and Method* (2013).

In 1958-1959, Hans-Georg Gadamer was completing the final draft of his *summa* which drew attention at our finitude. The original title he intended for this manuscript was “Foundations of a Philosophical Hermeneutics.” However, Gadamer’s publisher Mohr Seibeck thought that the term ‘hermeneutics’ was too unfamiliar and advised Gadamer against such a title for a book of philosophy. Gadamer took the advice home to discuss with his wife. One of the options they considered was “Understanding and Events”, which was soon
dismissed for its similarity to Bultmann’s theological *Faith and Understanding*. Finally, the author and his publisher agreed that “Truth and Method” could capture the attention of the public. The title suggested itself in virtue of Gadamer’s subject, which was about the ‘event’ of truth that method could not capture. Gadamer did not oppose truth to method. Rather, he pointed out that methodological investigations championed by natural sciences uncover only a fraction of the truth in human experience. Events of truth emerge in human experience of the shared world full of affection, ambiguity, and complexity that method cannot conceptualise and control. Humans experience this kind of truth in different ways and share it with each other via language. As Jean Grondin puts it in his biography of Gadamer, the book “takes off from a modest starting point of the *Geisteswissenschaften* [human sciences], rumbles through the domains of art, history, language, and the whole of Western philosophical tradition, and winds up with a universal ontology” (2003, 284).

In *Truth and Method*, I am interested in Gadamer’s account of human finitude, the incompleteness of our understanding. The book establishes that our finitude is constituted by our situatedness in the world. Gadamer calls hermeneutical experience the coming to awareness of finitude and incompleteness in understanding, of context-dependency of understanding. Hermeneutical experience leads us to awareness that our understanding is always already our interpretation from our hermeneutical situation. It is precisely this kind of awareness that enables us to grow beyond our limitation and expand our horizon. It is precisely this event of truth, of coming to awareness of finitude that Gadamer tries to capture in the term ‘hermeneutical experience.’

Gadamer correctly established that hermeneutic experience leads us towards openness, listening to each other, and learning from each other. It is only through the encounter and engagement with the other that we can see the edges of our understanding, our limits, and finitude – our incomplete understanding. In other words, it is this push towards hermeneutical experience that makes Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics result in pluralism, engagement, and conversation that has been noted by Malpas and Zabala (2010, see xvi).
In order to understand Gadamer’s concept of hermeneutical experience, we must visit other concepts from his philosophical hermeneutics. They are: hermeneutical situation and hermeneutical consciousness. The main conceptual part of this chapter is divided into two sections followed by a discussion of their implications for discourse ethics in Section 2.3. Section 2.1 is devoted to what constitutes hermeneutical situation and how it shows the ontological dimension of finitude in incomplete understanding. Section 2.2 is devoted to the notions of hermeneutical experience and consciousness because they are the two sides of the same event of truth that Gadamer describes as hermeneutical truth: the truth of our finitude.

Section 2.1 deals with what the hermeneutical situation consists in and how it constitutes human finitude. The term hermeneutical situation is well expressed by Inga Farin: “the hermeneutic situation, then, is nothing other than a particular, historical, interpretive space at a specific historical time, that is, the ensemble of past and present understandings, persuasions, interpretive strategies, discourse formations, available conceptualities, and paradigms, insofar as they constitute ‘the condition,’ or rather, the possibility for new interpretive inventions or departures” (2014, 107-126). Here, I establish the way hermeneutical situation accounts for human finitude and has a constitutive role in human understanding through such concepts as situation, horizon, and prejudice in Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*. These concepts highlight the historicality of our being and show how incomplete understanding is a permanent feature of human understanding. As Gadamer argues, since we are historical beings and as such we belong to history, we cannot attain complete understanding. This section forms the foundation of my argument that we are always already interpreting things in discourse from concrete situations and supports the argument that the interpretive implications of pluralism as engagement and encounter are unavoidable in democratic politics.

Section 2.2 deals with the way in which Gadamer’s concepts of hermeneutical experience and consciousness address the problem of incomplete understanding described in Section 2.1. Hermeneutical experience

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17 The quote is taken from Farin’s essay on Heidegger, where she explores the hermeneutical dimensions of his earlier and later work. However, the definition is broad enough that it fits the way I understood Gadamer’s term.
is experience of finitude. Gadamer’s principle of openness to the otherness of the other comes from the concept of hermeneutical experience. One can have hermeneutical experience through openness to the other. Hermeneutical consciousness can be understood in the sense of the result of hermeneutical experience. Hermeneutical consciousness has to do with self-understanding and awareness of the finitude as well as the way hermeneutical situation constitutes this finitude and is taken up in our understanding, encounter, and engagement of the other. In this section, I examine the way in which these concepts make up the structure of what Gadamer calls ‘fusion of horizons’ and ‘historically effected consciousness’.

This section will begin with looking at Taylor’s essay on Gadamer, where he makes the question of understanding central for our times. Taylor is useful in highlighting the role of self-understanding in engagement and encounter of the other. I establish how self-understanding and engagement and encounter of the other are connected in the way that the other enables one to achieve better self-understanding while better self-understanding pushes one towards openness to the otherness of the other. In general, this section establishes the roles of encountering the other and self-understanding in overcoming our incomplete understanding of the other. I argue that this is possible through Gadamer’s principle of openness.

Section 2.3 deals with the implications of accepting Gadamer’s account of the ontological dimensions of human finitude for Habermas’ discourse ethics. If we accept the argument on human finitude and the way hermeneutical situation constitutes its limits as well as the way it is taken up in understanding, then it is necessary to accept the implication that encountering and engaging with others across difference results in conflict of interpretations. It must be shown how discourse ethics is limited in addressing the interpretive conflicts because of its strict distinction between ethical and moral forms of discourse. To do this, I draw from Georgia Warnke’s critique of Habermas’ discourse ethics. Warnke examines the limits of discourse ethics in dealing with interpretive conflicts from the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics. The point she makes is that ethical and moral forms of discourse overlap due to the interpretive dimension of understanding. Even though consensus can be reached on general norms such as freedom of speech and right to life,
consensus breaks down with interpretive problems that emerge when concrete groups of people apply the norms to concrete situations.

Before proceeding into the substantial parts of the chapter, Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’ and the way it supports pluralism must be noted. Diana Eck’s idea of pluralism serves as a good lens through which to read Truth and Method. Similar to Eck’s idea of pluralism outlined in the Introduction, ‘fusion of horizons’ embodies an engagement and encounter that is mutually educative and aimed at understanding across differences. ‘Fusion of horizons’ is a model of understanding for Gadamer and as such it depicts a kind of understanding that results from a relationship based on openness whereby groups treat each other as having their own world to disclose, as having something to say.

If we were to describe a Gadamerian idea of pluralism, we would do so with reference to ‘fusion of horizons’, which is enabled by his principle of openness. It pushes towards recognizing that when we are confronted with a different group, it is one thing to study them, their interests, culture, and values as an object of inquiry within the social sciences, it is another thing to encounter them as having something to say too, as having some world to disclose to us. We need to encounter them as having a horizon which we too need to include, bring together, and reconcile with our own. Adoption of Gadamer’s principle of openness is one of the ways for democratic politics to support greater autonomy, equality, and liberty in plural societies.

This kind of encounter captured by Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’ can be comprehended as Gadamer’s contribution to our understanding of the normative definition of pluralism as engagement across difference. For this reason, political theorists need to look more closely into Gadamer’s work in order to identify the kinds democratic practices that lead to ‘fusion of horizons’.

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18 See, for example, Walhof, Darren “Bringing the Deliberative Back In: Gadamer on Conversation and Understanding” Contemporary Political Theory 4 (1 May 2005): 154-174. Walhof advocates philosophical hermeneutics as a resource for theorists who seek to make deliberation as a place of mutual understanding and transformation. He argues that “Gadamer’s approach deepens and extends the insights of the deliberative theorists by showing us how dialogue discloses a common subject, creates a common language, and puts our prejudices at risk”. See also Sandel, Adam Adatto 2014 The Place of Prejudice: a case for reasoning within the world. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press. Sandel argues that prejudice plays a positive role in politics and makes his case based on the distinction between detached and situated modes of reasoning. He draws on the works of Heidegger and Gadamer for his conception of situated reasoning.
I suggest asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism as suitable candidates.

There is no denying that openness is a trivial idea to democrats. Ferrara (2014) understands openness as a virtue of a democratic ethos and underlines its inherency to democracy by defining as a “democratic passion” which “aims to capture an attitude of receptiveness to novelty, of exploration of new possibilities for a life form, for a historical horizon, for a social configuration” (49). The democratic passion for openness contributes to “a public culture that orients opinion in the public sphere in the direction of favouring unconventional solutions more often than any nondemocratic public culture does” (Ferrara 2014, 48). Therefore, I do not pretend to offer openness as a new idea in the literature within the democratic “horizon”. However, what we are usually interested in is the argument that one makes for upholding certain virtues, values, and principles in democracy. Specifying normative functions of openness in democratic politics, how exactly it can be practiced in engagement and encountering others, and understanding what it accomplishes can be contentious.

Stephen White (2015, 3) notes that Ferrara prefers the idea of openness over similar ideas in Taylor’s agape, Derrida’s hospitality, and White’s own “presumptive generosity” because the latter are heavily embedded in ethical-ontological philosophies. Instead, openness as a political disposition that is not couched in “comprehensive” or “general moral notions” is more suitable for the conditions of plurality (Ferrara 2014, 62; White 2015, 3). Now, the strange feature of my argument for openness is that, since I am coming at it from a Gadamerian perspective, it can be said to be indebted to an ethical-ontological philosophy making it a virtue with an ethical orientation rather than political. I do not think I can contest this argument because as it will become evident in this chapter and the next part of the thesis, I prefer “openness” for its conduciveness as a virtue with ethical orientation that is helpful in addressing the problem of incomplete understanding. Its political aspect, by the implication of my approach, is secondary to its aim at promoting understanding, engagement and encounter across differences as prescribed by the idea of pluralism I promote here.
My purpose in this chapter is to address the problem of incomplete understanding as it emerges from the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics. In light of this, Gadamer’s principle of openness is ethical insofar as it specifies a disposition that is suitable for recognizing the mutual belongingness of I and Thou, and preserving the otherness of the other. It answers the question ‘how we should treat one another given the incompleteness of our understanding’. However, it is not a thick ethical principle because the good it has as its end is respect for the other’s otherness. Certainly, that is not a political good. It applies to human relationships and interaction in light of the hermeneutical conditions of understanding regardless of culture, world-views, or ideas of the good. The principle does not state that it will lead to one kind of polity rather than another and Gadamer does not suggest any kind of good it will bring about except mutual education. In this thesis, however, I aim to instantiate it as a principle that leads to a more pluralist democratic politics. In virtue of this goal, I use the principle as a prescription for an ethical disposition suitable for beings with incomplete understanding.

A political conception of openness, on the other hand, imposes boundaries on the kinds of otherness one can be open to and is directed at political goods such as inclusion, participation, and equality. A political conception of openness is faithful to the constitutional essentials of the polity, which in the case of democratic polity, are the essentials of a democratic constitution. Thus, a political conception of openness is committed to a political good as its end.

We can delineate the distinction between ethical and political conceptions of openness with more clarity by referring to the corresponding vice of excessive openness. It can be argued that the problem with Gadamer’s principle as an ethical disposition can be that it risks an excess of openness that endangers the constitutional integrity of democratic politics, while the political conception of openness does not run this risk. The problem is whether Gadamer’s principle of openness has a limit on the extent of openness that can be observed when engaging and encountering the kinds of others that endanger the values and principles of democratic politics and pluralism.
First, I would like to address this issue from within Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. We shall see that with Gadamer the process of engagement and encounter leads to fusion of horizons. This fusion can occur between an interpreter and a text as well as between two people that pose an irreducible otherness to each other. This fusion is made possible because of the disposition of openness to the otherness of the other. Now, it may be said that this openness leads to a fusion with the other regardless of what their otherness represents to us. The danger is that the principle of openness imposes no limit to the “fusion” as an understanding that is achieved between different others. In politics, excessive openness can lead to openness towards the kinds of others that deny, for instance, the principles of democracy, pluralism, and the constitutional organization of democratic politics.

In section 2.2, I develop an account of historically effected consciousness as a regulative principle for fusion of horizons. Historically effected consciousness marks the boundaries for engaging and encountering the otherness of a text that prevent a radical rupture with what has been traditionally handed down. Therefore, historically effected consciousness is a principle that regulates ‘fusion of horizons’. It is a principle that does not let the extinction of one’s horizon; rather, it regulates the fusion in a manner that maintains the horizon’s integrity and continuity.

Now, I would like to highlight the distinctiveness of the political instantiation of the principle relative the main aim of this thesis, which is to show that democratic politics requires a commitment to pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness and that this commitment is possible through the instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness. With regards to the dangers of excess particularly, the instantiation of openness in the democratic modes of reflexivity and agonism avoid such vice. In chapter 4, I develop an account of reflexivity as awareness of constraints within a system such as a particular discourse. I show how reflexivity has an element of historically effected consciousness, which means that that reflexive action knows the limits of what is possible to change and reconstitute from the given hermeneutical situation. In chapter 5, I develop an account of agonism as a mode of openness against those that might contest our interpretation of the principles and values of democracy and pluralism, or deny them.
This is not to say that these modes render Gadamer’s principle useless. It is worth noting that reflexivity and agonism, as well as asymmetric reciprocity, do not diminish the importance of Gadamer’s principle of openness because the principle provides an ideal against which it is possible to develop an account of political openness that is faithful to the principle of pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness. The difference is that while Gadamer only gives us the principle as an ethical disposition for beings with incomplete understanding, its instantiations as asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism have democratic politics and commitment to pluralism as their aim. A political conception of openness in these three instantiations retains the ethical disposition of Gadamer’s principle that is suitable for beings with incomplete understanding.

2.1 Human finitude and incomplete understanding

This section is devoted to Gadamer’s account of human finitude as it opens up the problem of incomplete understanding in a more fundamental way. Gadamer’s account of human finitude relies on the concept of “hermeneutical situation” that consists in the notions of horizon, situation, and prejudice. These terms support my claim that human finitude is behind incomplete understanding and show how incomplete understanding makes up the human condition as Gutmann and Thompson argue. Based on this examination, I claim that incomplete understanding is a permanent feature of understanding; no person can hold an all-encompassing view of the world and understand it due to the structural limitations of the “hermeneutical situation” and the historicality of our being contained within it. Then, I show how admitting incomplete understanding does not imply a defeatist position according to Gadamer. For Gadamer, finitude can be expanded by encountering and engaging with a different other. This is possible because the otherness of the other broadens our horizons by challenging our prejudices. This will set up my argument for the principle of openness in the next section.

The idea of human finitude suggests the particularity and ‘situatedness’ of understanding. It allows me to factor in the particular conditions within which we understand the practical and political world. We normally understand the practical and political world from a particular perspective and point of view of a particular historical and cultural heritage. The practical and political worlds
require defining ourselves in terms of who we are and who we want to be. We then engage with others based on concretized and particular self-understanding. We must also engage with others in the practical and political worlds. In part, ‘human finitude’ captures the fact that we cannot view practical and political matters from all points of view. Given that we ourselves are situated in a concrete hermeneutical situation, we need to be open to others’ points of view for us to understand things from outside our own finitude. We need others to put forward their interests. It is impossible for one person to understand and engage for everyone because one is finite within one’s own thrownness into a particular hermeneutical situation. Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics starts exactly with the acceptance of finitude: our perspective, our position, our interests, values, ideas may not be the perspective, position, interests, values, and ideas of the others.

To make the argument on incomplete understanding and interpretive conflicts stronger, it is necessary to take into account Gadamer’s argument on

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19 Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is based on Heidegger’s early work on hermeneutics of facticity, which is an account of concrete human existence in the world. Later, Heidegger uses “thrownness” as an example of this sort of existence in Being and Time (1928). Gadamer first learned about thrownness in terms of hermeneutics of facticity in a short essay Heidegger had written for Paul Natorp. Broadly speaking, Gadamer took facticity as situatedness in concrete historical and cultural situation. Moreover, he took hermeneutics of facticity as a notion that captures the way human existence is informed and constituted by its situatedness in hermeneutic situation. This thrownness, or facticity, of human existence is captured in Heidegger’s concept of Dasein in his Being and Time (1928). Gadamer’s account of human finitude is based on his interpretation of Heidegger’s Dasein and the hermeneutics of facticity that underpins it.

Dasein is a being that is thrown into the world, a being that belongs to the world, and finally, a being that always already finds itself in an intersubjective relationship with others. For Gadamer, Dasein can be disclosed hermeneutically. Thus, rather than bracketing the world, Dasein needs to disclose itself in an act of self-understanding that is situated in the world. Dasein must recognize its situatedness in the sense of finite experiences which underpin its existence, sense of meaning, and value. In Heidegger, Dasein’s self-understanding is understood in the radicalized fundamental principle of hermeneutics: the relationship between the part and whole. Every time we endeavour to understand something, we make a projection of the whole and as we pursue this projection by trying to understand the parts of this whole, our projection alters and modifies until we have grasped the whole in relation to its parts. This, for Gadamer, is the simple every day process of understanding. Dasein’s self-understanding then proceeds in a similar fashion, where the subject proceeds to understand its own situatedness in the world and the way this situatedness informs and is taken up in human existence. The hermeneutical aspect discloses itself when self-understanding of Dasein becomes conscious of its own fore-structures, or structures that allow understanding to project itself forward and modify as it understands each individual part in relationship to the whole. Here the implication is that individual becomes conscious of his/her dependence on tradition in particular and the hermeneutic situation in general. Tradition gives pre-conceptions, pre-judgements, a mode of categorization that allows an individual to cast a projection in attempt to understand alien traditions, cultures, and peoples.
the universality of the hermeneutical problem. He made this argument in response to Habermas’ critique that began their debate. Gadamer’s response to Habermas is important for taking seriously the challenge of “human finitude” in plural societies and the interpretative conflicts that it raises in pluralism. If we accept the terms within which Gadamer makes his case for the universality of the hermeneutical problem, then we also accept that we do in fact need to consider the concepts of hermeneutical situation, consciousness, and experience when thinking about pluralism and democratic politics.

Gadamer’s focus on the virtues of situated understanding forces him into defence of the universality of the hermeneutical problem against Habermas; namely, that there is an interpretative dimension to all understanding. From a hermeneutical perspective, the extent of our understanding depends on the degree of our self-understanding. It has to do with awareness of one’s own Bildung within a particular time, culture, and history; in other words, in one’s

20 Gadamer’s account of the universality of the hermeneutic problem are in his 1967 essay “Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and the Critique of Ideology” (Mueller-Vollmer 2002, 274-292) and the 1976 essay “The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem” (Ormiston and Schrift 1990, 147-158). They were written in response to Habermas’ criticism that concentrated on the inability of philosophical hermeneutics to emancipate the social and political sphere from ideological distortions. This criticism was first expressed in Habermas’ review of Gadamer’s Truth and Method in his study On the Logic of the Social Sciences (1967). The relevant section is also available in Ormiston and Schrift 1990, 213-244.

21 Gadamer’s work is embedded in the Bildung culture of the German philosophy (see Sullivan 1989). And that is why in Truth and Method, he argues that it is necessary to bring human sciences back to the Bildung culture from contemporary positivism in order to revive the concepts of Bildung, sensus communis, judgement, and taste that he considers to be fundamental to human sciences (2013, 9-39). Bildung refers to the ontological process of self-realization and self-understanding (Weinsheimer 1985, 71f). The precise translation of the word means culture, education, formation (see Lawn and Keane 2011, 17-18). Human understanding forms in the process of Bildung, a process of “organic development, operative at the level of the individual and society”; “at the individual level Bildung is the formation of the person as she or he is drawn into a specific cultural framework and finds her or his own voice and individuality within the larger configurations of culture ... at a broader level, Bildung is the movement of culture as its customs and traditions develop historically” (Lawn and Keane 2011, 17-18). The basic idea common to both senses of the concept is, as Gadamer writes, “to recognize one’s own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the basic movement of spirit, whose being consists only in returning to itself from what is other” (2013, 13). He writes further: “Hence all theoretical Bildung, even acquiring foreign languages and conceptual worlds, is merely the continuation of a process of Bildung that begins much earlier. Every single individual who raises himself out of his natural being to the spiritual finds in the language, customs, and institutions of his people a pre-given body of material which, as in learning to speak, he has to make his own. Thus every individual is always engaged in the process of Bildung and in getting beyond his naturalness, inasmuch as the world into which he is growing is one that is humanly constituted through language and custom” (Gadamer 2013, 13).

The tripartite translation of its meaning as culture, education, and formation gives the impression about moulding people into a homogenous body. Quite the contrary, it refers to the individuality of an authentic being that emerges from the formative functions of different institutions and customs that a person is thrown into. Bildung is the process whereby a person
own finitude. For Gadamer, hermeneutic reflection is necessary everywhere where self-conscious awareness is necessary (Gadamer in Mueller-Vollmer 2002, 289) because, as he argued in *Truth and Method*: “long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live” (Gadamer 2013, 288-89). Our ‘human finitude’ is partly constituted by the “family, society, and state in which we live” and partly the lives we have lived and the experiences we experienced. For Gadamer, overcoming this finitude is connected to the hermeneutical problem which has to do with awareness of the way they constitute said “finitude”. The argument that there is an interpretative dimension to all understanding builds on the argument that we are constituted by this finitude and our understanding of the world is a result of our interpretation of the practical and political world from our situatedness in this finitude.

This particular finitude includes within itself the historical moment. But it is not a moment isolated from history because our understanding has been influenced and developed throughout history. Understanding is something that has been handed down to us by tradition. Gadamer captures this finiteness within a particularity – or human finitude – with his the term ‘horizon’. Therefore, hermeneutical self-knowledge involves awareness of one’s horizon from a particular situation, and a consciousness of the effects history has had on one’s understanding, and awareness of one’s finitude and limitations in experiencing the practical and political world. Hermeneutical situation, consciousness, and experience culminate in this sort of self-understanding.

A closer look at Gadamer’s concept of ‘horizon’ as it is explained in his *Truth and Method* reveals how understanding is limited from a particular makes him/herself at home in the external universality like sensus communis and finds him/herself in it. Do we not call people authentic when they have found their individuality in the commonality and in the shared? We are always striving to be in a certain way of being that we can individuate as “my way”. The concept of Bildung captures the ontological process behind the finding of this way of being in a shared world. It captures the way in which there can be plurality and commonality because it refers to the way people are expected not to live in imitation of others and yet in acknowledgement of the formative functions that others had for one’s finding one’s own way – my way. A process by which I find “my own way” while always already being among others in “our way”.

Since Bildung is a process in which individuality forms, it leaves the remainder between I and Other that account for the strangeness and otherness between us. According to Gadamer, our respect for plurality consists in preserving the strangeness and otherness between us based on mutual understanding.
'hermeneutical situation' (2013, 313). To have a horizon means to have a worldview, a perspective. Gadamer takes Husserl's idea of 'horizon' as underlying particular meanings. In a horizon, particular meaning merges with a more universal meaning. As can be seen Gadamer's interpretation of Husserl: “With this concept [...] Husserl is obviously seeking to capture the way all limited intentionality of meaning merges into the fundamental continuity of the whole” (Gadamer 2013, 247).

It is crucial for Gadamer that 'horizon' does not denote a fixed and rigid boundary for a particular meaning. 'Horizon' allows an unfixed and constantly changing sense of boundary for the particular (see Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* p. 44f). Translated into the practical and political world, it means that having one's interpretation couched within one's own culture, identity, and so on does not mean that one will necessarily have a fixed and rigid interpretation. Culture and identity themselves are subject to reflexive change as they engage with other cultures and identities. They do not remain rigid. Rather, they change over time throughout history because, as Gadamer writes: “a horizon is not a rigid boundary but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further” (Gadamer 2013, 247). Concentrating on the fluidity and constantly changing nature of Husserl's term, Gadamer likens 'horizon' to Wilhelm von Humboldt's vision of the role of language.

For Humboldt, “language is never a mere tool of communication, but an imprint of the mind and the world-view of its speakers” (Humboldt qtd. in Mueller-Vollmer 2002, 12). As Lawn and Keane explain, Gadamer relies on Humboldt's idea of language to disclose the linguistical nature of 'horizon': “as one acquires the capacity to use language, and as a result of the process of acculturation, one at the same time acquires a ‘horizon’, a perspective on the world” (Lawn and Keane 2011, 51). Thus, to have a horizon means to have a world-view, a perspective. One has a perspective in language. As our physical location draws the boundaries of our horizon, the hermeneutical situation draws the finitude of our 'horizon' in the practical and political world.

We can now look at how 'hermeneutical situation' constitutes the very limits of human finitude; the finitude that makes incomplete understanding a permanent feature of human understanding. Gadamer writes:
We define the concept of “situation” by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential to the concept of situation is the concept of “horizon”. The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth (2013, 314).

Gadamer’s use of ‘horizon’ here points at how ‘human finitude’ is an ontological condition for plurality. If understanding is finite due to the hermeneutical situation, then there are many different understandings because there are many different hermeneutical situations. Thus, there is a plurality of horizons, and so, there are as many perspectives. It also points at how finitude manifests itself in challenges that are attributed to incomplete understanding. The use of the term ‘situation’ above is synonymous with the more common term ‘context’, which we use to relativize and differentiate problems and topics in the practical and political world. ‘Context’ also represents a standpoint which limits the possible interpretations because we understand things against a contextual background and from our own context22.

By establishing an internal connection between ‘situation’ and ‘horizon’, Gadamer draws our attention to the connotations the word horizon has in German and French languages. Gadamer writes:

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22 In Gadamer’s tradition, ‘situation’ gained significance with Heidegger’s overturn of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology. See David Woodruff Smith’s “Phenomenology” in The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (Winter 2013 Edition) on Heidegger’s role in turning phenomenology from Kantian “transcendental idealism” towards a situated conception of experience and understanding. Gadamer’s phenomenology was influenced by Heidegger’s Being and Time (1928). For Heidegger, we are always already in the world. It means that things (hammers, pens, computers), our activities and experiences can only have a meaning and be interpreted in a contextual relationship to other things in the world.

In political theory, Walzer, for example, uses the term context in a similar way. In Thinking Politically: Essays in Political Theory (2007, 38-52), Walzer discusses social meanings as derived from constructions of objects within particular contexts. The social meaning of a table as an altar depends on constructing the table within a religious context. Thus, the construction of the social meanings of objects have, to a certain extent, a context dependency. The very same table constructed and understood as an altar, Walzer notes, can be somebody’s desk outside the religious context, or a dining table, or a butcher’s block (Walzer 2007, 40). It is congruent with and demonstrates Gadamer’s notions of situation and horizon: recall that above we looked at how “we define the concept of ‘situation’ by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision” and the way “horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (Gadamer 2013, 314).
The concept of ‘horizon’ suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand – not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion (2013, 316).

Jean Grondin posits that while the French and German differ in usage, the connotation in both languages suggests a sense in which it can be said “that a book, a journey, or a meeting has broadened our horizon, or in the plural, they have opened up new horizons to us” (Grondin 2003, 100). He notes that the term denotes a certain sense of wisdom and that “this wisdom is essential to Gadamer’s concept of horizon” (Grondin 2003, 100). This kind of wisdom belongs to a person who is aware of the limitation within his/her standpoint, awareness that one understands things in a certain way due to that standpoint, and sees things in a certain way from a particular standpoint. In other words, it is knowledge and awareness of one’s own ignorance in the manner of the Socratic ignorance. But it is not just awareness of one’s own finitude. It is also awareness that one’s Bildung belongs to particular tradition, culture, values, etc., and, as Gadamer puts it, belongs to history23. This awareness, in Grondin’s words, “allows me to open myself to the perspective of others” and makes up the dialogical essence of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. Thus, we rely on holding a dialogue with others in order to understand things from their perspective; we rely on others’ narratives to expand our horizon.

Having grasped Gadamer’s use of ‘horizon’ as having to do with finitude in the manner of the Socratic wisdom, it is important to move to the way this finitude manifests itself according to Gadamer. Human finitude manifests itself in the prejudices. In Truth and Method, Gadamer writes: “if we want to do justice to man’s finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices” (2013, 289). Gadamer’s goal here is to rehabilitate the

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23 Gadamer wrote: “In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being” (2013: 288-289).
notion of ‘prejudice’ from the distortion it got from the Enlightenment. He writes a substantive and convincing critique of the way the Enlightenment treated the concept (see Gadamer 2013, 283-289) but it is not the focus here\textsuperscript{24}. Rather, it is important to highlight the role of “prejudices” in understanding and human finitude. With regards to Gadamer’s treatment of the distortion of the concept since the Enlightenment, we only need to note that Gadamer wishes the restore ‘prejudice’ from the negative connotations it received as something diametrically on the opposite side of reason. He wants to remind us that “actually, ‘prejudice’ means a judgement that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined” (Gadamer 2013, 282). In this sense, our ‘prejudices’ are ready-to-hand\textsuperscript{25} in our understanding and are immanent to the situation into which we are, in Heidegger’s sense, ‘thrown’.

Gadamer’s point is that prejudice and reason are not to be polarized. Instead, we need to accept that prejudices make up reason and understanding. They indicate where the limitations of our reason and understanding are. They are the manifestation of our finitude. However, their primary functions are in letting us appropriate and understand the world. Gadamer factors into prejudice things that allow us to understand something new, something alien. In that sense, our native language through which we appropriate and learn foreign languages is prejudice. Similarly, anthropologists use prejudices in order to appropriate and understand the social organization, traditions, rites and rituals of indigenous populations, tribes, and alien cultures. Gadamer brings to our attention that there are “legitimate” prejudices in this sense. For him, there are true ready-to-hand prejudices that allow us to understand new things in the world and which also allow us to find our way and make ourselves at home in

\textsuperscript{24} For useful commentary, see Wachterhauser 1988 (231-253), Simms 2015 (69-77), and Sandel 2014 (chapter 4). I proceed by taking at face value the validity of Gadamer’s argument for rehabilitating prejudice, tradition, and authority and his critique of the Enlightenment.

\textsuperscript{25} This is in reference to Heidegger’s distinction between entities that are ready-to-hand and those that are present-at-hand. For instance, when using a hammer for hammering things, the hammer is ready-to-hand. We do not think about the hammer, what makes it a hammer and its hammerness. We are focused on that for the sake of which we are hammering. However, if hammer breaks, the hammer is present-to-hand. That is, we are aware of the hammer, what makes it a hammer and its hammerness. Later in the chapter, Heidegger’s distinction will be engaged to show that the significance of Gadamer’s philosophy is precisely in calling out how certain prejudices are ready-to-hand in our practical and political encounters with others and how in this encounter of the other, if we are open to its otherness, our prejudices can become present-at-hand, whereby we can overcome our finitude and incomplete understanding.
the ethical/practical world through *Bildung*. In encountering the other, its otherness can challenge our prejudices. When challenged, our prejudices turn from ready-to-hand to present-to-hand, allowing us to reflect on them and, perhaps, reconsider them.

Let us look at some insights gained in Gadamer's rehabilitation of 'prejudice' with regards to plurality. First, it demonstrates the impossibility of absolute reason. It explains there can be plurality of differentiations with equal claims for truth and validity by disclosing how understanding is historically termed and limited. So it takes us to the fundamental reason for why in pluralism we need to accept that there cannot be one undisputed truth claim.

In hermeneutics, *vis a vis* 'prejudice', “reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms –i.e. it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates” (Gadamer 2013, 288). We speak of plurality of ideas, values, principles, and world-views when we see that reason can be differentiated due to particularity of history, culture, and language. If we accept that reason exists within concrete circumstances, then by implication we must accept that our understanding is interpretation that changes depending on the hermeneutical situation. Prejudices also express our historicality that also accounts for incomplete understanding. We have incomplete understanding primarily because we are historical beings and belong to history.

The second insight in Gadamer’s rehabilitation of ‘prejudice’ establishes the significance of encountering the other for broadening our horizon. Gadamer insists that all understanding essentially proceeds from self-understanding (2013, 261). If we agree with Gadamer here, then we accept that to understand other values, ideas, or cultures, we first of all need to understand ourselves. It is necessary to be aware of the historicity and situatedness of our understanding because they mark its incompleteness.

Previously, it was noted that prejudices manifest the historicity and particularity of understanding. Warnke recognizes this and brings it to bear upon deliberative democracy (2000; 2002). For her, and Gadamer, in order to act and engage with one another, as for instance we would in a debate on ethics, we must first of all understand “who and where we are and who and where we want
to be” (Warnke 2002, 79). For that kind of self-conscious awareness, we must come as close as we can to full realization of our situatedness in the hermeneutical situation and of the limitedness of our understanding within the finitude that our situation marks. Therefore, “from the beginning then, we are involved in the practical task of deciphering the story in which we are a part so that we know how to go on” (Warnke 2002, 80). The kind of self-conscious understanding that Gadamer and Warnke emphasise requires awareness of one’s prejudices. Prejudices are ready-to-hand things in understanding and dealing with others. They partake in the event of understanding because “prejudice means a judgement that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined” (Gadamer 2013, 282).

Prejudices come to the foreground and become present-at-hand in the encounter and engagement with the other. The otherness of the other broadens our horizons by challenging our prejudices. It is in this engagement with the other that our prejudices become present-to-hand. Hermeneutics is about encountering and understanding the other, the alien, in their otherness. Gadamer highlights the significance of encountering the other in their otherness for self-understanding. This is evident in his use of the term ‘horizon’. In most encounters of something strange and alien, there is something to learn if one is open to it. In reading a new text, an open reader constantly challenges and revises his/her prejudices. In encountering a person with a different perspective, an open dialogue partner challenges and revises his/her prejudices about that person’s perspective. In both cases, the educational aspect shows that there is not only a change in understanding of the book or the person, but also a change in self-understanding.

When it comes to practical and political world, it is often the case that the inclusion of a different group brings a change in perspective. This becomes especially significant when the debate reaches an impasse. Even in the more dramatic scenarios of personal life, a look at one’s circumstances from a new

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26 For Gadamer, foregrounding and testing one’s own prejudices is part of hermeneutically conscious mind. This mind is open and sensitive to the otherness of the text; it is prepared for the text to say something new and expects to disclose its own alterity. We learn from Gadamer that “this kind of sensitivity involves neither ‘neutrality’ with respect to content nor the extinction of oneself, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one’s own fore-meanings and prejudices … the important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against our own fore-meanings” (2013, 282).
perspective makes a world of difference. The new perspective is usually gained by talking to somebody. As Gadamer shows, all cases of changed understanding and/or perspective require openness to the new and to the alien. In opening up to the other and encountering it, a hermeneutical task is performed in the same way a text is read. The text must be read with openness to its otherness because that is the only way something new can be learned from and about it. Thus, as in the case of reading to learn and broaden horizons, encountering other people in the practical and political world of a plural society leads to less incomplete understanding of the collective and to wiser decisions. This is the main insight to take from Gadamer on upholding pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other.

For Gadamer, encountering the other involves ‘transposing’ of one’s self into the horizon of the other. By doing this, one is allowed to see things the way the other sees them. The analogue for transposing in hermeneutics is reading a historical text, on which Gadamer writes: “if we fail to transpose ourselves into the historical horizon from which the traditionary texts speak, we will misunderstand the significance of what it has to say to us” (2013, 313). It also applies to the practical life: “to that extent this seems a legitimate hermeneutical requirement: we must place ourselves in the other situation in order to understand it” (Gadamer 2013, 313). It must not be confused with the idea of moral respect. Let us consider Gadamer’s case. He writes:

in a conversation, when we have discovered the other person’s standpoint and horizon, his ideas become intelligible without our necessarily having to agree with him; so also when someone thinks historically, he comes to understand meaning of what has been handed down without necessarily agreeing with it or seeing himself in it. In both cases, the person understanding has, as it were, stopped trying to reach an agreement. He himself cannot be reached. By factoring the other person’s standpoint into what he is claiming to say, we are making our own standpoint safely unattainable (2013, 314).

The idea of moral respect usually requires that we detach from our particularity. The assumption is that only by transcending from the historical moment, from the particular tradition, from our particular social position can we see things from the other’s perspective. Moral respect also underlines the idea
of universal point of view. In this instance, moral respect underpins the condition for seeing things as the other does. To achieve that, one must detach from one’s self. For Gadamer, this move results in closure; a closure in which we make ourselves unavailable to the other; a kind of closure in which we seal our prejudices from being challenged. Truly encountering the other in their otherness requires that we put ourselves into their position.

As Gadamer argues further:

This is necessary, of course, insofar as we must imagine the other situation. But into this other situation we must bring, precisely, ourselves, only this is the full meaning of ‘transposing ourselves’. If we put ourselves in someone else’s shoes, for example, then we will understand him – i.e. become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person – by putting ourselves in his position (2013, 315).

Putting ourselves in the other’s position allows us to understand the other in their otherness. It also allows us to foreground and challenge our own opinions and prejudices. Contrary to the idea of moral respect, the fact that we need to see things the way others see them “does not mean that when we listen to someone or read a book we must forget all our fore-meanings concerning the content and all our ideas” (Gadamer 2013, 281).

Gadamer falls short of advocating the idea of moral respect as taking a detached and universal point of view. Transposing involves bringing ourselves into the other so that we can really see its otherness relative to us. Moral respect precludes this kind of encounter. That is, if we are to detach from our particularities and see things purely as the other sees them, it does not involve any encounter at all. It involves our unilateral and monological transposition, even a certain appropriation of the other without ourselves being available to be encountered by the other. For Gadamer, it is not so much that the idea of moral respect is impossible as it is undesirable because it results in making oneself unavailable to the other. In taking a universal position we close ourselves from the other and avoid foregrounding our prejudices before the other.

Considering a deliberative setting in which we hold ethical, moral debates, by transcending from our particularity we conceal our own prejudices from contestation, close ourselves off from the debate, and therefore make
ourselves unavailable to the other. So, we deny them the same hermeneutic
task that we perform in the encounter with them. Usually, our interest in some
subject matter leads us to encounter the other. In the political sphere, the
subject matter can be the moral principle of justice, or normative validity of laws,
or the truthfulness of an opinion, or the rightness of the rule. The interest in
subject matter serves as a condition for inclusion and exclusion in dialogue for
both Gadamer and Habermas. For Gadamer, the interpreters’ interest in the
subject matter serves as the ground for their encounter, whereas for Habermas
those interested in the subject and affected by the outcome encounter and
engage with one another. In both cases, encountering the other requires that
that we are present from within our own finitude, with our opinions and
prejudices and keep an open mind towards the others in their otherness without
disregarding the former.

When we consider the implications of Gadamer’s idea of ‘transposing’ for
deliberative theories of democracy, we can see that those who only formulate
deliberation as sharing and discussion of opinions (Gutmann and Thompson
1996; Ackerman and Fishkin 2002) fall short in affirming encounter and
engagement across differences. We have established that for Habermas too it
is crucial that one represents one’s own interests as truthfully and genuinely as
possible. However, for Habermas, when it comes to moral discourse, being
present with one’s own particularity can be an obstacle to reaching
understanding/consensus. By contrast, for Gadamer, being present with one’s
own particularity is the condition of possibility for understanding the other in
their otherness. There is an obvious contrast here. In Habermas, understanding
is directed at reaching consensus on validity claims. For Gadamer,
understanding is directed a mutual accord with the other. For Gadamer, it is
important that the otherness (and so, plurality) is preserved. Neither of the
positions can be dismissed. The significance of Gadamer’s position is that it can
show why there is a misunderstanding. There could be a difference in
interpretation due to situated understanding. As Section 2.3 establishes, this

27 Although, being present from our own perspective depends on the form of discourse
in Habermas’ discourse ethics. If we are in moral discourse, then for Habermas the
particularities that make up our perspective are obstacles to achieving consensus and realizing
the ideal speech situation.
issue becomes more important when norms are challenged from the perspective of ethical discourse.

Let us return to why it is necessary to encounter the other in their otherness:

That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text’s alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither “neutrality” with respect to content nor the extinction of one’s self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one’s own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings (2013, 282).

Gadamer’s focus on encountering the otherness of the text does not concern us. It is necessary to take his point on the importance of being “aware of one’s own bias” in order to move on to the next section. For Gadamer, an encounter between a reader and a text, or people, is an encounter of horizons. A process of understanding takes place when two or more horizons encounter and engage with one another. Gadamer calls this process ‘fusion of horizons’. For ‘fusion of horizons’ to be possible, horizons must be aware of the hermeneutical situation they are embedded in.

As it was established previously, understanding proceeds from self-understanding. It is necessary to be aware of the hermeneutical situation that constitutes the finitude of understanding. It is only possible to become aware of such finitude in the encounter and engagement with different horizons. Horizons can challenge one another and in that process bring their prejudices to the foreground. Without such encounters and engagements, that is, without pluralism, we would truly be dogmatic beings blindly believing in the rightness of our own world-view. Encountering the other in their otherness, awareness and foregrounding of one’s own situated understanding is where the I and the Other engage in a process of understanding. Central to that process is fusing of the horizons of the two. Thus “understanding is always the fusion of … horizons” (Gadamer 2013, 317).

Gadamer’s notion of ‘fusion of horizon’ is a model for all understanding (see Gadamer 2013, 315-318; Lawn and Keane 2011, 51-53; Weinsheimer
On the one side, the model “explains the nature, and justifies the existence, of the philosophical and literary canon” (Lawn and Keane 2011, 53) and on the other it also explains how understanding takes place at interpersonal and inter-cultural level (Lawn and Keane 2011, 52). For Gadamer, understanding that takes place in ‘fusion of horizons’ is dialogical because the horizons are linguistic. We encounter one another and bring our horizons into contact by holding a dialogue. When we have discourse on a subject, be it moral principles or ethical values, we bring our horizons into the discourse situation and keep within our focus, as Gadamer says, the subject matter itself. The understanding we reach about the subject matter results from our fusing our horizons.

This form of understanding does not necessarily mean appropriation of one by the other. It means that both undergo a change and expansion in their self-understanding. All who are interested and concerned about the subject can participate in this fusing in discourse. And since each participant accepts their own finitude, they accept that the other might open up something new and unexpected about the subject. That is, the other brings into one’s horizon things that weren’t in it before. One also brings to the fore and tests the legitimacy of one’s own prejudices. This process of understanding is reciprocal and mutual. When horizons fuse, we overcome our finitude and are able to reach an understanding across difference.

Fusion of horizons “embodies a measure of agreement” (Lawn and Keane 2011, 51). “And this in turn is a partial understanding” (Lawn and Keane 2011, 51). According to Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’ understanding is never complete because horizons themselves are not fixed. They are constantly changing, moving, and expanding (Gadamer 2013, 315). Thus, for Gadamer there cannot be one final understanding of something because there cannot be one complete and final ‘fusion’. We are historical beings that are future oriented. We constantly look to our past to understand our present so we can define who we are and who we want to be. Thus, our horizon from the present is constantly brought into contact with the horizon of the past. And just like in reading historical texts and artefacts, our horizons come into contact with the horizons of other persons and cultures. Since in both occasions we are assumed by
Gadamer to constantly test and revise our fore-meanings and prejudices, our horizons are not fixed.

Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’ reveals a normative aspect of pluralism in a fundamental way. It establishes that “understanding is not a question of an active subject casting a meaning on an inert and dead object” (Lawn and Keane 2011, 52). Rather, understanding is treating the other as having a horizon of its own with which one needs to come together (Lawn and Keane 2011, 52). Plural societies are not just divided by the values and interests people commit to. They can be divided more fundamentally by history, interpretations of history, languages, culture, religious world-views. ‘Fusion of horizons’ establishes that in pluralism, when confronted with a different groups of people, it is one thing to count them as part of the collective by studying them, their interests, culture, and values as an object of inquiry of social sciences, and it is another thing to encounter them as having something to say too, as having some world to disclose. The normative revelation ‘fusion of horizons’ makes in pluralism is that the other must be encountered as having a horizon that must be included, brought together, and reconciled in an engagement that lets the other disclose its own otherness. This sort of encounter and engagement can be comprehended as pluralism.

Gadamer’s idea of ‘fusion of horizons’ is not complete without the regulative idea of ‘historically effected consciousness’. He writes, “to bring about this fusion in a regulated way is the task of … historically effected consciousness” (Gadamer 2013, 317). ‘Historically effected consciousness’ is a kind of consciousness that recognizes that one’s concern and interest in the subject matter is always already influenced by one’s situated understanding. Gadamer breaks up the structure of this regulatory idea into hermeneutical situation, hermeneutical consciousness, and hermeneutical experience. In this section, it was established that hermeneutical situation accounts for incomplete understanding in a fundamental way. In the next section, it will be established that Gadamer’s principle of openness enables the kind of engagement and encounter that is suitable for beings with incomplete understanding. The argument will be supported by establishing the role of hermeneutical experience.

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28 For Gadamer “historically effected consciousness is an element in the act of understanding itself and … is already effectual in finding the right questions to ask” (2013, 312).
and consciousness in ‘historically effected consciousness’ and drawing the principle of openness from the way Gadamer uses hermeneutical experience.

2.2 Understanding and encountering the other through openness

Charles Taylor observed that “the great challenge of the coming century, both for politics and for social science, is that of understanding the other” (2002, 126). Since it was established that we should approach the challenge of understanding the other by embracing our finitude and incomplete understanding, the first task in understanding the other is understanding oneself, i.e. self-understanding. This section establishes the fundamental way in which self-understanding is connected to understanding the other and how this leads to openness and change in self-understanding. Taylor argued that the slogan of the approach to the challenge of understanding in our time should be “no understanding the other without a changed understanding of self” (2002, 141). I agree.

The reason for significance of Gadamer’s idea ‘understanding’ in pluralism has to do with its open-endedness and its basis on bilateral engagement. This feature is evident in Taylor’s distinction between knowledge and understanding in philosophical hermeneutics. Knowledge is unilateral, whereas understanding is bilateral. The goal in each is different. The goal of knowledge is to achieve a final explanation of the object. It aims to exclude all future surprises. “Coming to an understanding does not have this finality”, because we can only come to understanding with definite interlocutors (Taylor 2002, 127). These interlocutors are humans that may be in similar circumstances to ours or in completely different circumstances that may make these people different from us. Furthermore, we can never achieve a final explanation about humans or their affairs because circumstances and, therefore, humans change. Objects do not change the way humans change. It is not necessary to agree with an atom about where it will be and how it will behave. Understanding is more cooperative and open-ended for the new and unexpected.

Furthermore, in knowledge the “goal is to attain full intellectual control over the object, such that it can no longer ‘talk back’ and surprise” (Taylor 2002, 128); It may require a change in perspective or the framework that may hinder
this control. But in all these changes, the goal for finality and intellectual control does not change. By contrast, coming to an understanding with an interlocutor can change one’s goal. In coming to understanding we do not try to manipulate others, at least we do not want to seem like we are or otherwise we would be denied the engagement with them. In coming to understanding, the aim, argues Taylor, is to live together “and this means listening as well as talking, and hence may require that I redefine what I am aiming at” (2002, 128).

Thus, genuine understanding of the other can change understanding of the self. Taylor writes: “in coming to see the other correctly, we inescapably alter our understanding of ourselves” (2002, 140; emphasis added). Taylor is not suggesting that there is a correct understanding of the other in a way that precludes all other understandings as incorrect. Rather, it is necessary to take away the point that understanding the other correctly suggests more towards a correct way to understand the other. A correct way to understand the other is to put prejudgments and prejudices about other at the forefront of the engagement and let the otherness of the other challenge them. “Really taking in the other will involve an identity shift in us”, and “that is why”, Taylor argues, “it is so often resisted and rejected” (2002, 140). The problem is “we have a deep identity investment in the distorted images we cherish of others” (Taylor 2002, 140).

For Gadamer, openness to goal revision is what makes one a better human being (see Gadamer 2013, 362-366). For him, this kind of person is an “experienced” person. Let us take a closer look at what he means by “experience”.

Gadamer does not follow what he calls the “teleological perspective” of experience in human sciences that has been handed down from Bacon (2013, 358). To distinguish it from what he calls “genuine” experience, he contrasts two ways in which the word “experience” is used in language29. First, the word is

29 The precise German translation of experience is Erfahrung. Lawn and Keane suggest that its root word fahren as travel or wander adds to its etymology a connotation with a more philosophically tinted “voyage of discovery” (2011, 47). In Gadamer’s Truth and Method, it too “echoes the idea of travel as an experience that deeply transforms the traveller and it is precisely in such an experience that truth exists” (Lawn and Keane 2011, 47). Here he wants to overcome not only the theory of experience since the Enlightenment but its Hegelian roots in philosophy. The philosophical tint of the term was articulated in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit. For Gadamer, “the Hegelian system does not accurately represent the true meaning of the term Erfahrung, experience, because the movement within the circularity of consciousness leads one to believe that the experience is enclosed within itself and not open to actual
used to describe experiences that confirm an expectation (Gadamer 2013, 361). Second, the word is used to describe new experiences (Gadamer 2013, 361). The second type of experience usually shows something in a new way, which leads to revision of current understanding. It causes change in understanding of the object as well as self-understanding. For Gadamer, this kind of experience is a “process” that “is essentially negative” (2013, 361). Because negative experience can show “that we have not seen the thing correctly and now know it better”, Gadamer argues that “the negativity of experience has a curiously productive meaning” (2013, 362). It does not necessarily mean that we correct a previously wrong knowledge, which sometimes can be the case. It also means that “we acquire a comprehensive knowledge” (Gadamer 2013, 362). For Gadamer, negative experience is genuine experience (2013, 362). It presupposes a determinate negation, which is otherwise called dialectical experience (Gadamer 2013, 362).

Gadamer ascribes negative experience to the Hegelian understanding of experience. However, he rejects the finality that Hegel sees in dialectics. It does not “do justice to hermeneutical consciousness” (Gadamer 2013, 364). For Hegel, self-consciousness that comes to know itself can only do so with new experiences. However, new experience cannot be one that confirms what is already known. Rather, new experience is negative experience – i.e., one that unconceals something new, previously unknown, and simultaneously unconceals the limits of self-consciousness. The negativity of experience is what moves self-consciousness towards better consciousness about itself, i.e. it overcomes limitations when they are unconcealed by new and negative experiences.

difference or otherness” (Lawn and Keane 2011, 47). Whereas “the ultimate goal of Hegel's dialectic of absolute knowledge, where consciousness brings its wandering to an end”, Gadamer pushes to overcome this account by factoring in the fundamentality of human finitude (Lawn and Keane 2011, 47). In other words, Gadamer pushes for a more nuanced notion of experience that is sensitive to the changing and transforming circumstances understood in terms of hermeneutic situation and horizon discussed above. For Gadamer, this notion of experience reveals to us that fusion cannot be complete, and therefore understanding cannot be complete.

30 Gadamer reads Hegel through Heidegger. I am faithful to Heidegger's notion of aletheia as Gadamer is in the section on the concept of experience; see Gadamer 2013, 362-364.
Gadamer retains two things from Hegel and discards the ultimate finality of self-consciousness. First, Gadamer retains the phenomenological and existential aspects of Hegelian dialectics. Indeed, if our experiences have made us into who we are, we need to be aware that that which is unconcealed might be due to who we have come to be through our experiences. The new thing that is unconcealed can only be unconcealed to the consciousness that is experiencing it. Thus, we need to be aware that what we are finding out through our new experience, the newness that we find in experience, is new for us. Second, Gadamer retains the openness of dialectics. Thus, it is clear that Gadamer rejects the finality of Hegel's dialectics. For him “the dialectic of experiences has its proper fulfilment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself” (Gadamer 2013, 364).

By retaining both of these aspects of the dialectics of experience, Gadamer opposes “genuine” experience to absolute knowledge and finality (see Gadamer 2013, 364). A genuine experience reveals a distinct kind of truth. That truth has to do with self-knowledge and awareness of our own finitude, situatedness, and historicity (see Gadamer 2013, 365-366). When Gadamer argues that Hegelian dialectic does not “do justice to hermeneutic consciousness” (2013, 364), he is factoring in the ontological dimension of finitude. Hermeneutical consciousness is consciousness of finitude. Therefore, there cannot be any finality or absoluteness in dialectics. The truth of dialectic experience “always implies an orientation toward new experience” and not the finality of synthesis (Gadamer 2013, 364). Rather than leading to absolute knowledge, experience leads to Socratic doctrine of ignorance. As Gadamer

31 On this point, Gadamer writes: “for consciousness its object is in-itself, but what is in-itself can be known only as it presents itself to the experiencing consciousness. Thus the experiencing consciousness has precisely this experience: that the in-itselfness of the object is in-itself “for us” (Gadamer 2013, 362).

32 The experienced man for Gadamer is Socrates. As Socrates encountered people in a dialogue from the position of self-conscious awareness of finitude. He sought new experiences by engaging in dialogues with others. And it was this experience that kept him open to new encounters, new dialogues, and new experiences. Gadamer writes: “The truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience. That is why a person who is called experienced has become so not only through experiences but is also open to new experiences. The consummation of his experience, the perfection we call “being experienced”, does not consist in the fact that someone already knows everything and knows better than anyone else. Rather, the experienced person proves to be, on the contrary, someone who is radically undogmatic; who, because of the many experiences he has had an the knowledge he has
writes, genuine experience is “that whereby man becomes aware of his finiteness” (2013: 365) and “experience of one’s own historicity” (2013: 366).

Genuine experience is experience of finitude, situatedness, and historicity. From philosophical hermeneutics, we see that ‘historically effected consciousness’ fulfils a regulative role in ‘fusion of horizons’. It means that no ‘fusion’ can achieve finality. For Gadamer, in order for ‘historically effected consciousness’ to fulfil this role, “it must reflect the general structure of experience” (2013, 366). In the strict sense, ‘historically effected consciousness’ is primarily consciousness of tradition and the history of effect contained in tradition. In the broader sense, it is also consciousness of situatedness of understanding. Since “hermeneutical experience is concerned with tradition” (Gadamer 2013, 366), it is the defining feature of ‘historically effected consciousness’. Therefore, in order to establish the role of ‘historically effected consciousness’ as a regulative idea that prevents finality, Gadamer must show how hermeneutical experience is genuine experience (see Gadamer 2013, 366). Showing how hermeneutical experience leads to openness in its concern with tradition establishes the way ‘historically effected consciousness’ regulates ‘fusion of horizons’ from achieving finality or absolute knowledge. The open, dialogical, and fluid character of ‘fusion of horizons’ depends on hermeneutical experience being a form of genuine experience.

Making his case for hermeneutical experience, Gadamer differentiates between three types of experience of the other (2013, 366–396). The first type draws knowledge from the experience and “can make predictions about others on the basis of experience” (Gadamer 2013, 366). It establishes the other as a means to an end. Gadamer makes a moral judgement against this type of experience calling it “purely self-regarding” and that it “contradicts the moral
drawn from them, is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them. The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfilment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself” (2013: 364).

33 Gadamer writes: “Our discussion of the concept of experience thus arrives at a conclusion that is of considerable importance to our inquiry into the nature of historically effected consciousness. As a genuine form of experience it must reflect the general structure of experience. Thus we will have to seek out in hermeneutical experience those elements that we have found in our analysis of experience in general” (2013: 366)

34 For Gadamer, it is the experience of the Thou. I am keeping it as other to maintain clarity.
definition of man” (2013, 367). In relating this type of experience to the hermeneutical problem, Gadamer equates it to “naïve faith in method and in the objectivity that can be attained through it” (2013, 367). This type of experience treats the other as an object with no openness to what it has to say.

The second type experiences the other in a “false” dialectical way (Gadamer 2013, 367). For Gadamer, this experience is also self-regarding but in a different way. It takes a form of “self-relatedness”. “Such self-regard derives from the dialectical appearance that the dialectic of the I-Thou relation brings in” (Gadamer 2013, 367). The other is experienced not in the way that its otherness negates something about the person experiencing the other. It is not directed at a change in self-understanding. Rather, experience of the other is a competition with it, an argument. “One claims to know the other’s claim from his point of view and even to understand the other better than the other understands himself” (Gadamer 2013, 367). Here, the other does not speak for itself, is not given a chance to disclose its otherness: “the claim to understand the other person in advance functions to keep the other person’s claim at a distance” (Gadamer 2013, 368).

In relating this type of experience to the hermeneutical problem, Gadamer equates it to “historical consciousness” (2013, 368). Historical consciousness treats tradition as an object. It attempts to know everything there is to know about the otherness of its object. It situates it in the context of the historical horizon that the object belongs to. Through historical consciousness, tradition is studied by separating, distancing, and isolating its historicity from the present. But the way historical consciousness experiences the other is not a genuine experience. “By claiming to transcend its own conditionedness completely in knowing the other, it is involved in a false dialectical experience, since it is actually seeking to master the past” (Gadamer 2013, 368). This type of experience does not treat the other as an object like the first type. Yet, it has no openness to the other because the person experiencing the other claims to understand for the other and reflects him/herself out of the relationship with the other.35

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35 Gadamer illustrates as thus: “The servant who tyrannizes his master by serving him does not believe that he is serving his own aims by doing so. In fact, his own self-consciousness consists precisely in withdrawing from the dialectic of this reciprocity, in
The third type experiences the other in their otherness. Here, one approaches the other with awareness of one’s finitude, situatedness, and historicity. One does not experience the other as an object, nor does one enter into a false dialectical relationship with the other. The other discloses its otherness. Gadamer calls this type of experience “the highest” type of hermeneutical experience (2013, 369). In relating it to the hermeneutical problem, Habermas equates it to historically effected consciousness. Here, tradition is treated as a dialogue partner. In this dialogue, we let tradition challenge us and bring our prejudices to the forefront. We bring our own horizon to meet with the horizon of the tradition in such a way that we recognize our own historicity and finitude. In other words, it is with ‘historically effected consciousness’ that we can conceive of understanding similar to Taylor as bilateral, party-dependent, and open to goal-revision. Because it leads to awareness of one’s own finitude, situatedness, and historicity, hermeneutical experience “calls for a fundamental sort of openness” (Gadamer 2013, 369).

Hermeneutical experience is genuine experience because its openness to the otherness of the other leads to negative experience. In experiencing the other this way, one “transposes” oneself into the horizon of the other. This kind of engagement and encounter allows the otherness to confront and challenge one’s prejudices. One comes to awareness of one’s prejudices by encountering the other and being open to its otherness. That is a hermeneutical experience. It is an experience of negation of one’s prejudices; therefore, it is a genuine experience.

At this moment, it is important not to conceive of hermeneutical experience as experience of tradition only. It was established in Section 2.1 that tradition is part of one’s hermeneutical situation, which includes situation, prejudices, and historicity as well. Therefore, hermeneutical experience is experience of one’s hermeneutical situation generally. Hermeneutical situation is the point from which we can have a horizon. Hermeneutical experience allows us to gain a better self-understanding and awareness of our situatedness.

reflecting himself out of his relation to the other and so becoming unreachable by him” (2013, 368).

36 On this point, Gadamer posits: “I must allow traditions claim to validity, not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to me. This too calls for a fundamental sort of openness” (2013, 369)
within the hermeneutical situation. It unconceals our very own finitude. To be aware of this finitude is to have hermeneutical consciousness. Thus, ‘historically effected consciousness’ consists in the intricate and intimate relationship between hermeneutical situation, experience, and consciousness.

In section 2.1, we have seen that incomplete understanding, to which such challenges as incommensurability of values and moral disagreement are attributable, has to do with the ontological dimension of human finitude. We have seen that human understanding is finite within the hermeneutical situation it belongs to. Understanding is always already situated in the hermeneutical situation. We can have a horizon from this situation, which makes things understandable in particular ways. In this section, we established that, broadly applied, hermeneutical experience is the experience of the other in their otherness. It is hermeneutical experience in so far as it involves the to and fro movement, a movement of discovery and unconcealment of one’s own edges as well as the otherness of the other.

The role of the new, the alien, the other is integral to hermeneutical experience and consciousness. Encountering the other presents us with a chance, an opportunity to understand ourselves better, to make our incomplete understanding a little less incomplete, to expand our finitude a little further outward. This experience depends on our openness to the other, our willingness to let the otherness confront us and change our self-understanding. In turn, genuine openness can only come from recognition of our own finitude, our self-understanding and awareness of our situatedness and particularity. Thus, understanding and encountering the other requires self-understanding while self-understanding requires encountering and understanding the other. We gain entrance into this virtuous circle, if you will, through recognition of our finitude that pushes us to be open to the other. This is the hermeneutical insight we get for the problems of plurality that come from incomplete understanding and our affirmation of pluralism as engagement and encounter in democratic politics.

The following quote from *Truth and Method* contains the principle of openness I draw from Gadamer’s idea of hermeneutical experience. This principle of openness is suitable for beings with incomplete understanding and
appropriate for committing to the idea of pluralism as engagement and encounter inspired by Diana Eck. Gadamer writes:

A person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what manifests itself by their light. It is like the relation between I and Thou. A person who reflects himself out of the mutuality of such a relation changes this relationship and destroys its moral bond. A person who reflects himself out of a living relationship to tradition destroys the true meaning of this tradition exactly the same way. Knowing and recognizing this constitutes … hermeneutical experience: the openness to tradition characteristic of historically effected consciousness. It too has a real analogue in the I’s experience of the Thou. In human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, to experience the Thou truly as a Thou –i.e. not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. But ultimately this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another. When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person “understands” the other. Similarly, ‘to hear and obey someone’ does mean simply that we do blindly what the other desires. We call such a person slavish. Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so (2013, 369).

To be open to the other means to be open for the other to say something new to us. It means to be open to the otherness to challenge our own prejudices. We can only learn something new, expand our finitude and broaden our horizons if we are willing to put our prejudices to the test37. Gadamer’s principle of openness means readiness to revise our prejudices and, if need be, revise our self-understanding. We can define the normative function of

37 For Gadamer, foregrounding and testing one’s own prejudices is part of hermeneutically conscious mind. This mind is open and sensitive to the otherness of the text; it is prepared for the text to say something new and expects to disclose its own alterity. We learn from Gadamer that “this kind of sensitivity involves neither ‘neutrality’ with respect to content nor the extinction of oneself, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one’s own fore-meanings and prejudices … the important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against our own fore-meanings” (2013, 282).
openness as such: openness starts with the recognition of one’s finitude and
incomplete understanding, followed by a question directed at the dialogue
partner that comes from a genuine interest in his/her otherness, and ends with
letting the otherness of the other challenge our prejudices and, perhaps, change
our own self-understanding and understanding the other in his/her otherness.
What we need to be open for is precisely difference and otherness that
challenges what we already know, assume, and understand. We need to be
open to change not just in understanding the other, but also in our self-
understanding because there cannot be a change in understanding the other
without a change in self-understanding. If we want to expand our incomplete
understanding at all, then hermeneutical philosophy shows us that to be open to
negative experience that is only possible when we encounter and engage with
the other in its genuine otherness.

In the introduction to my thesis, I presented the three criteria of pluralism
as engagement and encounter as: active seeking of understanding across
differences, encounter of commitments, and dialogue. Incomplete
understanding poses a problem for committing to this idea of pluralism. In this
chapter, we have seen that Gadamer can be a useful resource in gaining insight
into the nature of this problem.

With Gadamer, it was established that incomplete understanding is a
permanent feature because of the ontological dimension of human finitude. We
are historical beings, and since we belong to history, a history that started
without us and will continue without us, we can never claim to have a complete
understanding. Moreover, our understanding is always influenced by the
particularities that are contingent to our hermeneutic situation. Gadamer’s
account of incomplete understanding shows why it is necessary to actually
uphold pluralism as engagement and encounter in addition to political pluralism.
If such challenges of plural societies as deep division, moral disagreement,
incommensurable values are attributable to incomplete understanding, then
engagement and encounter seems like an appropriate response. For this,
Gadamer shows the importance of self-understanding, of recognizing that we
always already have an incomplete understanding due to the ontological
dimension of finitude. Furthermore, through Gadamer we recognize the
importance of encountering the other in revealing the edges of our incomplete
understanding, the finitude that contains it, the particularity which we should not mistake for universality. Gadamer’s philosophy shows that actually the other, in their otherness, gives us the possibility to understand ourselves as we are. It puts the other in a mutual bond of belongingness with what we consider to be in each case I and myself. Difference should not be divisive. Difference is only divisive if we make the mistake of forgetting the ontological dimension of our finitude and mistake our understanding to have completed itself and come to its final being.

The core ideas of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics have brought us to this point. If we accept Gadamer’s account of finitude and incomplete understanding, and if we want to commit to pluralism as engagement and encounter, we need to find in deliberative democracy the possibility to instantiate this principle of openness. In Part II, I establish how Young’s “asymmetric reciprocity”, Dryzek’s “reflexivity”, and Mouffe’s “agonism” can be understood as instantiations of this principle in democratic politics. They arrive at these concepts from critique of discourse ethics based on premises that are similar to the hermeneutical critique of critical theory. Hermeneutic critique of discourse ethics focuses on the situated conception of understanding and argues that reasoning cannot detach from its hermeneutical situation. This results in interpretive conflicts that must be accommodated in democratic politics. Young, Dryzek, and Mouffe take similar positions on discourse ethics. Next, I will look at hermeneutical critique of discourse ethics, which will draw the common ground Young, Dryzek, and Mouffe share in their critique and appropriation of discourse ethics, and I will examine from Gadamer’s perspective the extent to which pluralism can be affirmed through discourse ethics.

2.3 Discourse and the interpretive problem

In this section, I draw from Georgia Warnke’s critique of Habermas’ discourse ethics. Warnke’s critique of discourse ethics is based on Gadamer’s philosophy. She looked at Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics in relation to themes of justice in democratic politics (1992), feminism (1993, 81-98), deliberative democratic politics (2013, 755-770), and, most recently, identity (2014, 579-594). She discerns three points from Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics and applies them to democratic politics and feminism. First, given
that understanding is interpretation and we interpret the world from a particular hermeneutic situation, validity of one interpretation does not preclude the validity of another interpretation (1993, 91). Second, in light of the first point, there is an educational feature stemming from the competition and conversation between various interpretations (for us it would be fusion of horizons as described above). Here, we learn the limitations of our own interpretations and are able to see the world in new light and dimensions (Warnke 1993, 91). The third point that Warnke gathers from Gadamer concerns the role of reasons in such a mutual education: we do not dismiss someone as irrational for not sharing our interpretation because we have equally valid reasons for our interpretations, which might differ in virtue of our different interests, concerns, orientations, etc. (1993, 92).

Warnke accepts Gadamer’s argument that all understanding is interpretation. Therefore, she argues that encounter and conflict of interpretations is inherent to deliberative democracy. Her critique is that deliberative democracy has a blind spot for this dimension. If we take Gadamer's argument that understanding is interpretation, then pluralism as engagement and encounter involves encounter and engagement between different interpretations. And since we too are considering deliberative democracy underpinned by Habermas’ discourse ethics, Warnke’s critique is a useful resource to draw from on the implications of pursuing our ideal of pluralism through discourse ethics.

Below I discuss how discourse ethics avoids interpretive conflicts because Habermas does not take into account the ontological dimension of ‘human finitude’. I agree with Warnke’s argument that drawing on philosophical hermeneutics brings to the attention of deliberative democracy the importance of interpretive dimension of understanding in deliberation. If we, like Warnke, take into account Gadamer's case for human finitude and understanding, then “we will acknowledge that we always already understand reasons, consideration, actions and practices from particular perspectives, with particular interests and concerns that emerge from our particular personal, cultural and historical situations and experiences” (Warnke 2013, 765). And if such is the case, we can recognize the importance of formulating pluralism as engagement
and encounter because if we are limited in such a way, then we depend on engaging and encountering the other to expand our limitations.

It is important to consider the Habermasian argument against highlighting the interpretive dimension of understanding in deliberative democracy. Warnke is aware that, for Habermas, hermeneutics does not provide standards for testing the rationality of interpretations (1992, 88). If all understanding is interpretation, then there are certain interpretations that we would consider unacceptable but still have to engage with. What if we engage with an interpretation that is radically offensive, sexist, racist, and promotes hatred? Coming from Gadamer’s side, we do indeed come shorthanded in dealing with such interpretations because we will need to engage and reach an understanding with them too. From Habermas’ side, this problem requires “a return to Kantian moral theory”. The strength of Habermas’ return and reformulation of Kantian theory into discourse ethics is that it “does not rely on claims about what we believe but rather depends on more formal and formal-pragmatic features of our communication” (Warnke 1992, 95). Warnke admits that “in this way it also seems to provide an independent standpoint for a critical assessment of norms and beliefs” (1992, 96).

For this reason, it cannot be said that deliberative democracy has a blind spot on the interpretive dimension. It is fairer to say that it just does not include it as part of rational deliberation. Interpretation can evade critical evaluation according to the rational standards. However, despite this argument, the interpretive dimension persists in deliberation – all understanding is interpretation. If it was not, then we would not need discourse situation as a problem solving mechanism that restores understanding. It is precisely because there is an interpretive element that we need to fall back to discourse to resolve our interpretive difference and/or conflict. We can support this argument with Gadamer’s essay where he responds to Habermas’ critique with a rebuttal that one cannot reflect oneself out of one’s hermeneutical situation (Gadamer in 2002, 282). That is not to say that misunderstanding or ignorance is interpretation as well. If a norm is simply not understood correctly, then it is not so much a restoration of agreement as it is (hermeneutic) clarification. In the following pages, I examine this problem with interpretation that emerges in
discourse ethics and the implications that can be drawn on this issue about the way democratic politics can affirm pluralism as engagement and encounter.

The problem with the principle of openness we drew from philosophical hermeneutics is that it can call for openness to the kinds of worldviews that are disagreeable. This is the persistent issue that Kantian thinkers bring to bear upon hermeneutics and it must be taken seriously. Indeed, Warnke admits that encounters and engagements between interpretations that degrade rather than educate is a serious problem that the Habermasian deliberative democracy does not need to face (1992, 88). That is the gist of Habermas’ concerns about Gadamer’s hermeneutics which he expresses in his first review of Truth and Method in his On the Logic of Social Sciences. There, Habermas is indeed concerned about hermeneutics’ ability to deal with distorted communication given its premises about reflection within the hermeneutic situation. Habermas’ critique is that, without a critical distance outside the hermeneutic situation, reflection re-establishes and reaffirms the same conditions of distorted communication. For him hermeneutical standpoint does not offer any critical standards against which the interpretations can be evaluated. From his perspective, what is necessary is not factoring in particularity for moral deliberation but rather abstraction and universalization. That is what is necessary in plural societies as we saw his argument in Chapter I. We saw that for him difference and plurality means that “the morally justified norms that control the individual’s scope of action in the interest of the whole become ever more general and abstract” (Habermas 1990, 205). For him, difference and plurality require discourse to be deontological, cognitivist, formal, and universal (1990, 116-188). To this end, Habermas offers his own reformulation of Kantian moral theory as discourse ethics. We saw that his discourse ethics involves the formal-pragmatic and procedural means to meet the requirements for discourse in modern plural societies. An important aspect of Habermas’ discourse ethics is the division of discourse into three forms: pragmatic, ethical, and moral. Pragmatic discourses have to do with restoration of consensus on means, ethical discourses have to do with (hermeneutic) clarification in the self-understanding of groups, and moral discourses have a universal character in that here consensus applies across differences to different groups, therefore, this last form must be universal, abstract, formal, and deontological.
The distinction between the types of discourses is useful for the problems of contemporary world\textsuperscript{38}. When it comes to interpretations of the way people see themselves as a group and want to organize their lives without generalizing them to a more global level, they are involved in an ethical debate. It need not involve a moral (or universal) application of the outcome of their discourse. Moral discourse, on the other hand, requires the application of Habermas’ universalization principle (U) because here participants are engaged in a moral debate over the validity of normative ideals across differences. (U) requires that for a particular interest to be valid, it needs to be assented to and accepted by all affected. We also saw how, in formulating discourse ethics based on these distinctions and principles, Habermas relies on the formal-pragmatic rules of discourse which stipulate that our discussion is as close as possible to the ideal speech situation. In short, we discussed these rules as prescribing that the moral claim of discourse ethics depends on the following: participants must be equal, free of coercion, deception, and relations of power; they should be ready to redeem their validity claims according to the three tier distinction between truth, rightness, and truthfulness/sincerity.

However we need to ask ourselves whether there can be a distinction between discourses. Warnke brings to our attention the ambiguity that resides between the ethical and moral forms of discourse in discourse ethics. She argues that the interpretive dimension of understanding blurs the distinction between ethical and moral discourses. The limitation of Habermas’ program is precisely in its avoidance of the interpretative difficulties. If for general norms to be valid in pluralist societies they must be universalized but, in turn, the universalization depends on the extent of their generality and abstractness, then Warnke asks “whether these norms are not so general and abstract that they become inadequate to deal with the controversies that arise in such societies over the concrete questions”(1992, 100). How do we determine how a general norm is interpreted and applied in particular circumstances by particular groups? The answer to these questions cannot come from the clear-cut distinction between moral and ethical discourses. On this point, Warnke writes

\textsuperscript{38} For instance, in the context of influx of migrants into Europe, CDU of Germany and CDP of Netherlands are debating internally on how they identify themselves. CDP of Netherlands is debating whether their Christian values uphold the Protestant work ethic or the Christian value of helping others. These can be said to fall into what Habermas calls the ethical form of debate.
“even if we reserve notions of rational agreement for abstract and general norms [moral discourse] and leave discussion of values to more intimate circles [ethical discourse], we must ultimately also determine the meaning of norms for particular issues” (1992, 102). Based on the hermeneutical premises that are similar to our account above, Warnke concludes that “this attempt seems simply again to have to confront differences in interpretation and evaluation” (1992, 102). Let us look at how she answers our question:

Habermas cites universal human rights as examples of norms of action that can be justified according to the conditions of practical [moral] discourse. But what exactly are these rights? While we in the West at least, might all agree on a right to free speech, it is notorious that we can disagree on what counts as speech and hence on what actions are supposed to fall under the right to it. Rights to life and liberty have also been very differently interpreted in disputes over the morality of abortion … Answers to these questions seem to depend on how we interpret the meaning of life and liberty and these interpretations, in turn, seem to depend, not on the arguments and reasons that we appeal to in practical discourse, but on our cultural values and religious upbringing (Warnke 1992, 102-103)

It is evident that she factors in human finitude within particular hermeneutic situation because “cultural values and religious upbringing” are within the hermeneutic situation and provide the ready-to-hand prejudices which allow us to interpret the world in a certain way. Habermas limits that aspect to ethical discourse as distinct from moral discourse that is aimed at evaluating the general norms themselves. However, “the question of values, interpretations, and sensibilities thus appears to extend beyond” the ethical domain of Habermasian discourse and enter the “moral-practical domain itself” (Warnke 1992, 103).

Interpretive conflicts must be taken into account if we are to promote pluralism as engagement and encounter across differences. They come into light when we look at the problems of plural societies from a hermeneutical perspective. Through Gadamer, we have seen that hermeneutical situation has a constitutive role in one’s understanding (Bildung). That is the main thesis of his response to Habermas in “Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and the Critique of
Ideology” (in 2002, 274-292). We do interpret the general norms of justice, rights to life and liberty, freedom of speech from our own hermeneutical situation, our own finite and limited view, when it comes to considering them within particular circumstances and issues. However, Gadamer also points at the hermeneutical dimensions that push us to engage and encounter the interpretations of others in order to overcome this kind of finitude. Thus, when considering pluralism, we need to take into account the interpretative challenges that are inherent to it.

Having established the significance of Gadamer’s ideas for our problem, and having discussed their implications for discourse ethics, next, I revisit the problems with discourse ethics established in Section 1.3, Chapter I. There, I established that Habermas’ conception of discourse confines understanding to understanding a speech act and coming to consensus on norms. Also, I established that his requirement for transcendence betrays the ideal of engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness.

Once again, Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics demonstrates that incomplete understanding is a permanent condition of human understanding. We are historical beings, and “to be historically means that knowledge of oneself is never complete” (Gadamer 2013, 313). We always already belong to history, a history that started without us and will continue without us (Gadamer 2013: 288-289). History is never complete; therefore we cannot have the final knowledge and understanding of ourselves and our affairs, and therefore, our understanding is always incomplete. However, we can expand the limits of our incomplete understanding by encountering and engaging the different other and coming to an understanding with it in discourse. Engaging with the other shows us our limitations and expands our horizons. If ‘understanding’ is limited to understanding of speech acts and consensus, then we avoid this dimension of understanding as disclosure. For Gadamer, understanding is not limited to consensus and problem solving. It is a mode of being, a state of openness and accord with the other. It is linked to a kind of understanding the other that reveals its strangeness and alienation from us, which “is inextricably given with the individuality of the Thou” (Gadamer 2013: 186). Therefore, besides being a
problem solving mechanism, discourse is also at the same time the medium for disclosure of the other and coming to understanding (accord) with the other.

While both Habermas and Gadamer see the value of intersubjective engagement in overcoming incomplete understanding, they see the role of the different other in this task differently. What Habermas refers to as “provincial limits of their own particular form of life” (1990, 202) is similar to what Gadamer refers to by hermeneutical situation. However, while Habermas emphasises transcending one’s hermeneutical situation in rational discourse, Gadamer emphasises becoming more aware of one’s hermeneutical situation through encountering the other in discourse. To some extent, they both ask us that in discourse we endeavour to see things the way the other does. However, we noted that the “moral point of view” betrays the ideal of engaging the other in their otherness. Above, we saw that Gadamer’s notion of “transposing ourselves” into the other’s position is more congruent with our ideal. Gadamer asks that rather than bracket our own particularity, we transpose ourselves into the other’s position with our particularity in order to see the otherness of the other. Furthermore, for Gadamer taking a “moral point of view” is an undesirable task because, in doing so, we mistake our own particularity as universal. For him, when we transcend from our particularity, we still take up some of our prejudices with us. Therefore, the “moral point of view” is informed by our prejudices. Denying this means denying the ontological dimension of human finitude and the permanent incompleteness of understanding. For Gadamer, we can expand our finitude and incompleteness not by transcending, but by placing “ourselves” in the encounter with the other so that our prejudices come to the foreground, and the boundaries of our finitude are highlighted. It is against this kind of unconcealment that the other can disclose itself to us in their otherness and provide the opportunity for us to have a “negative” experience. Gadamer’s principle of openness presupposes this kind of transposition.

Gadamer’s perspective also reveals a third aspect in discourse ethics that was previously unseen by us. This aspect is Habermas’ reliance on reflectiveness. For Habermas, reflectiveness has to do with awareness of the processes of formation of one’s interests and preferences. Through reflection, one situates oneself within the social world, the world of lived experience. It also brings about awareness of certain ideological influences that can contribute to
distortion of communication, which can prevent coming to consensus/understanding. In virtue of these functions, reflectiveness is an important aspect of discourse ethics. We can perceive Habermas’ reflectiveness as a form of self-understanding. Thus, in Habermas, understanding as a form of consensus is impossible without reflection. Similarly, Gadamer argues that there cannot be understanding without self-understanding. Habermas relies on discourse to induce reflection. With regards to the participants in discourse, he also has to rely on their predisposition of good will and willingness to be reflective. Gadamer must trust dialogue partners in the same way. However, there are two main differences between them. First, Habermas thinks that one can reflect oneself out of the influence of tradition, while Gadamer thinks that reflection is possible only within tradition. If Gadamer is right, then Habermas cannot maintain a strict division between ethical and moral discourses. Second, Gadamer goes further in highlighting the role of the different other in reflection and bringing about better self-understanding. Note that since we are historical beings, we can never achieve complete self-understanding. However, encountering and engaging a different other can help us achieve better self-understanding because in this encounter our prejudices, particularities, and differences are disclosed.

Finally, if we accept the Gadamerian perspective on reflection, then we need to take into account the problem of interpretive conflicts that discourse ethics avoids. If our hermeneutical situation informs our transcendence, then it means that the domain between ethical and moral discourses is the domain of interpretive conflicts. The two forms of discourse cannot be kept apart because of this problem. The particularities that make up the ethical discourse get taken up in moral discourse because of the way reflection and understanding work from Gadamer’s perspective. In Part II, we will see how Young, Dryzek, and Mouffe reorient discourse ethics to include interpretive conflicts into deliberation.

**Conclusion**

Gadamer helped us understand that incomplete understanding is a permanent feature of human understanding because of the ontological dimension of human finitude. Incomplete understanding does not only mean that something is understood poorly or partially. It also means that
understanding is situated and particular within the hermeneutical situation. Given Gadamer’s account of incomplete understanding, it was established that interpretive conflicts are inevitable in pluralism.

Based on Gadamer’s account of hermeneutical experience, it was also established that his principle of openness is suitable for beings with incomplete understanding. The principle posits that one must encounter the other in their otherness. One can be open to the other by, first of all, recognizing one’s own finitude and incomplete understanding. Then, it is necessary to let the other disclose its otherness in a dialogue. In this kind of engagement, one must practice openness by being open to be challenged by the other’s otherness and ready to put one’s prejudices, partiality, and situated understanding to the test. If such an encounter takes place, one practices openness by being ready to change one’s self-understanding and revise goals. It does not necessarily mean that interpretive conflicts between different people will be resolved. It is only a suitable disposition to adopt for beings with incomplete understanding who want to live together and partake in the collective democratically.

If interpretive conflicts are unavoidable and if democratic politics is committed to pluralism as engagement and encounter, then it is necessary to revise the idea of democracy. In Chapter I, it was established that democratic politics can approach the problem of incomplete understanding through discourse ethics. Now that it is established that interpretive conflicts are unavoidable, Habermas’ avoidance of the interpretive dimension of understanding has come under question. Section 2.3 established that the strict division between ethical and moral discourses cannot be maintained in a commitment to include all groups of people. Such an inclusion results in interpretive conflicts because general principles must be applied to concrete situations by people with situated understanding. Since in Section 2.2 it was established that Gadamer’s principle of openness is suitable for beings with incomplete understanding, it is necessary to find in deliberative democracy the possibility to instantiate this principle.

With that purpose, I turn to Young, Dryzek, and Mouffe in Part II. I will look at how they approach the problem of interpretive conflicts and establish
asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, agonism as modes of instantiation of Gadamer's principle of openness in democratic politics.
PART TWO

Instantiation of the principle of openness in democratic politics
Foreword to Part Two

In the previous part, we have established that one way to address the problem of incomplete understanding that does not break the link between democracy and pluralism is discourse. We have drawn from Habermas’ discourse ethics to specify the role of discourse for this purpose. Then, by drawing from Gadamer, we have established that, due to the ontological dimension of human finitude, incomplete understanding implicates pluralism in a fundamental way. We have established that incomplete understanding is situated understanding. As such, incomplete understanding gives rise to interpretive conflicts.

This has several implications for discourse ethics. Discourse ethics cannot admit interpretive conflicts due to its strict rationality and requirement for detached understanding. However, we have seen that discourse ethics cannot avoid interpretive conflicts altogether. Second, discourse ethics must allow the expression of situated understanding in its partiality and particularity because that is how we can encounter and engage the other in their otherness. Such an encounter and engagement is necessary because it helps one in self-understanding. Self-understanding is a way to mitigate the problems that arise from incomplete understanding such as moral disagreement and division. In order to achieve better self-understanding, one must be open to the otherness of the other. Thus, we have established Gadamer’s principle of openness as suitable for beings with incomplete understanding.

In Part two, I turn to Iris Young, John Dryzek, and Chantal Mouffe in order to understand how discourse ethics can accommodate the hermeneutical critique. With Young and Dryzek, we will come to understand how Gadamer’s concepts of hermeneutical situation, experience, and consciousness can be expressed in a concretized and politicized manner. We will come to understand hermeneutical situation as it is expressed in terms of social groups and particular discourses and how hermeneutical experience and consciousness can be expressed in asymmetric reciprocity and reflexivity. With Mouffe, we will consider how pluralism can be possible if we acknowledge the antagonistic dimension of human affairs.
These theorists weaken the strict rationality of discourse ethics in order to allow the expression of situated understanding in its particularity and partiality. They also recognize the significance of interpretive conflicts. I show the significance of interpretive conflicts for Young by drawing on her concept of “social perspective”. For Young, social perspectives are instrumental in fighting structural inequality because including them gives a more differentiated picture of the collective. I show how interpretive conflicts can be included in discourse by appropriating his use of the concept of “social perspective”. Further, I show the significance of interpretive conflicts for Dryzek by drawing on his account of “contestation of discourses”. For Dryzek, contestation of discourses allows the inclusion of different discourses such as environmentalism, free market capitalism, feminism, and so on. Inclusion of different discourses leads to inclusion of lateral complexities of an issue and consideration of the whole system of interconnected elements in the social structure. I show how interpretive conflicts can be understood in terms of contestation of discourses and how conceiving of interpretive conflicts in such manner prevents identity conflicts between people. Last, with Mouffe, I show the significance of interpretive conflicts by drawing on her account of agonistic contestation. For Mouffe, agonistic contestation gives the antagonistic dimension of human affairs a democratic outlet to express itself. I show how this prevents repression of antagonism, which otherwise could return as violence.

The main focus of Part two, however, is developing an account of modes of democratic politics that instantiate Gadamer’s principle of openness. By modes, I mean the way in which openness can occur, be practiced, and experienced in democratic politics. By drawing on Young, I develop an account of asymmetric reciprocity as a mode in which one is required to encounter and engage the other in their otherness because of the ontological dimension of human finitude. By drawing on Dryzek, I develop an account of reflexivity as a mode in which one becomes aware of the partiality and particularity of situated understanding by engaging and encountering the other. Finally, by drawing on Mouffe, I develop an account of agonism as a mode of openness towards the kinds of others that might deny the principles of pluralism and democracy.
Chapter III

Plurality as social groups and asymmetric reciprocity as openness

Introduction

Iris Young is an example of Gadamer’s “experienced” person. Her work and political activism show self-awareness of her own partiality and openness to the otherness of others in order to learn something from them. She advocated for these principles in deliberative democracy. She was a radical feminist, political activist, and a political theorist who drew broadly from two generations of Critical Theory represented by the emancipatory critical theories of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse and Habermas’ discourse ethics respectively, the postmodernism of Lyotard, the phenomenologies of Merlau-Ponty and Heidegger; and the existentialism of Jean Paul Sartre. Her earliest works defend politics of difference in light of the problems in the theoretical relationship between democracy and justice (1981), and membership (1986; 1989). In later works, Young focuses on injustices in plural societies that arise from “structural inequality” (see 2000, 6).

Structural inequality arises from the way social positions affect people’s lives. People are positioned differently in the social structure. Every social position has enabling and constraining functions. Some social positions are more enabling, some are more constraining. People do not choose their social position; they are born into it. Social position affects person’s “self-development” and “self-determination”, which for Young are the two measurements of justice (Young 2000, 31-33). In Inclusion and Democracy (2000), Young’s main concern is with injustices that arise from structural inequality in spheres of life where democratic politics cannot reach. An obvious solution to this problem is the expansion of direct democracy to these spheres of life. Young’s approach does not answer the question how to bring democracy into the spheres of life it cannot reach. Rather, she shows how they can be brought into democracy: the

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39 For a comprehensive introduction and discussion of her influence in various fields of social science and political activism, see Ann Ferguson's and Mechthild Nagel's Festschrift Dancing with Iris: The Philosophy of Iris Marion Young (OUP: 2009)
conditions and norms of “deliberative democracy that emphasises the ideals of inclusion, political equality, reasonableness, and publicity” make it possible to address structural inequality (Young 2000, 17).

For Young, the inclusion of social groups in deliberation is the way to address the problem of structural inequality. Members of social groups find each other due to their affinity in experiencing the constraining and enabling features of their social positions. Social groups bring into deliberation a particular and partial perspective. Allowing them to speak from their particularity and partiality gives more possibility and opportunity to identify and address structural inequality through collective action. This is where deliberative democracy is limited. Deliberation is too constrained in its standards of rationality and requirements for universalization and abstraction. Strict rationality means that social groups may sometimes be excluded from deliberation because rationality is connected to one’s communicative skills, which one acquires in virtue of specific social positions. Furthermore, social groups cannot express the partiality and particularity of their experience of injustice because of the requirements for universalization and abstraction. For this reason, Young offers to rethink the norms and conditions of deliberative democracy in order to make it more inclusive and appropriate for the conditions of modern plural societies.

Thus, Young defends plurality, particularity, and partiality of social groups as a resource for democratic politics. If they are a resource for addressing the problems of equality and justice in democracy, then strict standards of rationality must be weakened, and universalism and abstraction must be given up in favour of the situated knowledge and understanding that social groups bring into deliberation. Social groups can bring their perspectives through such forms of communication as storytelling and rhetoric, which the discourse ethics of deliberative democracy does not favour. Therefore, Young appropriates discourse ethics to allow these forms of communication and make deliberative democracy more inclusive.
Young's appropriation of discourse ethics speaks to the main points of my research in the following manner\textsuperscript{40}. First, it shows Young's recognition of the significance of human finitude and the problem of incomplete understanding for deliberative democracy. For Young, collective action against injustice depends on turning to social groups in order to get a better understanding of the general collective picture. Second, the engagement and encounter of social groups shows the significance of interpretive conflicts in democratic politics. At stake in interpretive conflicts is the perspective that social groups bring into deliberation. Their perspective can shift the playing field and offer a new starting point for the discussion. It can change the way the problem is constructed, present it in a new way, and include other groups in deliberation because a new perspective on a problem often reveals other parties that are affected by it. Third, it shows the significance of Gadamer's principle of openness for democratic politics. Young argues that the idea of moral respect in deliberative democracy must be expressed through asymmetric reciprocity. In asymmetric reciprocity, we recognize that we are finite and cannot understand things the way others do. Therefore, we must let them disclose their otherness to us and let it change our own understanding.

In this chapter, I discuss how Young characterizes plurality in terms of social groups; show from her perspective, the significance of interpretive conflicts in including social groups in democratic politics; and argue that her idea of asymmetric reciprocity can be conceived as a mode of instantiation of Gadamer's principle of openness in democratic politics.

In the first section, I draw parallels between Young's concept of social groups and Gadamer's concept of hermeneutical situation. For Young, a social group consists of members who have affinity in their social position. A social group represents a perspective that people have based on their experience, life-history, and situated understanding. I argue that social groups can be conceived as the expression of hermeneutical situation in politics by virtue of these features. Based on this argument, I claim that for Young the modern

\textsuperscript{40} To discuss Young's appropriation of Habermas' discourse ethics, I draw upon a variety of sources, two of which must be mentioned as her main and seminal works. They are Politics of Difference (1990), from which I draw some her non-idealist and hermeneutic dimensions, and Inclusion and Democracy (2000), from which I draw her interpretation of Habermas and positive formulation of her own account of deliberative democracy.
characteristics and challenges of plurality come from the existence of social groups. I also discuss Young’s argument that the abstraction, universalism, and standards of rationality in discourse ethics exclude the perspectives of social groups from deliberation. In connection to the problem of exclusion, I devote the second section to Young’s correctives to discourse ethics that make deliberative democracy more inclusive. Young offers three modes of communication that allow different social groups to disclose their perspectives. I interpret this as communicative plurality that gives means to the other to disclose its otherness.

In the third section, I examine the significance of interpretive conflicts in democratic politics from Young’s perspective. I argue that for Young the significance of interpretive conflicts have to do with the inclusion of social group perspectives that enrich democratic politics. For her, interpretive conflicts can present things in a new way, change our understanding, and provide a different starting point for deliberation. They do so because group perspectives function that way. Group perspectives come from particular location in the social structure, particular experiences and life-histories, and situated understanding. These features of group perspectives add to the significance of interpretive conflicts because for Young the interpretive conflicts are between social groups that represent different perspectives. Including them in deliberation is one way to approach the problem of incomplete understanding. But for Young there is a different positive outcome. For her, interpretive conflicts disclose differential perspectives that constitute the public realm and one way to bring them into deliberation is through such modes of communication as greeting, storytelling, and rhetoric.

In the fourth section, I examine Young’s idea of asymmetric reciprocity. For Young, asymmetric reciprocity is a mode of relationship between people that have differences with regards to their temporality and social positions. I argue that asymmetric reciprocity represents a mode in which Gadamer’s principle of openness can be instantiated in democratic politics. To support this argument, firstly I identify hermeneutical elements of finitude, situated understanding, and historically effected consciousness in the way Young characterizes difference with regards to temporality and social position. Secondly, I show how asymmetric reciprocity supports disclosure, engagement
and encounter of the other in their otherness in the way Young argues for the primacy of the question in a genuine dialogue.

3.1 Social groups as an expression of hermeneutical situation and the limits of discourse ethics

Young sought to include social groups in deliberation as a means to identify and address structural inequality but saw the strict rationality, the requirements for universalisation and abstraction of discourse ethics as an obstacle to her goal. Recall that for Habermas, the more complex and plural society is, the more abstract and general the principles must be in order to apply universally across the differences. Young accepts this argument but she is also aware of the interpretive conflicts that complicate democratic politics in plural societies. For her too, the principles that we apply to fix particular injustices must be general and abstract in order to be applicable across differences. Otherwise, we would not reach an agreement on the principles themselves. For instance, take her idea of justice based on two principles of self-determination and self-development (Young 2000, 31-33). She admits that in order for the theoretical argument to get off the ground, it is necessary to formulate self-determination and self-development at the abstract and general level (Young 2000, 33). However, she immediately notes the interpretive problems that arise when abstract principles are applied in concrete situations. Though, she writes, the level of abstraction makes her argument acceptable at the theoretical level, “interpretation and application of these ideals in a particular political situation, however, is always controversial” (Young 2000, 33). While we agree on the “goals and values in the most abstract sense”, we will “disagree strongly on what the best means of promoting these values in that context, what are the acceptable priorities and trade-offs, and so on” (Young 2000, 33). This shows her sensitivity to the hermeneutical problem we examined in chapter II; namely, her take on discourse ethics is in accord with my Gadamerian account of human finitude and incomplete understanding in terms of hermeneutical situation and the interpretive problems that arise from them.

For Young, the complexity of modern plural societies has to do with the existence of social groups (1989, 261). The interpretive problems with universalization and abstraction in discourses ethics arise because of the way social groups are differentially situated in the social structure. If equality is a
feature of democracy, then social group differentiation in plural societies poses a political problem because the fact is “that some of our groups are privileged and others are oppressed” (1989, 261). Discourse ethics comes short in addressing this problem because of its emphasis on universality and abstraction. To make the problem of social groups clearer, let us look at the way Young defines them.

She distinguishes social groups from groups that form by aggregation on the one hand, and by association on the other. Social groups are a product of affinity and not aggregation or association (Young 1989, 259). Groups defined by aggregation are based on arbitrary characteristics like eye colour, hobbies, likes and dislikes, while groups defined by association are a “collectivity of persons who come together voluntarily – such as a club, corporation, political party, …” (1989, 260). Young defines social groups based on an entirely different notion – that of affinity:

A social group involves first of all an affinity with other persons by which they identify with one another, and by which other people identify them. A person’s particular sense of history, understanding of social relations and personal possibilities, her or his mode of reasoning, values, and expressive styles are constituted at least partly by her or his group identity. Many group definitions come from the outside, from other groups that label and stereotype certain people. In such circumstances the despised group members often find their affinity in their oppression (1989, 259).

Young argues that one of the mistakes political theorists make is in their tendency “to elide social groups with associations rather than aggregates” (1989, 260). In associations, individuals “come together as already formed persons and set them up, establishing rules, positions, offices” (Young 1989, 260). However, relationship based on affinity is not chosen. Moreover, affinity is not a fixed feature of one’s life. It may change.

Let us consider Young’s point for a moment. The complexity of plurality is such that a person can belong to different groups based on aggregation, association, and affinity at the same time. It is not controversial to assume that in modern society a person can be a member of football club, of a housing association and the Labour Party, and find affinity with such social groups as LGBT, working mothers, single parents, etc. Though membership in aggregate
or association groups “fundamentally affects one’s life”, it does not “define one’s very identity in the way, for example, being Navajo might” (1989, 260). We may begin to appreciate Young’s hermeneutical aspect with regards to human finitude when she writes that in social groups “one finds oneself as a member of a group, whose existence and relations one experiences as always already having been” (1989, 260). The hermeneutical aspects become highlighted even more so, when we note that Young’s notion of affinity is linked to Heidegger’s notion of thrownness⁴¹. Young writes:

For a person’s identity is defined in relation to how others identify him or her, and others do so in terms of groups which always already have specific attributes, stereotypes, and norms associated with them, in reference to which a person’s identity will be formed. From the thrownness of group affinity it does not follow that one cannot leave groups and enter new ones. Many women become lesbian after identifying as heterosexual, and anyone who lives long enough becomes old. These cases illustrate thrownness precisely in that such changes in group affinity are experiences as a transformation in one’s identity” (1989, 260).

Gadamer’s account of human finitude is underpinned by his interpretation of Heidegger’s “thrownness”, which denotes the situated nature of our understanding. If we accept Young’s characterization of social groups based on her interpretation of Heidegger’s thrownness, then we should accept that we cannot start from very general and abstract universals as Habermas suggests. Rather, as Young argues, we must start from the particularity of social groups, and the contextuality and historicity of their differentiation. “This means that we must develop participatory democratic theory not on the assumption of an undifferentiated humanity, but rather on the assumption that there are group differences and that some groups are actually or potentially oppressed or disadvantaged” (1989, 261). Here, Young is targeting theories that start from the assumption of what a completely just society would be like, because for her, such a starting point would a priori start from a position that is blind to particularities. The reason is that such an assumption is impossible. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the way understanding works is that it takes up particularities from the hermeneutical situation.

⁴¹ Gadamer’s account of human finitude is based on his interpretation of Heidegger’s notion of thrownness. See page 79 N19 of this thesis
Now, let us return to the political problem with social groups and Young’s proposed political solution for it. The problem is that in plural societies some social groups are oppressed. Young argues that a critical theory of such societies must not start from abstractions and universalizations. However, here she is torn between critical theory and hermeneutics. On the one hand, she recognizes that a certain degree of universalisation and abstraction purchases the necessary critical distance to evaluate injustice. On the other hand, she recognizes that the critical distance must not be acquired by a principle so abstract that it is removed from and blind to the conditions of injustice that arise due to historical and contextual dimensions. Therefore, Young looks for a framework that would yield a general principle of justice and also allow one to start from particularities of concrete groups in concrete societies. In other words, she wants a balance between ideal and non-ideal, universal and particular, general and concrete. For her this balance can be struck in Habermas’ discourse ethics.

Young’s argument against theories that assume independence and transcendence from particularity to have a universal appropriateness across differences is premised by her idea of social groups. Her premise chimes with Gadamer’s historically affected consciousness; namely, that one’s particularity is taken up in one’s act of transcending the particularity much in the same way one’s hermeneutical situation informs and is taken up in all understanding. From this premise, Young takes the position against theories of justice and democracy that start from a transcendent point of view and formulates a universal argument. She holds that traditional arguments oriented from a Kantian perspective maintain that theories of justice and democracy “should be held independently of a particular social or historical circumstances, or practices, as a necessary condition for objectivity” (1981, 291). Furthermore, “in the effort to achieve this universality and objectivity, most modern philosophical accounts seek correct normative principles of social life by adopting a strategy of deriving such principles from a hypothetical starting point” such as the state of nature, the original position, the moral point of view, the ideal observer, etc. (Young 1981, 291).

As we have seen with Habermas, the pretext for the argument in favour of universalization and abstraction usually has to do with the problems of plural
societies in which normative principles can be contested and disagreed. Therefore, the alternative is to derive of a starting point which eschews difference and particularity and which “escapes the specificity of actual historical circumstances” (Young 1981, 291). As a result, “political theorists can claim to derive the correct conception of the just social order from this universal and formal starting point” (Young 1981, 291). While Young strengthens her position against such theories by relying on the critiques by Fisk (1976) and Wolff (1977), we can draw parallels from her position to our Gadamerian position in chapter II. For instance, the argument Young makes is comparable to ours:

as we have seen, however, Fisk and Wolff point out that each account smuggles into the starting point substantive premises derived more or less directly from the theorist’s social circumstances. The theory of the social order which emerges, then, merely reflects in idealized and systematized form the actual structure of society in which the theorist dwells (1981, 292).

I do not think a Gadamerian would object to such an argument given that, as we have seen previously, for philosophical hermeneutics, hermeneutical situation is taken up and informs understanding. If we accept the argument in chapter II, then we agree with Young too because the nature of understanding is such that transcendence carries up the substantive elements of one’s hermeneutical situation.

Having established that, it is important to underline that Young does not want to do away completely with transcending the particular to achieve universality and abstractness. That would mean her giving up critical theory. She recognizes that transcendence purchases the critical distance necessary to evaluate the injustices of society. For her, it is necessary to theorize about democratic politics based on a framework that allows transcendence as well as recognition of the role of particularities. We can say that Young is looking for a hermeneutically informed critical theory in order to balance out the ideal and the non-ideal 42. For this reason she turned towards Habermas’ discourse ethics as a framework that yields a theory of justice that “both stands independent of a given social context and yet measures its justice” (1990, 4). However, as I will

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42 She maintained this position in her most recent work Global challenges: War, self-determination, and responsibility for justice (2007). She argues that the impact of particular historicism and social positions must be taken into account when transcending and so critiques Rawls, Dworkin, Murray, and Meads for not considering particularities.
discuss in a moment, she is aware of Habermas’ own tendency towards universalism and abstractness. Her reason for appropriating Habermas from this critical angle is in line with our own position in chapter II. Namely, similar to Warnke, she thinks that universal and abstract principles are unsuitable in plural societies because they are subject to interpretative conflicts by groups whose differences are contingent to history, culture, and tradition. For this reason, I locate her right between Gadamer and Habermas because she turns towards a more hermeneutical critical theory which emphasises historicity, contextuality, particularity that was more explicit in the first generation of the Frankfurt School critical theory: “critical theory rejects as illusory the effort to construct a universal normative system insulated from a particular society” (Young 1990, 5). Instead, “it is a normative reflection that is historically and socially contextualized” (1990, 5). It is precisely in the tension between universal and particular, ideal and non-ideal that I find Young torn between Habermasian deliberation and Gadamerian conversation because she is at the same time accepting the value of transcendence while remaining sensitive to its hermeneutical constraints.

I now turn to examining the way Young appropriates Habermas’ discourse ethics for her understanding of plurality in modern societies in terms of social groups. She finds Habermas’ discourse ethics as both enabling one to acquire a critical distance while being aware of the hermeneutical constraints that such transcendence inherently has. For Young, Habermas’ ideal speech situation offers a theoretical foundation which can help avoid the problems she identifies with the Kantian formulation. Even though Young’s primary argument is to bring into our focus on injustices the “questions of institutional relations and domination” as well as distribution of material goods, I think that her argument can be extended to the general problems of plural societies (see 1981, 281).

According to Young, Habermas’ discourse ethics allows inclusion of particularities, critical evaluation against the status quo, having general principles that are not too abstract and universal for the particularities of plural societies. She argues “that the application of the ideal speech situation to particular social configurations constitutes a means for solving the problem of how to construct an objective and critical conception of justice which does not merely reflect actual social circumstances at the same time that it remains historically specific” (1981, 281). In this sense, it allows for participants to take
part in deliberation from their concrete circumstances rather than bracket them. For this reason, Young takes discourse ethics as appropriate framework for theorizing democratic politics in plural societies.

Since plurality has to do with social groups (in addition to associations and aggregations), for Young discourse ethics is a framework within which the problem of structural inequality that social groups experience can be addressed (1981, 286). It is suitable for the problem because while Habermas’ discourse ethics presupposes a regulative ideal speech situation which itself is abstract and formal enough to purchase the necessary critical distance, it also allows introduction of historically and materially specific circumstances. In Habermas’ discourse ethics, the ideal speech situation itself is not the goal of justice; it “does not itself constitute a standard or set of principles by which actual social arrangements ought to be evaluated” (Young 1981, 291), rather it “offers the vision of social relations free from domination, the ideal of pure democracy and social reciprocity” (Young 1981, 295) that is purely formal and “abstracts from all particular and historical content” (Young 1981, 291). However, to make it work, “we must introduce material premises derived from actual social circumstances” (Young 1981, 291). Thus, in Young’s interpretation of the ideal speech situation, discourse ethics, allows and requires a plurality of conceptions of general and normative principles derived from the particular historical and cultural circumstances and, as Young concludes, “applicable only to them” (1981, 297). In other words, discourse ethics presupposes an ideal which requires that people come into discourse knowing their own material and physical conditions to the best degree possible, knowing their own interests and values, and their own ethical concerns that are naturally tied to their historical and cultural heritage.

Thus, we see that Young’s appropriation highlights the hermeneutical dimensions of discourse. She takes the capacity of discourse ethics to include

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43 We can find a stronger push towards a more hermeneutically nuanced discourse ethics in her *Justice and Politics of Difference* (1990). There she affirms the impossibility of transcending particularity, historicality, and context because “the call to ‘be just’ is always situated in concrete social and political practices that precede and exceed the philosopher. The traditional effort to transcend that finitude towards a universal theory yields only finite constructs which escape the appearance of contingency usually by recasting the given as necessary” (1990, 5). She adds “normative reflection must begin from historically specific circumstances because there is nothing but what is, the given, the situated interest in justice, from which to start” (1990, 5).
particularities while rejecting Habermas’ emphasis on universality, abstraction, and impartiality in discourse. Similar to our argument on the way hermeneutical situation informs and is taken up in one’s understanding, Young argues that the impartial point of view is impossible because people cannot and should not detach themselves from their own context and particularities (1990, 97). The rationale behind Habermas’ appeal for impartiality and universal point of view is understandable. It calls for a deliberation from the ‘public’ point of view, i.e. from a point of view that is not one’s private interest but the interest of all affected. However, Young argues that impartiality is based on a false dichotomy of the universal and particular, of the public and private, of reason and passion (see 1989, 253-57, 1990, ch. 4). The ideal of impartiality, for Young, is what exposes propensity for a homogenous society in discourse ethics because it excludes those who cannot adopt the public point of view, and those whose particular circumstances are a result of oppression and domination in the structural organization and institutions.

A good example of the problems with this universal point of view is in Young’s critique of the concept of citizenship. Citizen, Young argues, is a concept that presupposes a universal status. It transcends particular interests of every person. When we speak and act as citizens, we speak and act on behalf of the collective. The term citizen refers to a universal point of view, a position that is detached from one’s social/economic position, culture, religion, history, and language. A citizen’s position is all-inclusive and does not discriminate against particularities. When law applies to citizens, it applies to all members across their differences. When a leader addresses the citizens, she/he addresses all members across their differences and not particular groups. Young’s critique of the moral claim of universal citizenship is thus:

The attempt to realize an ideal of universal citizenship that finds the public embodying generality as opposed to particularity, commonness versus difference, will tend to exclude or to put at a disadvantage some groups, even when they have formally equal citizenship status. The idea of the public as universal and the concomitant identification of particularity with privacy makes homogeneity a requirement of public participation. In exercising their citizenship, all citizens should assume the same impartial, general point of view transcending all particular interests, perspectives, and experiences (1989, 257).
The idea is that if one can assume the status of a citizen that requires one to disregard personal interest in favour of the public interest, then it is also possible for one to disregard the influence of one's particular world-views, culture, history, and traditions. To put it in Gadamer's terms, the citizen is not situated in the hermeneutical situation and does not have historically effected consciousness. To be clear, I do not stand against the idea of universal citizenship. What I contest from a Gadamerian point of view, and find support in Young, is the assumption that taking the position of a citizen grants one a universal and impartial point of view. It does not. Even if it is possible that one sheds his/her personal interest when one assumes the position of citizen, I argue that it is impossible for one to shed the particular ways in which culture, history, and traditions has shaped one's understanding. A universal point of view means a view without a horizon, and understanding that has no history or culture. If we accept the argument on human finitude in chapter II, then we accept that any point of view is situated and has a horizon within which one sees and understands things in a certain way. Young maintains a similar line of argument when she points at the constitutive role particular circumstances take in one's attempt to take a universal point of view.

Naturally I agree with Young that we must not be misled that our transcendence from particularities grants us an impartial point of few. Such a mistake results in our imposing our own horizon as universal, our world view and judgements as universally applicable. It denies pluralism. If we recognize that our transcendence takes up with itself and is informed by our historical and cultural context, prejudices, and traditions, then we can participate in a kind of conversation that is open to different others. Only by doing so, can we affirm pluralism. Young’s argument against impartiality not only resonates with Gadamer's position during his debate with Habermas, it also pushes us towards a kind of modesty that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics requires. Grondin remembers that in his last years Gadamer emphasized that “the soul of

It does not mean that one's understanding never changes. In fact, that would be a very un-Gadamerian conclusion. Understanding changes by means of fusion of horizons. This means that understanding changes in virtue of appropriation of the alien, the different other, or the new, by means of what one already knows and understands. That is why Gadamer maintains the universality of the hermeneutic dimension: all understanding is interpretation. This is also the basis of my argument for taking interpretive conflicts seriously. Habermas’ discourse ethics will do well if it turns to the interpretive problems without apriori prejudgment that interpretive conflicts arise from systematic distortions of communication.
hermeneutics … consists in the possibility that the other might be right” (2003, 317). Thus, with Gadamer we understand the nature of openness to different others and with Young we see how such openness translates in a political deliberation without giving up the critical distance Habermas’ discourse ethics purchases us.

In a political conversation, Young argues, groups must not be dismissed for failing to take an impartial (i.e. universal) point of view. Rather, they need and must make themselves heard from their partiality, their particular experiences of injustice: “full and free expression of concrete needs and interests under social circumstances where some groups are silenced or marginalized requires that they have a specific voice in deliberation and decision making” (1989, 263). With Young, we get the sense that one’s partial view is actually their perspective, and that one’s perspective is always partial. It is a resource for democratic politics because of its partiality, because of its differentiated location within the social structure. Young does not conclude that if all perspectives are accounted for, we get a complete picture of the structure. Rather, in public participation from partial perspectives we get differential perspectives that constitute the public realm. In the next section, we will see that she offers to revise the standards of rationality in discourse ethics to include a plurality of forms of communication that allow these perspectives to be disclosed.

For the present, it is important to note the way Young’s argument on including partial perspectives links to my argument about incomplete understanding and how it gives rise to interpretive conflicts. We can understand her argument on partiality in terms of how human finitude is constituted by the hermeneutical situation and the way finitude manifests as incomplete understanding. Indeed, one’s partiality is constituted by one’s hermeneutical situation. For Young, what we lose in impartial discourse are the interpretive conflicts. The most important interpretive conflicts are the ones between social groups because they allow the disclosure and encountering of perspectives that are partial. I elaborate more on Young’s take on interpretive conflicts in terms of group representation in the third section.
In Young’s appropriation of discourse ethics, I see a kind deliberation that recognizes hermeneutical dimensions of understanding. A deliberation that does not require impartial and universal positions can be reflexive against particularities disguised as universal and impartial. We need not to worry that a deliberation that does not assume impartial and universal point of view may disintegrate into opinion sharing between radically divided groups. We need not to worry that admitting the hermeneutical dimensions of discourse results in renunciation of its critical capacities. For Young, group representation and deliberative democracy based on Habermasian discourse ethics leads to a deliberation that does not appeal to the particular interest of particular groups but by appeal to general principles and norms like justice. For Young, “the introduction of such differentiation and particularity into democratic procedures does not encourage the expression of narrow self-interest”; rather, group represented deliberation according to discourse ethics “is the best antidote to self-deceiving self-interest masked as an impartial or general interest” (1989, 263). Discourse ethics requires that one’s interest be linked to a valid general principle, therefore: “in a democratically structured public where social inequality is mitigated through group representation, individuals or groups cannot simply assert that they want something; they must say that justice requires or allows that they have it” (Young 1989, 263). What we carry over from philosophical hermeneutics into discourse ethics is awareness that we neither hold the ultimate truth nor can claim full impartiality and universality of our position.

Thus, Young’s contestation of the internal connection between impartiality and the idea of universal citizenship based on her argument that people cannot transcend without taking up their particularities is similar to Gadamer’s argument on the way ‘historically effected consciousness’ prevents a Habermasian critical theorist from taking a position outside tradition. From Young we receive additional support for Warnke’s argument that Habermas’ discourse ethics cannot do away with interpretive conflicts by relegating them away from moral discourse into ethical discourse. Thus, we will now explore the way in which Young incorporates interpretive conflicts into discourse ethics and at the same time fights Habermasian tendencies for homogenization, exclusion, and abstraction. Our exploration will focus on the ways Young shows different social groups can be included in deliberation. I contend that Young’s inclusion
of different social groups also includes interpretive conflicts. This is because she defines social groups in terms of Heidegger’s concept of ‘thrownness’. Of course, this concept underpins Gadamer’s theme of human finitude on which we based our argument about the inherent possibility of interpretive conflicts in Habermasian deliberation. Her proposition is that a plurality of social groups requires a plurality of forms of communication instead of a single form of (rational) communication that the standards of discourse ethics accept. Therefore, from Young we derive an understanding that pluralism requires not only giving up the ideas of impartiality and universality of discourse ethics, but also expanding the narrowness of its rationality. The rationality of Habermas’ discourse ethics tends to favour dispassionate, neutral, detached, and objective argumentation and forms of speech. This runs the risk of favouring one group over others. Therefore, Young proposes to expand the rationality of discourse ethics in order to include a variety of forms of communication in order to support communicative plurality that allows a variety of channels to introduce differentiation, particularity, and partial – as opposed to impartial – and specific experiences.

In her various works, Young generally points at two limitations of discourse ethics when it comes to affirming pluralism in the deliberative fora (see 1996; 1997; 2000). The first limitation, as was pointed earlier, comes from the rational character of deliberation in Habermasian discourse ethics. The second limitation has to do with the assumption of unity under the aegis of appeal to shared understandings of the participants (1996, 125-6). Young proposes to expand the rationality of discourse ethics to include a broader plurality of forms of communication in order to counter these limitations. Her proposition is to include such forms of communication as greeting, rhetoric, and narrative as supplementary rather than alternative to the rational-argumentative form of communication in Habermas’ discourse ethics. As she puts it in *Inclusion and Democracy* (2000), such a communicative plurality adds a normative force to promote the inclusion of marginalized, undervalued, unrecognized, and/or underrepresented peoples and groups in pluralist democracies (58-81).45

45 It will do well to remind ourselves once more that, just like Young, we should not seek to replace the standards of Habermas’ discourse ethics. That has not been the purpose of this
According to Young, inclusion of the said forms of communication counters the two exclusionary tendencies of deliberative democracy that result from the two limitations she identifies in Habermas’ discourse ethics. First of all, the assumption of unity and consensus has a tendency for external exclusion. This type of exclusion is the most regular form of exclusion in plural societies in which certain peoples and groups are simply prevented from participating in deliberation (2000, 53). As Young puts it, external exclusion simply means that some people and groups are “kept outside the process of discussion and decision making” (2000, 56). While it seems that Young tones down her critique of external inclusion in Habermas discourse ethics in Inclusion and Democracy (2000) compared to her essay in Benhabib’s Democracy and Difference (1996) and her own Intersecting Voices (1997), she nevertheless maintains that an appeal to consensus under shared values would result in an exclusion of people and groups that do not share in those values or are not part of the consensus. Once again, Young sees deliberative democracy based on Habermas’ discourse ethics as the most inclusive and appropriate for countering this kind of exclusion in virtue of Habermas’ principles of discourse.

However, there is a second type of exclusion from which, Young claims, discourse ethics is not immune. It is a more subtle kind of exclusion, which she terms as ‘internal exclusion’. Internal exclusion has to do with cultural and/or highly intellectual/technical character of deliberation promoted by the normative force of rationality in Habermas’ discourse ethics (1996, 122; 2000, 55). It is subtler and therefore less noticeable, and thus harder to remedy in Habermasian deliberative democracy that may risk advocating only nominal inclusion in virtue of the discourse principles (2000, 53). It is less noticeable because according to the discourse principle, all who are affected by the research. I think that the value of Habermas’ discourse ethics can be demonstrably positive for formulating deliberative democratic practices in the complex conditions of what he terms as post-metaphysical world. Young, on her part, is crystal clear that she does not wish to do away with the values of rationality that underpin Habermas’ deliberative model (see Young 2000: 80). Her goal is not to substitute but to supplement because the dispassionate, neutral and rational deliberation required by Habermas’ standards must be more accepting of other forms of communication and persuasion if the normative requirement for maximum inclusion by the discourse principle (D) is to be achieved. Therefore, Young’s three modes of communication are to “accompany” rational argument rather than to replace it (ibid.). What we are seeking here is the realization of the normative function of the discourse principle itself (D), which requires that all affected by the outcome are included in the deliberation. Groups can bring to the attention the effects that observation of a general principle can have on them by means of telling their stories and using rhetorical devises such as metaphorical analogies, figurative speech, similes and etc.
decision may be nominally included in the deliberation but internally excluded from participating because only one form of communication is accepted in the deliberative process according to discourse ethics. This situation cannot be overcome because, as Young notices, it is usually hard to assert oneself against a very subtle exclusion that is often inadvertently imposed by the heightened cognitive and oratory skills of a privileged class of group of predominantly white males (1996, 122; 2000, 55). Young is afraid that due to these exclusions, deliberative democracy cannot bring about respect and trust among all participants and may fail to reach an “understanding across structural and cultural difference, and motivate acceptance and action” (2000, 58). I think we should also take notice of Young’s caution with discourse ethics and ask whether discourse ethics really promotes a democratic politics that can affirm the ideal of pluralism as engagement and encounter. For if we do conceive of pluralism normatively as a process of engagement and encounter across difference, then we also need to go into the process of deliberation itself and ask whether deliberation ought to be uniformly governed by a kind of rationality that we would expect in an academic setting or whether we should allow other means of communication as well. For Young, the communicative rationality of discourse ethics supplemented by greeting, rhetoric and narrative can bring about a democratic politics that affirms pluralism that we wish to see in modern societies.

3.2 Communicative plurality in discourse ethics

We would do well to reconstruct Young’s take on greeting, rhetoric, and narrative as well as her reasons for believing that they provide the necessary supplements for the limitations of discourse ethics. We can understand them as Young’s procedural correctives in her appropriation of discourse ethics. In the next pages I present them in more detail and then turn to the way Young’s appropriation of discourse ethics covers the problem of interpretive conflicts.

According to Young, greeting is a “specific communicative gesture with important and not sufficiently noticed functions for democratic practice” (2000, 57). Drawing from Levinas’ distinction between ‘Saying’ and ‘Said’, Young characterizes the act of greeting someone as opening up to them without
mediating the content \(^{46}\) (2000, 57). It is an act of saying, without the said, in which the speaker simultaneously recognizes and accepts the presence of the others as well as she “announces her presence as ready to listen and take responsibility for her relationship to her interlocutors” (Young 2000, 59). Absence of greeting the other in the second person is the sign of their absence in deliberation and thus greeting is an act whereby one is included and recognized as a participant in the dialogue. This is resonant with my Gadamerian interpretation of pluralism where one does not discuss the other as an object, rather as another subject who has something to say to us. Greeting is an important indicator for when deliberation does not affirm pluralism and thus, I take from Young that it “adds something important to the ideals of inclusive public reason”: “it is not simply that participants in public discussion should have reasons that others can accept, but that they must also explicitly acknowledge the others whom they aim to persuade” (2000, 62; emphasis as in original).

The other form of communication that must be allowed in discourse is rhetoric. Since Plato, rhetoric has had a bad reputation. Especially in Habermasian circles, rhetoric is conceived as a strategic use of speech and therefore not part of communicative action. The form of speech that is usually contrasted with rhetoric is a dispassionate, neutral, detached from private interests and values. Young, like Gadamer, views rhetoric as an inherent part of deliberation\(^{47}\). It is, for her as well as Dryzek and Mouffe, a permanent “feature of political expression to which we ought to attend in our engagement with one another, rather than an aspect of expression we try to bracket in order to be

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\(^{46}\) Young argues that international politics is filled with almost ritualized acts of greeting that are very important in conflict resolution settings. The most prominent one she mentions is the moment of greeting between Yasir Arafat and Yitzak Rabin in 1993: “the moment was and remains a historical turning-point, however, as the moment when Israel for the first time gave greeting to the Palestinians as a group with whom they are obliged to discuss their mutual problems and conflicts” (Young 2000, 62). However, she notes that the situation in inter-social relationships among different groups and the political decision making between them is different. For instance, she cites the case with the American welfare reform in which women were referred to in the third person, which marks their absence in deliberation.

\(^{47}\) See Gadamer’s “Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Critique of Ideology” in Mueller-Vollmer’s The Hermeneutics Reader (2002: 274-290). There, Gadamer argues that rhetoric is inherent to communication because it is the natural part of the suasive power of language. Rhetoric helps overcome misunderstanding as well as disclose an otherwise unknown world much in the same way sciences use rhetorical devices to describe and explain complex phenomena. For a brief history of the concept, also see Susan Shapiro's “Rhetoric as Ideology Critique” (1994: 123-150) where she distils the concept of rhetoric from the distortions that it has acquired through time. She employs Habermas’ terms to argue that our understanding of rhetoric has been “systematically distorted” and if one reverses the inauguration of rhetoric by Cicero as ornamental speech, one can conceive rhetoric in its pure dialectical form.
truly rational” (Young 2000, 64). In her mind rhetoric is a category that distinguishes between what has been said in deliberation and how it has been said.

Political expression always involves figurative speech, similes, and metaphors. In his 2008 presidential run, Rudolph Giuliani, an American lawyer and politician, equated healthcare to a product using the metaphoric example of a flat screen TV. In a common-sense manner, he argued that though everyone is free to buy a TV, not everyone works hard enough to buy one, therefore not everyone deserves one. By the same logic, while everyone is free to purchase healthcare, not everyone deserves it. By equating healthcare to a product, he further argued against healthcare reform in terms of liberal free market economy: if somebody does not want to buy a product, it is unconstitutional for the government to force that person into purchasing. Barack Obama, on the other hand, used the same metaphor to advance his own views on healthcare reform: “In formulating his healthcare act, President Obama placed the product metaphor in the context of commerce clause of the Constitution, Article I, Section 8, which gives Congress the right to regulate commerce. If healthcare is a product that is bought and sold across state lines, then Congress can regulate the selling and buying of it. The Affordable Care Act is based on that metaphor and Obama’s interpretation of it” (Lakoff and Wehling 2012, 12). Here we can see the vices and benefits of rhetoric. On the one hand, as pointed by George Lakoff48, “notice what is not in the frame: if healthcare is a product, it is not a right. Providing healthcare is thus not a moral concern; it is an economic matter. The word affordable fits the economic frame, as do words like market, purchase, and choice” (2012, 12; emphasis as in the original). On the other hand, as we will now follow Young’s lead, this example shows how “rhetoric constitutes the flesh and blood of any political communication” (Young 2000, 65).

From this example, we can understand the way rhetoric allows us to distinguish between what is said and how it is said. In other words, “rhetoric concerns the way content is conveyed as distinct from the assertive value of the

48 Lakoff is a cognitive linguist known in the political sphere for his book on formulating discursive strategies for the promotion of the progressive movement in the USA.
content”, and so “understanding the role of rhetoric in political communication is important precisely because the meaning of a discourse, its pragmatic operation in a situation of communicative interaction, depends as much on its rhetorical as its assertoric aspects” (Young 2000, 65). Of course, one can focus on the distortions that rhetoric brings into discourse, and one can study rhetoric as a category which purchases one a critical access to what Habermas would call the ideological character of political communication as systematically distorted communication. Young would not challenge this (see 2000, 66, 77-80). Rather, she wants to look at three positive functions that are also characteristic of rhetoric and that also allow a more inclusive deliberation. First, “rhetorical moves often help to get an issue on the agenda for deliberation” (Young 2000, 66)\(^49\). Second, “rhetoric fashions claims and arguments in ways appropriate to a particular public in a particular situation” (Young 2000, 67). Here, Young hints at the constructive function of rhetoric by which a speaker appeals to particular experiences, histories, and values of the particular audience in order to get his/her message across. Rhetoric constructs not just the message, but also “the speaker, the audience, and the occasion by invoking or creating specific connotations, symbols, and commitments” (Young 2000, 68). Thus, it allows us to “construct our positions and messages in a way appropriate to the particular context and audience to which we are speaking” (Young 2000, 69). Third, “rhetoric motivates the move from reason to judgement” (Young 2000, 69). For Young, “political argument usually aims ultimately at making judgements about institutions, situations, people, and solutions to problems” (Young 2000, 69). Hence, “the good rhetorician is one who attempts to persuade listeners by orienting proposals and arguments towards their collective and plural interests and desires, inviting them to transform these in the service of making a judgement together, but also acceding to them as judges, rather than claiming himself or herself to know” (Young 2000, 69). These functions make rhetoric an important category to designate as a form of communication that discourse

\(^{49}\) The forms of communication Young has in mind here are: “demonstration and protest, the use of emotionally charged language and symbols, publicly ridiculing or mocking exclusive or dismissive behaviour of others, are sometimes appropriate and effective ways of getting attention for issues of legitimate public concern, but which would otherwise not be likely to get a hearing, either because they threaten powerful interests or because they particularly concerned a marginalized or minority group” (Young 2000, 67)
ethics must attend to “in order to criticize exclusion and to foster inclusion” (Young 2000, 70).

The last form of communication with which Young supplies discourse ethics is narrative. By narrative, she means a hybrid combination between a testimony in court and colloquial storytelling. For Young, narratives are influential in a political setting. I think we should consider Young’s account of narrative as the most conducive to a deliberative democracy that is to affirm pluralism for the five functions which narratives have as a form of political communication. In order to do so, we must take from Young that “the general normative functions of narrative in political communication … refer to teaching and learning” (2000, 77). Telling the story of one’s experience, history, and culture is a teaching and learning experience that reaches across differences in the way that would be most compatible with our ideal of pluralism. If we are to pursue the ideal of pluralism as a process of engagement and encounter, then we must deal with the problem that might be endemic to modern plural societies. It may be the case that different groups and people may not share the same values, experience, and histories that give certain assumptions, perspectives, and world-views their validity. It may also be the case that in modern society the values, experience, and history of one group may dominate. By implication, it may be the case that the assumptions, perspectives, and world-views of this group may dominate discourse. It may also be the case that often rational argument fails in conveying a certain message or a demand for justice; rational argument may not be enough to challenge the dominant assumptions and perspectives. The best example that Young points at is the invention of sexual harassment. According to her, it took women who have experienced harassment to tell their stories to address it as a problem and initiate deliberation and judgement on the issue. For this reason Young values narrative; narrative can help where rational argument may fail. Therefore, let me briefly summarize five political functions of narrative that Young deploys in order to persuade us about its value for discourse ethics. We can see these five functions as five ways narrative can reach across differences in places where rational argument of discourse ethics may not (see Young 2000, 72ff).

First, narrative offers a way to express injustices experienced by a radically marginalized and excluded group, and thus narrative is a form of
disclosure\textsuperscript{50} (Young 2000, 72). Certain groups may have experiences that the contemporary language cannot express in a way that complies with the standards of discourse ethics. Here, telling one’s story discloses the problem and furthers deliberation on the issue. Second, narratives function in “facilitation of local publics and articulation of collective affinities” (Young 2000, 73). This function is closely related to social groups by affinity. For Young, deliberations in plural societies can be dispersed in space and time. Therefore, assembling people affected by the decision can be problematic. In these cases, people most often tend to gather into localized publics or groups based on affinity with the issue or topic at hand. Therefore, “storytelling is often an important means by which members of such collectives identify one another, and identify the basis of their affinity” (Young 2000, 73). Third, narratives help in promoting “understanding the experience of others and countering pre-understandings\textsuperscript{51}” (Young 2000, 73). Fourth, narratives are more conducive to deliberation than rational argument when it comes to “revealing the source of values, priorities, or cultural meanings” (Young 2000, 75). As Young notes, “for an argument to get off the ground, its auditors must accept its premises” (2000, 75). However, the problem with furthering rational argument is exacerbated in pluralist settings where there are “serious divergences in value premises, cultural practices, and meanings, and these disparities bring conflict, insensitivity, insult, and misunderstanding” (Young 2000, 75). When there is a lack of shared source of values and premises, narrative is more conducive because “values, unlike norms, often cannot be justified through argument” (Young 2000, 75). Therefore, narrative can serve as a mode of explanation to the others what certain values, priorities, and cultural practices mean to them. Fifth, narratives “aid in constituting the social knowledge that enlarges thought” (Young 2000, 76).

\textsuperscript{50} Young equates this function to the meaning of Lyotard’s “differend”. In my understanding, Young's equivocation of how narrative brings issues to public view with ‘differend’ suggests how certain experiences disclose themselves and make themselves known to the public. Therefore, to maintain clarity, I will refer to the first function as disclosure without altering the meaning that Young intended.

\textsuperscript{51} Young illustrates this function by bringing to our attention the example with disabled people. Not only does their storytelling promote our understanding of their everyday experience when they are out and about, but also their storytelling can counter our pre-understandings of their lives as limited, deficient in some ways.
There is a Gadamerian tone in this formulation. Young argues that narrative “exhibits the situated knowledge available from various social locations, and the combination of narrative from difference perspectives produces a collective social wisdom not available from any one position” (2000, 76). Both Gadamer and Young see the value of sharing a story in a dialogical manner, rather than monological, as most beneficial in enlarging thought. Just as Gadamer points at the way one can overcome his/her finitude by listening to others, Young points at the way listening to others overcomes the finitude of one’s view of political and social issues. A dialogue, in which people are not restricted to rational-argumentative justification of their position but also allowed to tell their story, can in fact produce a collective perspective within a horizon that can encompass the subject of the discourse in a more wholesome way.

3.3 Social perspectives as interpretive conflicts

I now turn the way in which Young’s appropriation of discourse ethics allows for recognition of interpretive conflicts. We will see that the significance of interpretive conflicts for democratic politics has to do with inclusion of group perspectives.

Our argument on interpretive conflicts is premised by Gadamer’s account of incomplete understanding in terms of hermeneutical situation. We established that incomplete understanding gives rise to interpretive conflicts when different others encounter and engage with one another. We saw that discourse ethics is limited in recognizing the significance of interpretive conflicts for democratic politics. A Habermasian argument against interpretive conflicts is based on two premises. The first premise is the separation between ethical and moral discourses that divide between subjective and objective claims of validity respectively. The second premise argues that if interpretive conflicts are included in the moral discourse it will result in partial and distorted communication.

In Warnke’s critique of Habermas, we saw that there cannot be a strict division between ethical and moral forms of discourse. General principles that

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52 One may also connect this point to the argument that empirical democrats such as Helene Landemore make about the epistemological benefits of collective narratives from a variety of social positions. See Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many (Princeton University Press: 2012)
are agreed upon in the moral discourse still need to be interpreted and applied through the ethical discourse. Interpretive conflicts exist in the overlap between ethical and moral discourses and do not let them be strictly separated. Our reason for thinking so has to do with the hermeneutics of understanding that we looked at in the first and second sections of chapter II. Young’s account of social groups is consonant with our premises. In the first section of this chapter, we discussed Young’s characterisation of plurality as consisting in social groups and the role of their involvement in democratic politics based on their particular experiences, histories, and cultures. Based on her idea of social groups, Young would concur with the argument that general principles are subject to interpretive conflicts and that we need to take interpretive conflicts into account in democratic politics. For her, what is at stake in interpretive conflicts is the inclusion of particularity as a resource for democratic politics. Also at stake is the particularity that social groups represent as a resource for expanding incomplete understanding. Recall that in her appropriation of discourse ethics, she argues that general principles must not be abstract and removed from particular circumstances by a form of understanding that claims a universal and transcendent status. What we must be aware of is that understanding is situated and our discussions must not require abstractions, transcendence, and impartiality. Young writes:

Appeals to principle have a place in such discussion, but they must be applied to particular situations in the context of particular social relationships. Thus participants in political discussion cannot transcend their particularity. If participants are to make objective judgements appropriate for their context, they must express their own particularity to others and learn of the particularity of those differently situated in the social world where they dwell together (2000, 113).

We know that application of a principle to particular situations is an act of understanding. It is a hermeneutical task and as such, it is an act of interpretation. Young also recognizes that particular groups apply general principles in particular situations by interpreting them from their own perspectives. For Young, what is at stake in interpretive conflicts is the disclosure of partiality, of particular perspective that comes from particular

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53 As far as Gadamer is concerned, “all understanding is interpretation” (Gadamer 2013: 407)
history, culture, and social position. This is consonant with our idea of hermeneutical situation. Partial perspectives are a resource for democratic politics because they disclose the plural and differentiated constitution of the public realm. Since each perspective has a location within a structure it discloses, the significance of interpretive conflicts lies in the inclusion of partiality as a resource in democratic politics:

Inclusion of and attention to socially differentiated positions in democratic discussions tends to correct biases and situate the partial perspective of participants in debate. Confrontation with different perspectives, interests, and cultural meanings teaches each the partiality of their own and reveals to them their own experiences as perspectival. Listening to those differently situated from myself and my close associates teaches me how my situation looks to them, in what relation they think I stand to them. Such a contextualizing of perspective is especially important for groups that have power, authority, or privilege. Those in structurally superior positions not only take their experience, preferences, and opinions to be general, uncontroversial, ordinary, and even an expression of suffering or disadvantage, as we all do, but also have the power to represent these as general norms. Having to answer to others who speak from different, less privileged, perspectives on their social relations exposes their partiality and relative blindness. By including multiple perspectives, and not simply two that might be in direct contention over an issue, we take a giant step towards enlarging thought (Young 2000, 116).

Young’s argument for including other perspectives shows the significance of Gadamer’s hermeneutical consciousness and experience for democratic politics. There are political benefits to encountering the other in their otherness, letting the other challenge our prejudices and change our self-understanding. Critical distance from particular circumstances is achieved not by transcendence and universalization, but by confronting the other in their otherness with awareness of our own hermeneutical situation.

So, what are the terms in which Young includes interpretive conflicts in democratic politics? The primary mode of including interpretive conflicts is inclusion of social perspectives that each social group brings into deliberation. For Young, perspectives can be included in deliberation as part of group representation, which I take to be a form of institution she defends in terms of politics of difference. In Inclusion and Democracy (2000, chapter 3), Young
defends her version of politics of difference against theories that uphold the idea of ‘common good’. Her politics of difference is about recognizing difference in a positive formulation, rather than negative. Young notes that the supporters of the idea of common good mistakenly argue that recognizing difference is in reality just attending to the special interest of certain groups while disregarding the common good. She counters that with an argument that in the modern plural world there cannot be a common good in the strong sense because different people have different claims of injustice that they have experienced. They must be given a chance to express the particular ways in which they experience injustice. Appeals to common good may block such an expression. Therefore, democratic theory must uphold the value of difference as a resource for democratic politics.

Furthermore, through Young’s defence of politics of difference, we get a sense of how interpretive conflicts in the form of social perspectives cannot be reduced to clash of identities. Since interpretive dimension of understanding is linked to the hermeneutical situation\(^{54}\), and since Young’s idea of social groups is linked to hermeneutical situation, we can follow her in her disassociation of politics of difference from the logic of identity politics in two ways: “first, we should conceptualize social groups according to a relational rather than substantialist logic”; “secondly, we should affirm that groups do not have identities as such, but rather that individuals construct their own identities on the basis of social group positioning” (Young 2000, 82). In the first instance, she emphasises that we cannot assume that there is a common denominator that all individuals in a social group share. Its members can consist in people who can be differentiated according to their gender, colour, culture, education, class, etc. Nothing warrants the application of identity politics here because the members of this collective gather according to relational affinity with each other in their experiences of inequality as, for instance, homosexuals. In the second instance, Young wants to ensure that we do not conceive of social groups as groups with identity in themselves. Otherwise we would roll back into the logic of identity politics in the first instance. It is important for deliberative democracy that we conceive of individuals as capable of constructing their own identities. There is

\(^{54}\) It will do well to recall and keep in mind that in chapter II we discussed that hermeneutic situation has a horizon, and horizons are not fixed; they are fluid, and therefore one’s understanding is not fixed.
no point for deliberative politics if people cannot be trusted to be reflective and change their minds about certain things. However, it is important to recognize that “social groups … position individuals, but a person's identity is her own, formed in active relation to social positions, among other things, rather than constituted by them” (Young 2000, 99). We need to recognize that “individual subjects make their own identities, but not under conditions they choose” (Young 2000, 99).

Based on her characterization of politics of difference in terms of social groups and its difference from identity politics, it is reasonable to suppose that Young would not see interpretive conflicts as a matter of identity. Rather, she would see them in hermeneutical terms as part of situated understanding, which influences the way we see political matters and informs our deliberation. This is similar to the argument in chapter II about the way one’s hermeneutical situation serves as the background which informs and is taken up in one’s interpretation. It is the totality of one’s lived-experience that constitutes one’s finitude, one’s incomplete understanding, and partiality with which one understands practical matters. Our lived-experience gives us a perspective in the same manner our hermeneutical situation gives us a horizon. Young argues that social perspectives must be represented as part of group representation in democratic politics (see 2000, 121-148). For Young, representing the social perspective of a group is an important aspect of inclusive and legitimate representation that is different from representing group interests and opinions.

A social perspective is that which people have based on their experience, history, and situated knowledge. Social perspectives vary due to social positions that are always differentiated by colour, gender, class, physical disability, education, etc. Every person has a differentiated social location based on these aspects. A good illustration of this point is Young’s critique of feminism. She argues that the concept of woman in feminism is not differentiated enough to include the social positions of women other than white, middle class, Christian women. The social positions of women are always differentiated, so one needs to keep in mind the experiences of different women. The kind of sexism that white, middle class, Christian women are attuned to notice and experience is different from the kind of sexism that black, and/or lower class, and/or Muslim women experience. Hence, their social
perspectives on women’s rights and what feminist movements need to achieve might differ. Young writes, “because of their social locations, people are attuned to particular kinds of social meanings and relationships to which others are less attuned” (2000, 136). Much like the finitude delineated by one’s hermeneutical situation which limits one’s horizon, people may not be in the social position to notice the particular meanings of general principles in particular situations. Even though social positioning can be differentiated at the individual level, social groups and perspectives can emerge because, as Young writes, “following the logic of the metaphor of group differentiation as arising from differing positions in social fields, the idea of social perspective suggests that agents who are ‘close’ in the social field have a similar point of view on the field and the occurrences within it, while those who are socially distant are more likely to see things differently” (Young 2000, 136).

Young argues for the inclusion of perspectives into representation for the same reasons that Gadamer argues for the role of the other in hermeneutical experience. She writes:

Representing an interest or an opinion usually entails promoting certain specific outcomes in the decision-making process. Representing a perspective, on the other hand, usually means promoting certain starting points for discussion. From a particular social perspective a representative asks certain kinds of questions, reports certain kinds of experience, recalls a particular line of narrative history, or expresses a certain way of regarding the positions of others. These importantly contribute to the inclusion of different people in the decision-making process and nurture attention to possible effects of proposed policies on different groups (2000, 140).

Hermeneutical experience has the structure of genuine experience, which is a negative experience. It is an experience that lets us understand something in a new way. If social perspectives offer a different starting point, then encountering social perspectives is a hermeneutical experience because they disclose things in a new light. Social perspective is finite. Its finitude is its value to democratic politics. Social perspective represents specific location in the social structure and a specific lived-experience of a group. Young’s idea of social perspective brings home the argument that the significance of interpretive conflicts is in enriching deliberation with transformative and world disclosing dialogue. The reason we need to engage and encounter the other in their
otherness is precisely because the other discloses the question at hand from a new perspective. A different “starting point for discussion” is possible when the other presents its partiality, particularity by speaking from its otherness. Part and parcel of interpretive conflicts is presentation of something from one’s point of view against a different position. Interpretive conflicts are about disclosing one’s otherness relative to others. The standards of rationality and the requirements for universalism and abstraction in discourse ethics preclude this possibility. For Young, social perspective enters discussion not through rational deliberation but through greeting, storytelling, and rhetoric. This is the reason her procedural corrections are so important for democratic politics. Communicative plurality in deliberation allows a shift in the very way a problem is expressed and perceived. As in the case with sexism, it also allows the construction of a problem. It is the social perspective from the lived-experience of women that was expressed in their testimonies that made sexism an issue and constructed the debate on women’s rights and equality. Social perspective cannot be expressed in a rational discourse. It can be expressed in a discourse where one is allowed to share a lived-experience by telling one’s story and using rhetorical devices to construct, as Young puts it, “the speaker, the audience, and the occasion by invoking or creating specific connotations, symbols, and commitments” (2000, 68).

Genuine experience, Gadamer argues, is an experience that comes from openness to the otherness of the other. His principle of openness is about engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness. It is about letting the other challenge our prejudices and changes our understanding as well as self-understanding. In Young, engagement and encounter of perspectives that is congruent with Gadamer’s principle of openness is supported by her idea of asymmetric reciprocity. Next, I examine asymmetric reciprocity as a mode for instantiating Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic politics.

3.4 Asymmetric reciprocity as instantiation of openness in democratic politics

In “Asymmetrical reciprocity: on moral respect, wonder, and enlarged thought” (1997), Young critiques Benhabib’s idea of moral respect outlined in Situating the Self (1991). It is worth noting that both Benhabib and Young accept Habermas’ discourse ethics as a suitable framework for deliberative
democratic politics in plural societies. They both take issue with Habermas’ requirement that participants bracket their particularities to make rational consensus possible. For them, this requirement risks serving as a pretext for exclusion on the one hand and for homogenizing plurality on the other. Both think that deliberative democracy and consensus on general principles can be possible without bracketing particularities. However, their approaches to this problem are different. Both think that the idea of moral respect must be changed in order to allow partiality and particularity in deliberation. Benhabib offers to think about moral respect in terms of symmetric reciprocity; Young offers to think about it in terms of asymmetric reciprocity.

Benhabib offers to reformulate Habermas’ idea of moral respect in terms of symmetric reciprocity in order to include partiality and particularity in deliberation. Drawing from Arendt’s “enlarged thought”, Benhabib conceives of symmetric reciprocity as achieved by the moral act of assuming the other’s position, or looking at socio-political matters the way others would look at them. Thus, deliberative democracy need not bracket particularities in upholding Habermas’ idea of moral respect. Actors achieve moral respect by symmetrically reciprocating in looking at things from each other’s point of view (see Benhabib 1991, 137). If each of us reciprocated in this moral act, then, for Benhabib, we would not need to leave our particularities behind and still be able to come to consensus on general norms.

Young is critical of Benhabib’s idea of moral respect in terms of symmetric reciprocity. I claim that Benhabib’s idea precludes the principle of openness while Young’s idea of asymmetric reciprocity instantiates it in democratic politics. There are three ways in which symmetric reciprocity precludes openness. First, symmetric reciprocity risks obscuring difference because imagining how another person may view things must presuppose a great degree of sameness between two people (Young 1997, 45). Second, it is ontologically impossible to accurately imagine what it is like to be somebody else and view things as they would from their perspective (Young 1997, 46). Every person and group has a life-story, a totality of historical experience that cannot be reduced to one event or cannot be represented wholly from one of its parts. This life-story partly makes up the other’s situatedness that one cannot just imaginatively occupy and “get”. Assuming the view of somebody else
presupposes an overlap of historical experiences and situatedness. However, for Young, no matter how much two “stories” overlap, there is always a remainder, a difference between the two that account for the otherness of the other. The other’s perspective can be imagined only partially and only within a particular situation. The whole totality of one’s life-story and perspective cannot be grasped fully because the whole is not reducible to any of its parts. Since we cannot relive one’s life, we must accept that we cannot symmetrically reciprocate in imagining what it is like to be the other\textsuperscript{55}. Third, relying on symmetrical reciprocity as moral justification for judgement can yield “politically suspect” results (Young 1997, 47). If it is ontologically impossible to accurately assume another’s position, it means that we might be filling in the parts that we do not “get” by what we already know and presume – i.e. prejudices. For example, “when people obey the injunction to put themselves in the position of others, they too often put themselves, with their own particular experiences and privileges, in the positions they see the others” (Young 1997, 48). Young continues, “when members of privileged groups imaginatively try to represent to themselves the perspective of members of oppressed groups, too often those representations carry projections and fantasies through which the privileged reinforce a complementary image of themselves” (Young 1997, 48). In each of the three points Young makes about symmetric reciprocity, we see that there is no sense of letting the otherness of the other present itself and confront us as the principle of openness prescribes. Instead of symmetric reciprocity, Young proposes to uphold moral respect in terms of asymmetric reciprocity.

For Young, we are asymmetric in two main ways: with regards to our temporality and position. Temporal asymmetry has to do with the history of each position. Young writes “each person brings to a communication situation the particular experiences, assumptions, meanings, symbolic associations, and so on, that emerge from a particular history, most of which lies as background to the communicative situation” (1997, 51). This “history is inexhaustible, always subject to possible retelling in new contexts” (Young 1997, 51). She argues that temporal asymmetry makes it impossible for one person to adopt another’s perspective “because he or she cannot live another person’s history” (Young

\textsuperscript{55} Indeed, Young points at three examples that demonstrate the impossibility of assuming another person’s perspective. She titles them “Three stories of irreversibility” (see 1997, 41-44).
1997, 51). Second, there is asymmetry that comes from what Young calls “the specificity of position”. Young’s notion of “position” as based on Heidegger’s idea of ‘thrownness’ and is linked to her idea of “social groups”. Though in this particular essay the idea remains the same, Young does not elaborate it in reference to Heidegger’s ‘thrownness’ as she did it in her previous works (see 1989, 260). Rather, this time Young refers to Hegel’s ontology of self and other to make her point: “each social position is structured by the configuration of relationships among positions” (1997, 52). The relatedness between family, civil society and state in Hegel’s ontology illustrate Young’s notion well. We can see how one’s position as a family member can be understood in relationship to one’s position in the civil society, which in turn can be understood in its relationship to the state. However, as Sandel shows (2014, 91), Hegel’s ontology is similar to Heidegger’s account of the structure of the world, which in my view means that Young does not depart from her original formulation of ‘social position’ based on Heidegger’s facticity. Young brings together the philosophies of these two thinkers: “persons can flow and shift among structured social positions, and the positions themselves cannot be plucked from their contextualized relations and substituted for one another” (1997, 52). The second part of this sentence echoes Heidegger in the way he argues that Dasein is its world and cannot be separate from it. To me, retaining Heidegger’s voice in Young is important for understanding the hermeneutical dimensions of her thought in the next paragraph.

Young’s idea of asymmetric reciprocity has four hermeneutical aspects that help in making it an instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness. First, it is based on Young’s recognition of human finitude (see 1997, 49). Second, it is based on the recognition of situatedness evident in her idea of social position. Third, we can see that Young’s idea of temporality resembles Gadamer’s historically effected consciousness. Temporality has a similar regulative function to historically effected consciousness given that she argues that it is impossible to place oneself in another’s historical horizon fully. Fourth, asymmetric reciprocity recognizes the primacy of the question in a dialogue. I would not say that the primacy of the question is exclusively a hermeneutical idea. However, Gadamer recognizes it as an important part of openness in dialogue (see
Gadamer 2013: 370-387). An open person asks questions that invite the other to disclose its otherness.

Young argues that symmetric reciprocity is ontologically impossible because we are finite. We cannot relive the totality of life-history of another person or a group. We can only understand part of it or, perhaps, share in living a part of that history together. However, the whole is not reducible to its parts. This argument presupposes human finitude in the sense that our own perspectives are bound within our own life-history. Our perspective, as Young refers to it, or horizon, as Gadamer refers to it, is bound within this finitude. When viewed from the point of view of finitude, we can see that for Young moral respect conceived as symmetric reciprocity reveals itself as the opposite of openness. Our finitude within our own hermeneutical situation means that we cannot understand something from the perspective of another person as he/she might. Ignoring this impossibility means that that we risk engaging with the other person without encountering his/her otherness. If I can just represent to myself the other person’s view and understand things from his/her perspective, I am not in a dialogical relationship with this person. The understanding I achieve in this manner is not bilateral. Therefore, symmetric reciprocity is not according to the principle of openness and does not bring about understanding across differences.

Asymmetric reciprocity also recognizes situatedness of understanding and the regulative function of historically effected consciousness in virtue of Young’s ideas of social position and temporality. As we saw above, social position constitutes one’s social perspective, which is partial and particular. Therefore, it recognizes that understanding is situated. Historically effected consciousness, if you recall, is a regulative idea in Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’. It means that the consciousness experiencing the object of understanding, as well as the object itself, have had a history of effect. Young’s idea of temporality is similar. She writes: “each person brings to a communication situation the particular experiences, assumptions, meanings, symbolic associations, and so on, that emerge from a particular history, most of which lies as background to the communicative situation” (1997, 51).
The most important element in asymmetric reciprocity that makes it a counterpart to Gadamer's principle of openness is its emphasis on the primacy of questions (see 1997, 55). For Young, the proper expression of moral respect is asking the other questions to encounter its otherness rather than assume an answer for it. A question invites the other to disclose its otherness to us. In Young's terms, a question precedes the inclusion of a different perspective. Indeed, for Young our finitude obliges us to ask questions because there is no other way for us to understand and see things wholly as the other does. No matter how much we share in common, there is always a remainder that accounts for the otherness between us. Young notes that Habermas too forgets about the primacy of questions and focuses overwhelmingly on the answers (see 1997, 55). Thus, we see how asymmetric reciprocity instantiates the principle of openness that enables bilateral understanding and transformative dialogue. Similar to Gadamer, Young argues that we need to maintain dialogue because we are finite.

Recognition of finitude, situated understanding within a social position, temporality, and the primacy of the question are the elements that help understand asymmetric reciprocity as an instantiation of Gadamer's principle of openness. Yet, the argument can be made stronger once we see that Young is defending openness in her argument against symmetric reciprocity. I claim that Young proposes asymmetric reciprocity instead of symmetric reciprocity because openness is at stake, as well as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness. For Young, taking one's point of view can lead to an illusion that one already knows the other (1997, 49). It can impede communication rather than aid it because “if you think you already know how the other people feel and judge because you have imaginatively represented their perspective to yourself, then you may not listen to their expression of their perspective very openly” (Young 1997, 49). The idea of moral respect conceived as looking at things from other's point of view may actually reinforce one's identity investment in the established understanding of the other. Taking another’s point of view has a moral appeal but it may end up preserving our mistaken or incomplete view of others. It denies Gadamer's idea of genuine experience. It precludes opening up to the other, asking him/her questions and
letting his/her otherness challenge our prejudices, change our self-understanding, and expand our incomplete understanding.

Previously, I argued that Gadamer’s idea of “transposing ourselves” into the horizon of the other falls short of the principle of moral respect. This is because for Gadamer moral respect means closing ourselves off from the dialogue partner and making ourselves unavailable to the challenge our partner’s otherness poses. For Young, the idea of moral respect conceived in term of symmetric reciprocity leads closure of the self from the other too. For example, Young writes “if you think you can look at things from their point of view, then you may avoid the sometimes arduous and painful process in which they confront you with your prejudices, fantasies, and misunderstandings about them, which you have because of your point of view” (1997, 49). Thus, Young defends openness in asymmetric reciprocity and her defence includes the role of hermeneutical (and genuine) experience in engagement and encounter of the other. Young writes:

It is more appropriate to approach a situation of communicative interaction for the purpose of arriving at a moral or political judgement with a stance of moral humility. In moral humility one starts with the assumption that one cannot see things from the other person’s perspective and waits to learn by listening to the other person to what extent they have had similar experiences. If I assume that there are aspects of where the other person is coming from that I do not understand, I will be more likely to be open to listening to the specific expression of their experience, interests, and claims.

56 I appreciate the fact that in her essay Young brings Derrida to bear against Benhabib’s conception of moral respect. Young takes Derrida’s notion of gift-giving as a model for reciprocity in communication. I am offering a tendentious reading by drawing parallels to Gadamer’s terms and concepts. Concerning the conflict of interpretation that my reading raises with regards to Young’s identifiable source, from Gadamer’s perspective, he is not in disagreement with Derrida with regards to “understanding” (see Gadamer 1989). Derrida’s method of deconstruction relies on Heidegger but he did not associate himself with the hermeneutic tradition. Derrida was highly suspicious of it because for him hermeneutics harboured the Western tradition’s will to dominate the other by understanding it. However, Grondin observes that Gadamer started highlighting “openness” in hermeneutic experience after his debate with Derrida. During this debate, Derrida questioned Gadamer’s reliance on “good will” in understanding the other. Derrida thought that there is no reason that this understanding would not involve or hide a form of “appropriation” of the other. For Derrida, there is no reason to disbelieve that “good will” can masquerade as the will to dominate the other. Gadamer conceded but added that any question directed at dialogue partner expresses the good will to understand (see 1989). Grondin notes how Gadamer admitted that “understanding implied some form of application, which can indeed be read as a form of appropriation” (Grondin in 2005: 982-987). As a result, Gadamer pressed heavily that hermeneutic experience is about openness to being corrected.
Indeed, one might say that this is what listening to a person means. (Young 1997, 49)

Dialogue is essential for Gadamer. For him, the condition of possibility for a genuine dialogue is the Socratic admission of one’s own ignorance (see Gadamer 2013, 370-387). Not just philosophy, but openness to difference starts with the recognition of one’s finitude and incomplete understanding followed by a question directed at the dialogue partner. For Gadamer, Socrates was the genuinely experienced philosopher and dialogue partner. For Young, like for Gadamer, true moral respect and openness are expressed by two things: admission of one’s finitude, situated understanding, temporality, and asking a question that invites the other into a transformative dialogue. Thus, I propose Young’s asymmetric reciprocity as a mode of instantiating Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic politics committed to the idea of pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other.

Since all engagement presupposes directedness towards understanding, Young also proposes her own conception of understanding. However, her conception is underspecified and needs to be worked out if we are to perceive asymmetric reciprocity as the instantiation of the principle of openness. Gadamer’s principle of openness is underpinned by understanding conceived as ‘fusion of horizons’. It is bilateral and a result of each person being present from within their own particularity, with their own prejudices and fore-structures. Young underpins asymmetric reciprocity with a conception of understanding that falls short of ‘fusion of horizons’. She differentiates between two types of understanding. One kind of understanding involves engagement with the other directed at finding similarities between the parties. They engage to find common grounds and proceed further in deliberation. In this kind of engagement, parties construct “identification and reversibility” with the each other, which, Young argues, means that they never transcend their “own experience” (1997, 52). The second way of understanding the other involves a sense of wonder and “getting out of ourselves and learning something new” (Young 1997, 52). In this mode, parties are open to hear something new and something unexpected. For

Young, this kind of openness requires suspending one’s assumptions “in order to listen” (1997, 53). Suspension of assumptions opens one up to “new variations, new modalities on some practice or action or situation that is related to but beyond [one’s] experience” (Young 1997, 53). Young advocates the second one as appropriate for asymmetric reciprocity. I worry that it falls short of Gadamer’s conception of understanding in the principle of openness and can pose a problem for instantiating the principle of openness as asymmetric reciprocity in democratic politics.

The conception of understanding Young upholds does not seem so different from Habermas’ argument that understanding (consensus) between different others can only be reached when all sides have bracketed their particularities. This equivalence poses a threefold problem. First, it may pose problems to the criterion of pluralism as encounter of commitments. Since Young leaves “suspending” one’s assumptions underspecified, it might mean that we leave our commitments and experience behind. Second, suspending one’s assumptions when encountering something new falls short of the principle of openness because that would mean that we need to suspend our particularity, partiality, and “legitimate” prejudices too. If openness is being open to the otherness of the other, and the otherness is other only in relation to our own particularity, then we need to be specific about what we need to suspend. Three, if I were to suspend my assumptions, then openness has no meaning because my assumptions are not available to be challenged by the other. “Suspension” of my assumptions can be one more way I can make myself unavailable to the otherness of the other. Unless I am mistaken in my reading

58 It puzzles me that Young turns to this kind of division of understanding given that her earlier work involving the same concept of “social position” draws heavily from Heidegger. It is hard to see how her earlier formulation of “social position” based on Heidegger’s thrownness ends up requiring a conception of understanding where one should suspend assumptions and transcend one’s own experience. If I understand Heidegger’s philosophy correctly, then it is clear how first, one cannot assume the position of the other because in each of our cases our Dasein, in one of its senses, is a totality of a lived story and, therefore, no one can live it for us representatively. Second, it is not necessary to leave my own assumptions behind to understand the otherness of the other because Heidegger’s basic point shows that any distinctive characteristics of something, i.e. its otherness, shows itself in relation to others. Thus, the otherness of the other can be understood precisely in relation to my own assumptions and experience. It is harder still to imagine that in this specific essay, the reference to Hegel’s ontology of the self and the other doesn’t prevent this confusing division of understanding. Is not Hegel’s ontology of self and the other indicative of the relatedness between the self and the other? It seems to me the Hegel’s account of ethical life within family, civil society, and state shows that the self and other can be differentiated only in reference to each other. That is, each has to retain rather than leave behind that which makes it distinct so that it can be understood in
of Young, there is a way to rescue her from this confusion because she does not specify what suspending one’s assumptions might involve or what kinds of assumptions require “suspending”.

It strikes me that there are two things that Young wants to happen in “understanding across difference” (see 1997, 52ff). One, there must be genuine interest and openness to the other. Two, the otherness of the other must be understood in their own otherness, i.e. we should not appropriate it. Both are possible in asymmetric reciprocity. She writes:

We meet and communicate. We mutually recognize one another and aim to understand one another. Each is open to such understanding by recognizing our asymmetry. A condition of our communication is that we acknowledge the difference, interval, that others drag behind them shadows and histories, scars, traces, that do not become present in our communication. Thus, we each must be open to learning about the other person’s perspective, since we cannot take the other person’s standpoint and imagine that perspective as our own. This implies that we have the moral humility to acknowledge that even though there may be much I do understand about the other person’s perspective through her communication to me and through the constructions we have made common between us, there is also always a remainder, much that I do not understand about the other person’s experience and perspective (1997, 53).

In this passage, Young is at her closest to Gadamer’s principle of openness and fusion of horizons. The argument is that each must acknowledge the way in which their understanding finite and be open to challenge by the otherness of the other. It is possible to weaken Young’s requirement to suspend assumptions based on this passage. Suspending assumptions can mean that we suspend the quick judgements made about the other based on ready-to-hand prejudices. Thus, the assumptions we suspend are the ones that may
prevent us from being open. This clarification brings Young’s conception of understanding and asymmetric reciprocity to accord with Gadamer’s fusion of horizons and the principle of openness. Since we are asymmetrically related, we need to approach the other according to the principle of openness through hermeneutical experience and consciousness. Young also argues that the value of different positions is how their partiality brings about a negative experience. Previously, we saw that a group’s perspective offers a new starting point of the discussion. It can change the way the problem is perceived and presents things to our understanding in a new way. The partiality of a position also shows our own partiality, which is hermeneutical consciousness. Asymmetric reciprocity is the condition of possibility for such experiences in the same manner the principle of openness allows hermeneutical experience and consciousness.

Thus, from Young, we get a sense of how we are asymmetrically positioned due to our finitude, situatedness, and temporality. She proposes to conceive of moral respect in terms of asymmetric reciprocity, an idea that translates hermeneutical situation, experience, and consciousness into democratic politics. Asymmetric reciprocity brings the transformative dialogue between different social groups and fusion of horizons into democratic politics. The principle of openness starts with recognition of finitude, which asymmetric reciprocity does with regards to social group positions and perspectives. The principle requires encounter of the other in their otherness, which asymmetric reciprocity does because it preserves the primacy of question in letting the other disclose its otherness to us. The principle requires openness to challenge by the otherness and consequent change in self-understanding, which asymmetric

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59 This, of course, raises questions about suspending our experience with sexist, racist, destructive, disruptive, etc. groups. One could make an Aristotelian argument, as Gadamer does (2013: 330), i.e. that the subject would have enough practical sense to make a judgement when to suspend and be open to encounter and when not to. However, encountering something that is not just different but radically opposite to us can be illuminating. For instance, in her paper titled “Hearing the Other’s Voice” (2013), Cynthia Nielsen highlights how according to Gadamer’s “fusion of horizons”, new understandings can surface from encountering the interpretations and horizons of those with whom we would have a very deep and, perhaps, exclusive, disagreement: “a conversation with a Black Nationalist, who, while respecting King, is critical of his method of non-violent active resistance and advocates in certain severe situations the use of force for emancipatory purposes, may alert me to shortcomings in King’s approach. I may continue, however, to believe in the ethical merits of King’s non-violent strategies to effect social reform, and yet by genuinely listening to my dialogue partner’s perspective, my own horizon has been enriched and broadened. What I formerly saw as simply a ‘wrong’ strategy on the part of the Black Nationalist is now understood as more intelligible, even if I disagree with such an approach in the end. Stated differently, I am now able to see the Black Nationalist’s strategy as a legitimate and ethically valid possibility, even if I am more persuaded by King’s strategy”.
reciprocity does in virtue of the kind of understanding it aims to achieve. Thus, asymmetric reciprocity is a mode in which Gadamer’s principle of openness can be instantiated in democratic politics. Its significance comes from the way it recognizes the value of interpretive conflicts. Because we are asymmetric, we need to allow the other to disclose itself through greeting, storytelling, and rhetoric. Through these modes of communication, the other not only discloses its otherness, but also brings about change in our self-understanding.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we examined three aspects of Iris Young’s work. First, we saw that she questions abstraction, universality, and rationality in discourse ethics from premises that are similar to the one’s in Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. Namely, Young recognizes that discourse ethics cannot pretend to transcend the influences of particular histories, cultures, and social positions because we always understand the object of discourse and engage with others from the perspective of our own circumstances. We saw that in making this argument, Young has a similar ontology to Gadamer; that is, she starts with recognition of finitude and incomplete understanding. Young expresses these ideas through her notion of social groups. Social groups, for Young, characterize the plurality in modern societies and they are different from other kinds of groups because membership in a social group is based on affinity rather than aggregation or association. Affinity, as a term in Young’s thought, is related closely to *thrownness*, because relationship based on affinity can be involuntary: the experience of two people can just resonate with one another like in the case of handicaps. Second, we saw that through her idea of social groups, Young recognizes the significance of interpretive conflicts in democratic politics. For her, interpretive conflicts allow social group perspectives to be included as a resource for democratic politics. Discourse ethics comes short in including perspectives because of its requirements of rationality, universalism, and abstraction. Thus, Young offers procedural correctives that allow greeting, storytelling, and rhetoric as modes of communication through which the other can disclose its otherness. We practice openness to otherness by allowing the others to tell their stories and use rhetorical devices in ways that influence and change our understanding. Third, we examined Young’s asymmetric reciprocity as a mode of instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic
politics. Asymmetric reciprocity is a type of moral respect in which we allow social groups to present their perspectives through different modes of communication, allow them to challenge our prejudices because we recognize our own finitude, and allow the otherness of the other change our self-understanding. Next we turn to Dryzek’s work to examine how he understands plurality, discourse ethics, and the manner in which he is willing to accommodate interpretive conflicts.
Chapter IV

Plurality as discourses and reflexivity as openness

Introduction

Besides social groups, plurality of modern societies consists in different discourses. Discourses also exert influence on people’s understanding, constrain and enable action in a similar manner to social positions. Dryzek appropriates Habermas’ discourse ethics because the standards of communicative rationality can induce people to reflect on, problematize, and change the discourses that in part constitute their understanding of politics and others in society. Dryzek accepts Young’s correctives in discourse ethics but worries that including particularity through storytelling and greeting can turn interpretive conflicts into conflict of identities. In order to avoid this, he offers to think of interpretive conflicts in terms of contestation of discourses. Contestation among discourses removes the personal element from the conflict and in a way sublimes identity conflicts. This kind of contestation, when it follows the standards of communicative rationality, is capable of inducing reflexivity. Through reflexivity, people can become aware of how their understanding is constituted by the precepts of particular discourses and know what kinds of further actions are made available to them by their situatedness. This chapter establishes Dryzek’s idea of reflexivity as a suitable mode of instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic politics.

In the deliberative camp, Dryzek is known as a “cautious” Habermasian (see Scheuerman 2006, 92). He is critical of the merger between deliberative democracy and liberal constitutionalism that followed the debate between Habermas and Rawls (see Dryzek 2000, 27ff). For him, the merger resulted in the narrowing of deliberation in two ways. First, liberal constitutionalism narrowed down the criteria for “authentic deliberation”. Deliberative democracy adopted a singular form of public reason. This restricted forms of communication that can be included in deliberation to rational argumentative forms of speech. For Dryzek, this results in exclusion of different groups of
people. Thus, it can be established that Dryzek is concerned with preserving the presence of plurality in democratic politics. He favours “a more tolerant position”, which “would allow argument, rhetoric, humour, emotion, testimony or storytelling, and gossip” (Dryzek 2000, 1). As it was established in the previous chapter, allowing different forms of communication is conducive to the inclusion of plurality and supporting pluralism. The second way deliberative democracy has narrowed down has to do with the way liberal constitutionalism has imposed itself as a foundational framework for deliberative democracy. In effect, the merger put liberal institutions beyond critique and evaluation in the process of deliberation (Dryzek 2000, 27-30; see also Scheuerman 2006, 85ff). For Dryzek, liberal constitutionalism is just another discourse among others that constitute identity and politics, and thus, make one’s understanding situated and partial. Therefore, it should also be subject to reflexivity and critique.

In light of this, Dryzek formulates his own strand of deliberative democracy which he styles as “discursive democracy”. It relies on Habermas’ critical theory founded on the theory of communication action and discourse ethics, and (“loosely”) on Foucault’s conception of discourses as structures that harbour power (see Dryzek 1990; 2000). It is also influenced by Young’s and Mouffe’s critiques of deliberative democracy (see Dryzek 1996; 2005; 2006; 2010a; 2010b). Thus, Dryzek formulates a form of ‘discursive democracy’ “in which Habermas’ ideas about uncoerced speech and communication typically loom in the background” (Scheuerman 2006, 86) but without the strict limits of its rationality, and which adopts a critical attitude towards liberal institutions as deserving “more in the way of critique than celebration” (Dryzek 2000, 28).

It is necessary to note that there are two ways Dryzek uses the term ‘discourse’. First, drawing from Habermas, he uses discourse as unconstrained communication that functions as a problem solving mechanism when understanding breaks down. Second, Dryzek uses discourse as historically and culturally specific linguistic constructions that allow people to interpret the world in particular ways. There are political discourses, economic discourses, spiritual, and so on. What Dryzek refers to as political and economic discourses, we used to understand as ideologies. Neo/liberalism, neo/conservatism, neo/realism, socialism, free market capitalism, environmentalism – all are particular discourses that constitute politics and identities. Thus, when we say
situatedness of understanding, from Dryzek’s perspective, it should be conceived as situatedness within particular discourses.

To maintain clarity in using ‘discourse’ in these two distinct ways, I have made a stylistic differentiation in the following manner. Henceforth, I refer to Habermas’ conception of discourse as unconstrained communication with capitalized ‘Discourse’; and I refer to particular discourses with a lower-cased ‘discourses’.

This chapter consists in three sections. The main aim is to establish Dryzek’s idea of reflexivity as a suitable mode of instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic politics. In order to achieve this aim, it is necessary to highlight the hermeneutical aspects of discursive democracy.

Section 4.1 establishes Dryzek’s characterization of particular discourses as the expression of hermeneutical situation in politics. This argument will be supported by showing how Dryzek conceives of discourses as capable of constructing meaning, exerting particular and partial influence on understanding, and constituting politics and identities. For Dryzek, Discourse ethics is limited in addressing these features of discourses because of the rationality and universalization it requires. His worry is that Discourse ethics itself is blind to the way it may reinforce certain discourses over others due to its strict standards of rationality. Therefore, he argues that rationality and universalization must give way to a more differentiated and particularistic deliberation in order to purchase the critical edge against dominant discourses.

One way to do that is to allow for “discursive representation” in the public sphere. Dryzek offers to conceive of the public sphere as a “home to constellation of discourses”. In the public sphere, discourses can contest one another according to the standards of communicative rationality. In effect, this contestation induces reflexivity, which Dryzek conceives as an act of reason that helps counter the constitutive influence discourses exert on politics, identity, and, we will add, understanding. Dryzek’s idea of reflexivity is significant because it reveals the hermeneutical aspect of discursive democracy. For Dryzek, reflexive action can only be possible from within a given system like the hermeneutical situation. It cannot be autonomous. Thus,
this section will conclude with drawing parallels between Gadamer’s hermeneutical concepts and Dryzek’s idea of reflexivity.

Section 4.2 establishes the significance of interpretive conflicts for Dryzek. He allows particularity to be expressed in deliberation because partiality is a resource for democratic politics. However, Dryzek worries that including particularity in deliberation can devolve interpretive conflicts into conflict of identities. Therefore, he argues that interpretive conflicts must take place as contestation of discourses. Particularity and partiality must be expressed as part of a discourse because this way it is not personal. For Dryzek, people are more amenable to changing their preferences when their identity is not at stake. Contestation between discourses removes the element of identity from contestation without ceasing its participation in politics because identities are in part constituted by discourses. The significance of interpretive conflicts as contestation of discourses has to do with the way it allows discursive democracy to include the lateral complexities of any issue and provides the picture of the whole system of interconnected elements in the social, economic, and political structures.

Section 4.3 establishes reflexivity as a suitable mode of instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness. For Dryzek, reflexive action is capable of reconstituting particular discourses. Reflexive action can be induced in an intersubjective interaction, particularly in the public sphere where discourses contest one another. It has its own distinct logic which has to do with “reflexive intelligence” and “constitutive reasoning”. Reflexive intelligence is awareness of the partiality of one’s understanding, its situatedness, and of the constraining and enabling features of the discursive fields, historical moment, and circumstances. Constitutive reasoning is an act of reason that guides action with intention for constituting a desired world. The section shows how this act of reason does not break with the relatedness between hermeneutical situation and understanding on the one hand, and the relatedness between peoples on the other. It shows how these two aspects have the elements of hermeneutical experience and consciousness, which makes reflexive action an instantiation of openness.
4.1 Discourses as expression of hermeneutical situation and the limits of Discourse ethics

I do not presume to argue Dryzek out of the Habermasian universalist camp. Undoubtedly, he belongs there (see Blaug 1996, 74-75). I do, however, want to clarify the terms in which he assumes his “membership” in this group because he is aware of the limits of universalization. Dryzek rethinks the high level of abstraction and universalization in Habermas’ Discourse ethics because he wants to take into account the role of concrete contexts of meaning. In doing so, Dryzek subscribes to Habermas’ universalism only in terms of the assumptions that Habermas makes about the universality of communicative ethics in all forms of communication. Similar to Young, who asserts communicative ethics as naturally linked to democratic values in virtue of the “moral respect and egalitarian reciprocity” that they implicitly harbour (Young 1997, 41), Dryzek argues that the democratization of civil society and state institutions should draw from the inherently democratic features of Habermas’ discourse ethics rather than historically and culturally specific democratic models (see 1990, 113, 220; 2006, 160-1; 2010a, 114).

In short, the universalism of Dryzek’s discursive democracy has to do with the communicative ethics and standards of Discourse ethics. However, he wants to reorient it to take into account the concrete particularities of different contexts of meaning that arise from particular historicity, culture, social and political circumstances of concrete groups rather than steer Discourse ethics away from them up into abstraction. The terms in which Dryzek characterises context, particularity, and situation are, however, different from the way Young understands them. Whereas Young recognizes particularities in terms of facticity of social position and social groups, Dryzek recognizes particularities in terms of different discourse formations. To contrast, if for Young one’s particularity is constituted by social position, for Dryzek one’s particularity is partly constituted by discourses. Dryzek writes:

Discourses construct meaning, distinguish agents (with the capacity to take effective action) from those who can only be acted upon, establish relations between actors and others, delimit what counts as legitimate knowledge, and define common sense (Milliken, 1999). Discourses are a matter of practice as well as words, for actions in the social realm are always accompanied by language that establishes the
meaning of action. So practices help constitute, reconstitute, and sometimes challenge discourses. Even something as simple as presenting a passport at immigration control helps reinforce the discourse of sovereignty. Discourses can embody power in that they condition norms and perceptions of actors, suppressing some interests while advancing others. Discourses pervade, constitute, and help explain the structure of international affairs. The power of discourses arises in their ability to structure and coordinate the actions of individuals subject wholly or partly to them. This coordination can apply to individuals who otherwise have no formal relationship in that they never meet face to face, are not part of the same organization or same state, and have no direct interaction (2006, 3).

Dryzek emphasises the role of particular contexts of meaning by drawing “loosely” from Foucault’s conception of discourse. This puts his discursive democracy at the crossroads between Habermas’ and Foucault’s conceptions of discourse. As a result, he retains the Habermasian conception of discourse as a problem solving mechanism with awareness that participants deliberate from the perspectives of particular discourses like liberalism, conservatism, socialism, etc. For Dryzek, particular discourses partly structure identities and constitute the world (see Dryzek 1990, 171; 2006, 4). However, it is worth noting that Dryzek does not subscribe to Foucault’s pessimism about our ability to overcome the constitutive features of discourses. Instead, he argues that the universal pragmatic standards of everyday communicative ethics are rational means by which participants can change their minds and take some agency in reconstituting their identity and the world (2006, 6, 24; 2010a, 32).

Accordingly, his position between Habermas and Foucault purchases Dryzek a critical edge to question whether Discourse ethics itself reinforces particular discourses. Furthermore, it supports his argument on discursive

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60 Dryzek does not subscribe to Foucault’s position fully. He turns to him to only highlight the constitutive features of particular discourses: “Here it is necessary to think of ‘discourse’ in (loosely) Foucauldian rather than Habermasian terms: a discourse is a shared set of assumptions that enables its adherents to assemble bits of sensory information into coherent wholes” (2000, 51). Through Foucault, Dryzek only wishes to highlight the power of discourses in constituting a certain reality. But the emphasis he wants to make is on his own concept of “reflexive modernization” as a force against that power (Dryzek 2000, 75). For Dryzek, openness to contestation between discourses is a means for reflexively countering the constitutive power of particular discourses (2000, 75). Dryzek writes: “To Foucault and Foucauldians discourses are the prime causal factors in human affairs, including politics. My account of the contestation of discourses is quite different, because it allows that there is much more to life and politics than discourses. The claim is only that the contestation of discourses in the public sphere is the most defensible way to think about discursive democracy on a society-wide basis” (2000, 79).
democracy. If discourses have constitutive influence, then contestation between different agents is contestation between discourses. For Dryzek, “contestation of discourses in the public sphere is the most defensible way to think about discursive democracy on a society-wide basis” (2000, 79). Discursive democracy is about contestation of discourses and as such it offers democratic practices through which actors can reconstitute themselves and the world. One of those practices is reflexivity.

With regards to the conception of discourse, in Dryzek we are working in the tension between two conflicting claims: one claim is that discourses structure the world; the other claim is that they are amenable to conscious agency. The following paragraphs draw attention to how Dryzek’s sensitivity to particularity, partiality, and situated understanding in the first claim makes discourses an expression of hermeneutical situation in democratic politics. Central to the second claim is the idea of reflexivity, which will be discussed in more detail in Section 4.3

For Dryzek, discourses consist in five elements: ontology, agency, motivation, relationships regarded as natural, and rhetoric. These elements influence Discourse by framing problems in particular ways, providing underlying assumptions such as the ideally rational consumer, or offering a framework for justification of certain values, norms and principles (1990, 174; 2006, 3, 165). The ontological elements of discourses usually have to do with recognizing or not recognizing “key entities” such as “God, individuals, social classes, or nations” (Dryzek 2006, 165). Agency refers to those entities, who are “recognized as having the capacity to act, others treated as only capable of being acted upon” (Dryzek 2006, 165). For example, “traditional realist discourse in international relations emphasizes states as the key agents, ignoring NGOs and transnational corporations”; “Marxists, in contrast, would see social classes as the key agents, with the state as the instrument of the dominant class” (Dryzek 2006, 165). Motivation is as an element that allows discourses to explain how the “agents can be seen as moved by self-interest, perhaps in narrow material terms, or by concern for some common good” (2006, 165). Discourses tend to have particular specifications about what counts as natural and unnatural relationships: “so market liberals regard competition as natural. Realists regard violent conflict as part of the natural
order. Feminists would stress more empathetic and cooperative relationships. Other possibilities include equality, cooperation, and hierarchies based on race, gender, wealth, or intelligence” (Dryzek 2006, 165). Finally, rhetoric is an element that every discourse employs. Discourses often draw upon “metaphors and other rhetorical devices” such as “the idea that states interact like billiard balls on the table, the idea that the Earth is like a ‘spaceship’ in its fragile life support systems” (Dryzek 2006, 166). (Recall the illustrative example of Rudolph Giuliani’s and Obama’s use of the metaphor of TV for healthcare which shows their embeddedness in market liberal discourse.) Rhetoric is an important part of every discourse, especially when we consider understanding “public opinion in terms of the outcome of contestation within the public sphere” (Dryzek 2000, 50). Rhetorical devices not only disclose the particularity of underlying discourses but also serve an important function in forming and rallying public opinion and transmitting it to the state (Dryzek 2000, 50).

Thus, the particularity of every discourse is expressed by these five elements. These elements as well as Dryzek’s emphasis on their constitutive influences point at the interpretive dimension, which will be discussed in Section 4.2. For if discourses contest over such things as justice, then each will differ in ways the general principle translates according to the five elements. To be more concrete, if we return to the same metaphor on healthcare, we can understand the way in which the issue is taken into the discourse of market economy via the analogy of healthcare with TV. The analogy frames, draws equivalences, and ultimately interprets the issue according to the discourse of market economy. Other discourses with different ontologies, agency, relationships, motivations, and rhetorical devices can do the same. They can contest their interpretations, creating interpretive conflicts as a result of this plurality. Suppose that the constraints of the market economy discourse can be challenged in deliberation by the more traditional liberal democratic discourse. Suppose that by denying the TV metaphor, a liberal hijacks healthcare into a discourse within which it can be rendered as imperative to individual liberties and freedoms. Often, problems with health can be a permanent impediment to fulfilling and exercising one’s freedom and liberty to pursue one’s happiness. According to the rationality of the liberal discourse, not market economy, the
(US) government has a constitutional obligation to provide and secure universal healthcare in order to protect individual rights and liberties.

Thus, similar to the hermeneutical situation, discourses let agents interpret the world in particular ways. One’s understanding, as is with healthcare, is situated within a discourse. Thus, interpretive conflicts emerge as contestation between discourses for Dryzek. General principles can also be subject to interpretation by discourses and so Dryzek is consonant with the hermeneutical critique of Discourse ethics on interpretive conflicts. For Dryzek, A discourse may be defined in somewhat un-Habermasian terms as a shared way of comprehending the world embedded in language. In this sense, a discourse is a set of concepts, categories, and ideas that will always feature particular assumptions, judgements, contentions, dispositions, intentions, and capabilities. These common terms mean that adherents who subscribe in whole or in part to a given discourse will be able to recognize and process sensory inputs into coherent stories or accounts, which in turn can be shared in intersubjectively meaningful fashion. Accordingly, any discourse will have at its center a story line, which may involve opinions about both facts and values. Discourses involve practices, not just words, as social actions are generally accompanied by words that indicate the meaning in action. […]

Any discourse embodies some conception of common sense and acceptable knowledge it may embody power by recognizing some interests as valid, while repressing others. However, discourses are not just a surface manifestations of interests, because discourses help constitute identities and their associated interests. The relevant array of discourses depends upon the issue at hand (though some discourses can apply to a range of different issues), and can evolve with time. For example, when it comes to economic issues, relevant discourses might include market liberalism, antiglobalization, social democracy, and sustainable development. When it comes to international security, pervasive discourses might include realism, counterterrorism, Islamic radicalism, and neo-conservatism (2010, 32).

There are a number of relevant aspects here. First, similar to Gadamer’s hermeneutical situation and Young’s idea of social group perspective, Dryzek recognizes that the particular precepts of every discourse inform and are taken up in one’s political communication. In other words, one interprets and appropriates general principles and norms from within the discourse(s) one is
part of. Second, it provides a sense of how plurality of discourses may lead to interpretive challenges regardless of the consensus on general principles. Before moving the discussion to interpretive conflicts in the next section, it is necessary to consider how, according to Dryzek, Discourse ethics is limited in recognizing the significance of constitutive influence of discourses and the constraints they impose on Discourse itself.

According to Dryzek, every paradigm, be it normative or empirical is essentially rooted in some particular discourse(s). Discourses constitute, maintain, and reconstitute paradigms that serve as justificatory and legitimizing frameworks for forms of politics, political practices, institutions, and forms of relationships. Take, for instance, the liberal paradigm of democratic theory. The constitution of the liberal paradigm is a function of its organization around the idea of individual liberty. Thus, the liberal paradigm rests on a particular discourse that serves, as Dryzek would put it, as a “shared set of capabilities that enable the assemblage of words, phrases, and sentences into meaningful ‘texts’ intelligible to readers and listeners” (Dryzek 1990, 159). Thus, due to precisely these functions, discourses link paradigms and political practices into coherent and meaningful wholes with their own rationality. The specifically Western liberal discourse constitutes a liberal paradigm in which such divisions between private and public property, individual rights, freedoms, and interests give rise to the elaborate Western liberal multiparty democracies with institutional checks and balances.

It is demonstrable that discourses specific to culture, context, and history can produce paradigms with other specificities. A convincing example to illustrate this point can be gained from the discourse that embodies the African paradigm of one-party democracy described the political theories of Leopold Senghor and Julius Nyerere (Nursey-Bray 1983, 96-111). In contrast with the liberal paradigm, the “traditional African” (Nursey-Bray 1983, 99) paradigm of one-party democracy is a function of its organization around the ideas of community and communal consensus. The discourse within which this paradigm rests simply does not allow the combination of words “individual liberty” to form the same kind of coherency as it does in the West. In Gadamer’s terms, the people for whom it will not make sense simply do not have the ‘prejudices’ to understand and apply them in the way they are normally
understood in the Western liberal democracies. Whereas the West has ‘prejudices’ that allow the phrase ‘individual liberty’ to have a positive meaning, the traditional African ‘prejudices’ give the phrase a negative meaning as a highly unwelcome way of life. Looking at this example through Gadamer’s terminology illustrates that Dryzek’s recognition of the way discourses constitute one’s understanding of politics is consonant with Gadamer’s recognition of the role ready-to-hand ‘prejudices’ play in understanding.

In this example, we see that particular discourses can play constitutive and sometimes oppressive roles in Discourse ethics. They can constrict Discourse ethics within a single paradigm. This way of understanding the role of particular discourses is consonant with the main thrust of criticism that Warnke and Young express about Discourse ethics. Dryzek also recognizes that Discourse ethics defines a very narrow scope for deliberation in virtue of its embeddedness in the rationalism of Enlightenment (see Dryzek 1990).

Now, Dryzek’s appropriation of Discourse ethics as a framework for contestation of discourses in the public sphere will be examined. Particularly, Dryzek appropriates of the idea of “authentic reflection” as a means to counter the constitutive tendencies of particular discourses that otherwise Discourse ethics might reinforce.

It is necessary to recall the two claims Dryzek makes about the conception of discourse. He claims that particular discourses constitute and reconstitute identities, politics and political practices. They might even play into the argumentative-rational standards of Discourse ethics and constrain deliberation within one particular paradigm. Particular discourses can be constitutive this way and the rationality of Discourse ethics might end up reinforcing their dominance. His other claim draws from Discourse ethics to show how agents can counter the constitutive influence of discourses through reflecting intersubjectively on inclusive and equal. The form of that this intersubjective reflection takes is contestation of discourses. This approach, according to Dryzek, is called discursive democracy. In his words, it

rests on a tension between two related phenomena: first, the importance of discourses in ordering the world (and its conflicts); second, the potential for the structure of discourses to itself become the target of popular reflection and conscious
action. The tension here arises because if discourse were in reality manipulable by human agents they would lack any independent ordering force of their own. But they are not manipulable at will. Human action takes place within the context that discourses provide: discourses themselves both enable and constrain actions (2006, 24).

Agents can counter the constitutive influence of discourses through Discourse ethics. That is, reflection on one’s constitutedness can only occur in an intersubjective communication with other people\textsuperscript{61}. One can rarely become fully aware of one’s own prejudices without being exposed to people who have a different view of things. This kind of communicative engagement, for Dryzek, must be according to the rationality of Habermas’ communicative action (1990, 29).

The public sphere, distinct from the state institutions, is the proper venue for such deliberation. There are several reasons Dryzek gives for this. First, the public sphere is not directly part of the state institutions where communication takes an instrumental character. Rather, it is home for Habermas’ ideal speech situation (see Dryzek 1990, 38; 1987). Participants of deliberation in the public sphere can be much more amenable to changing their minds about their opinions, interests, and preferences (see Dryzek 1996). Often, in deliberation in a state institution like the parliament, the stakes are very high. Deliberation in such venues is much more consequential. It must come to judgement eventually and a decision must be made. Deliberators resist changing their minds almost deliberately in these kinds of institutionalized settings. By contrast, when deliberation occurs outside the state institutions, deliberators tend to be much more reflective and open to others’ points of view. They are much more likely to change their mind about something outside formal and official deliberative institutions such as the parliament. Therefore, the perfect place for deliberators to contest particular discourses is the public sphere because it sets the conditions most conducive for Habermas’ ideal speech situation. Second, the state institutions cannot accommodate a plurality of discourses. Rather, they tend to enforce and institutionalize the ideals and values of one discourse like liberal constitutionalism. Therefore, the public sphere is the proper home for discursive representation of many discourses.

\textsuperscript{61} Notice that here too the role of encountering the other as described by Gadamer comes back into picture.
For Dryzek, the public sphere can be home to what he calls “constellation” of contested discourses (1990, 38). With these two features, the public sphere is not subject to the state. Rather, it serves as a medium between the individual and the state (Dryzek 1990, 40; 1987) and be home to what Dryzek calls authentic reflection.

Authentic reflection can be affirmed in a deliberation that is inclusive and non-coercive; a deliberation that links particular experiences to a general point or norm (see Dryzek 2000, 68), and one that is “capable of inducing reflection” (Dryzek 2006, 52), and is consequential in the sense that deliberation should actually result is a judgement with an outcome (Dryzek 2010, 11). Dryzek offers these criteria as tests for determining the legitimacy of deliberation and for including other forms of communication such as greeting, rhetoric, and narratives (see Dryzek 2000, chapter 3). With these specifications, Dryzek pushes towards a means that can counter the constitutive features of discourses and specifies terms under which he accepts Young’s communicative plurality specified in the previous chapter. If any of the rhetorical devices or narratives fail these criteria, they are not included in the deliberation of Dryzek’s discursive democracy.

There is no disagreement between Young and Dryzek on these criteria. Synonymous with Dryzek’s criteria, Young also proposes that forms of communication not fail the criteria of “inclusion, political equality, reasonableness, and publicity” (see Young 2000, 17). Therefore, I will proceed on to the role of authentic reflection in countering the influence of discourses without going into technical differences in the general consensus between Dryzek and Young on the significance of communicative plurality for a more inclusive democratic politics. The fact of the matter is both Young and Dryzek are admissive of forms of communication other than the neutral and dispassionate rational argument so long as they pass their mutually consistent criteria.

For Dryzek, like for any deliberative democrat, reflection is endogenous to deliberation. So, one may rightly ask: if reflection is endogenous to deliberation, then why is it necessary to thematise Dryzek’s take on it? Wouldn’t it be in all forms of deliberation regardless of Dryzek’s mediation? What is
gained from Dryzek is the significance of reflection with regards to situated understanding that comes from particular discourses and, by implication, its significance to interpretive conflicts in the form of contestation of discourses. For the idea of pluralism this thesis is promoting, Dryzek highlights the significance of reflection for different agents in their role as representatives of different discourses when engagement and encounter is between discourses.

Being reflective, though natural to many, is something that needs to be specifically induced if engagement and encounter among people that interpret things differently is to be pursued. Therefore, Dryzek gives the significance of reflection as a “conscious action” (Dryzek 2006, 24) to reconstitute the constitution by particular discourses. Dryzek calls it “reflexivity”. “Reflexivity is by definition sensitivity to the degree to which actions themselves help create the contexts for action – that is, they are constitutive of the actor’s social situation”; and “to the extent that this situation is defined by the relative weight of competing (or complementary) discourses, action should be sensitive to how it reinforces, undermines, or reconstructs a particular discursive field” (Dryzek 2006, 85). The intersubjective process in which situated understanding can be addressed is “reflexive modernization”. It is “a process whereby individuals become aware of the traditions, rules, and understandings that govern their lives – and see them as potentially open to change” (Dryzek 2006, 117). This resonates with Gadamer’s ‘historically effected consciousness’. However, in drawing this parallel between Gadamer and Dryzek, it is necessary to work out their differences.

While for Gadamer reflection naturally occurs and proceeds from within a tradition, for Dryzek this leads to political problems. Dryzek would call Gadamer’s approach “reflexive traditionalization” in contrast to “reflexive modernization”. Reflexive traditionalization can entrench individuals and groups deeper and more fundamentally into their worldviews (see Dryzek 2006, 119). Dryzek’s example to illustrate his argument is the reflexive reaction induced by globalization and modernity that “leads individuals to seek shelter in fundamentalist religion, ethnic identity, or nationalism” (2006, 119). Dryzek is concerned with the threats that such “reflexive traditionalization” poses for transnational democracy (see 2006, 119). His concern must be taken seriously. I claim that Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics does not lead to reflexive
traditionalization. Let us look at the following argument Dryzek makes to which philosophical hermeneutics cannot object:

Reflexive action is engaged from within a system, not from the outside. That system inevitably imposes constraints on action as well as providing opportunities for action. Indeed, it is the presence of these constraints which makes action “reflexive” as opposed to “autonomous,” for “autonomy” implies the absence of constraints. In discourse terms, the structure of what Bourdieu (1993) calls “discursive field” helps constitute who actors are and what they can do – though this field is also amenable to reconstruction through their actions (Dryzek 2006, 119-120).

Given Gadamer’s account of the hermeneutical situation, consciousness, and experience discussed in chapter 2, and given his argument defending hermeneutical reflection in the debate with Habermas, it is reasonable to claim that here Dryzek is consonant with philosophical hermeneutics. For Gadamer, reflection is always from within a hermeneutical situation. Reflection comes from within tradition, and traditions are part of one’s hermeneutical situation. For Gadamer, reflection is constrained within the hermeneutical situation in a similar manner “reflexive action is engaged from within a system”. However, for Gadamer, the constraint has a positive function because the hermeneutical situation gives reflection its epistemic substance. By taking this position, Gadamer does not come to the conclusion that Habermas and Dryzek conclude about him.

Hermeneutics does not end up reinstating the same tradition and giving way to “reflexive traditionalization”. Reflexive traditionalization is precisely the kind of an outcome that would not be the result of a hermeneutical reflection because hermeneutical reflection is about openness to the new and the other in virtue of one’s awareness of the finitude of one’s reflection; a finitude within one’s hermeneutical situation. This finitude can only be overcome if one recognizes one’s debt to tradition and opens up to the others in a genuine dialogue. “Reflexive traditionalization” would be a result of one closing off his/her horizon, making himself/herself unavailable in a dialogue with others.

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62 In Discursive Democracy (1990) Dryzek accepts the hermeneutical argument that “communicative rational discourse can involve the reconstruction, rejection, synthesis, or even creation of traditions, not just their extension” (18-19). But then he states “here I part company from … Gadamer … who does not recognize the possibility of rationality that transcends particular traditions” (Dryzek 1990, 19).
and perceiving one’s own finitude/hermeneutical situation as the ultimate position that gives the final answer and truth. Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is consistent with Dryzek’s call for “reflexive modernization”, which, just like Gadamer’s “historically effected consciousness”, is “a process whereby individuals become aware of the traditions, rules, and understandings that govern their lives – and see them as potentially open to change” (Dryzek 2006, 117). I will discuss Dryzek’s harmony with philosophical hermeneutics more substantially in Section 4.3. To conclude this section, it is necessary to focus back on Dryzek’s appropriation of Discourse ethics.

Discourse ethics does not make the distinction that Dryzek draws between “reflection” and “autonomy”. For Habermas, reflection and autonomy are linked in the principle of impartiality. The requirement for impartiality in Discourse ethics presupposes the possibility of autonomous reflection, i.e. reflection that is not bound within one’s situation in tradition, discourse, history, culture, etc. If the significance of interpretive conflicts in the form of contestation of discourses is to be taken seriously, then it is necessary to distinguish between autonomy, impartiality, and authentic reflection.

In Discourse ethics, the assumption is that the deliberator’s ability to redeem validity is outside the context of meaning. The ability to reflect presupposes a kind of rationality that is autonomous from any system, discourse, or tradition. It is autonomous because this reflective ability is part of the apriori discourse ethics which we possess in virtue of our species-wide capacity to coordinate action via communication. Our ability to reflect and redeem validity claim does not come with some discourse, tradition, or system. However, reflection itself occurs from within discourses, traditions, or system. We cannot presume that apriori ability to reflect leads by default to reflection that is not bound within a certain discourse or tradition.

Authentic reflection is not the Habermasian kind of autonomous reflection outside tradition. In Dryzek’s formulation, it does not seem to be the transhistoric and transcultural action that delivers one to an impartial point of view. Rather, authentic reflection is something that brings one to become aware that his/her way of understanding the world is bound within a discourse or
tradition. Reflection means situating oneself within the social world, the world of lived experience.

I claim that awareness about one’s situatedness, in the sense of hermeneutical consciousness, is what constitutes Dryzek’s “authentic reflection”. Such an authentic reflection can only be induced in an intersubjective interaction. Deliberation in plural societies can be authentic when it cannot be reduced to an internal cognitive reflection of one person (e.g.: original position, categorical imperative). It must be intersubjective for it to induce authentic reflection because only in dialogue with others can one be aware of the constitutive influence discourse has had on one’s understanding.

Another aspect of Dryzek’s appropriation of Discourse ethics in his approach to the problem of plurality lays the foundation for understanding the significance of interpretive conflicts in discursive democracy. Dryzek focuses on the pragmatic problem of scale of inclusion in deliberation. His solution is similar to Young’s idea of “group representation”, in which Young posits that it is necessary to represent group interests, opinions, and perspectives for a more inclusive deliberation. For Dryzek, the pragmatic problem of inclusion can be resolved through “discursive representation” (2010, 42). Since Dryzek establishes that there is a plurality of discourses, and discourses partially constitute identities, it is sufficient to represent discourses in the public sphere. Discourses contest with one another in deliberation and then relate the outcome to the state institutions.

For Dryzek, “discursive representation” is capable of reflecting the general public opinion. It is also capable of representing the differentiated collective because one one’s opinion can be partially constituted by several discourses. The differentiated picture of the collective is represented by the constellation of different discourses. Given that there is a constitutive relationship between identity and discourses, it can be established that “discursive representation” is equal to representation of actual people. Even if a person’s opinion is divided between, for instance, the concern for economic growth and environmental protection, both sides of this person are represented by relevant discourses. Therefore, for Dryzek, “discursive representation” is more inclusive.
4.2 Contestation of discourses as interpretive conflicts

I will now look at how Dryzek’s discursive democracy recognizes the significance of interpretive conflicts in democratic politics. Previously, it was established that Dryzek is sensitive to the idea that people approach general norms and principles with situated understanding. Therefore, he must accept that interpretive conflicts are inevitable.

Yet, Dryzek is wary of situated understanding and interpretive conflicts. For him, they can manifest as deep division and moral disagreement in plural societies (see Dryzek 2013). His reservations about interpretive conflicts are also evident in his response to difference democrats (Young) and agonistic democrats (Mouffe) (Dryzek 2000, chapter 3). Against them, he questions the priority of particularity and situated understanding over general principles. If particularity is prioritized, then interpretive conflicts risk manifesting as conflict between identities (Dryzek 2000, 74f). Focusing on particularity and situated understanding forces deliberation to mediate division and disagreement between groups of people. Such a deliberation can lead to further entrenchment of people within their own particular interpretations. Accordingly, this deepens division and stymies deliberation.

In order to avoid interpretive conflicts taking the form of identity conflicts, Dryzek posits to conceive interpretive conflicts as “contest of discourses” (2000, 74). This argument builds on his characterisation of plurality in terms of discourses, as we have seen in the previous section. Let us take a closer look at how contest of discourses can take place.

For contestation to take place, discourses must be present in their partiality and particularity. In the previous section, we have seen that Dryzek recognizes that the strict rationality of discourse ethics is exclusionary. Therefore, he too supports including such forms of communication as greeting, narrative, and rhetoric. They are conducive to including particularities of discourses. For instance, for Dryzek, the environment and animals cannot represent themselves in democratic politics (see Dryzek 2006, 16ff). Discourses of environmentalism rely on such metaphorical devices as Earth as a Spaceship to convey the significance of their message (Dryzek 2006, 166 n1). So, Dryzek admits plurality of communications in the contest of discourses. They can bring
into deliberation partial and particular perspectives that can influence deliberation.

However, Dryzek admits partiality and particularity with reservations. For him, the implication of Gadamerian approach to deliberation such as Warnke’s, or Young’s attention to partiality and situated understanding, risks the “everything goes” attitude that can blow out of proportion the contestation between different interpretations. Once more, the problem with partial and situated understanding for Dryzek is that it ends up in deeper division, entrenchment, and identity conflicts.

To avoid this problem, Dryzek argues that partial and situated claims must connect to the relevant general principle (2000, 68). For example, the narratives and rhetoric of pro-choice and pro-life discourses on abortion enter into deeper disagreement if they keep articulating their positions in terms of their own particular circumstances. Rather, it helps their engagement and encounter if they appeal to some general principle. For him, appealing to a general principle is what makes one’s concerns, position, and interest political (Dryzek 2000, 69).

However, in making this argument, Dryzek ignores the interpretive conflict that arises when one connects one’s partial and particular claim to the general principle. Soon after stating the importance of the general principle in keeping interpretive conflicts from becoming identity conflicts, he explains that the particular claim can be connected to the general principle in the following manner: “the story must be capable of resonating with individuals who do not share that situation – but do share other characteristics (if only a common humanity) … thus truly effective story about a particular repression will also involve implicit appeal to more universal standards” (Dryzek 2000, 69). There is no further specification of how the general principle might be arrived at by the contesting parties. Suppose that we require that a pro-choice advocate links

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63 One way to understand how one can appeal to general principle is through Dryzek’s use of “resonate”. Young uses a similar word to show how a subjective story can become political. However, in Young “resonance” is more of a term than a general word because in her work it has a much more precise and measurable meaning. For Young (see 2000, 68-69; 1990, 182) particular experiences, become political only when they resonate with others. That is, expressing one’s particular experience need not to make some truth claim about or connect to a general principle in order to become political. Rather, it must strike a chord with others much in the same way we find that quote from Dryzek. When one’s experience resonates with others, it
her particular story and circumstances to some general principle? Which one should she appeal to that the contesting party will accept? Is not abortion such a contested issue because there are multiple general principles to which each group appeals? If pro-choice groups connect their narratives to women’s rights and individual liberty and pro-lifers to right to life, which general principle has priority? Usually, the substance of interpretive conflicts consists in determining which general principle is applicable in the concrete situation.

Dryzek assumes that there are already pre-given general principles that we have all agreed on prior to our deliberation. His example (2000, 69) illustrates the point well but it does not help resolve the problem of interpretive conflicts in plural societies. Dryzek shows the significance of appealing to general principles in examples such as retelling one’s story of suffering war crimes. If the side that suffered keeps telling the story about their suffering without appeal to such general principles as crimes against humanity, then this form of communication can deepen and promote mutual hatred between the conflicting sides.

War crimes are clear in most cases. It is just a matter of the guilty side admitting their fault. They do not dispute the general principle itself. However, interpretive conflicts in plural societies are not so clear cut. How does appealing to general principles of freedom of speech, religious freedom, rights to life, freedom of choice, individual liberties solve the problems of modern plural societies on such issues as abortion, marriage equality, gay rights, practice of certain religious rites if groups are going to contest (interpretive) appropriateness of the general principle for their concrete situation? That is the interpretive problem that worries Warnke. Therefore, it is not clear how appealing to a general principle mitigates interpretive conflict if the conflict is precisely about the interpretive appropriateness of the general principles. It is true that there are general principles that almost everyone agrees on: equality,

becomes public, and therefore political. It is not so much the appeal to general principle, but the resonance of experience itself that makes it political. Thus, it makes more sense to admit forms of communication based on their resonance with others. For Dryzek, resonance presupposes a general principle, i.e. somebody's experience might resonate with me in virtue of my upholding of certain values and principles. For a detailed discussion of Young's “resonance” see Michaele Ferguson’s “Resonance and Dissonance: The role of Personal Experience in Iris Marion Young’s Feminist Phenomenology” in Ann Ferguson and Mechthild Nagel (eds.) Dancing with Iris: the Philosophy of Iris Marion Young. OUP: Oxford, New York (2009)
freedom, rule of law. It is not true that plural societies will agree on the interpretive relevancy of a general principle to a particular situation. Neither will they agree on order-ranking of values, norms, and principles. Abraham Lincoln had to engage in interpretive conflicts about the general principles of equality and freedom during the Civil War. Appeals to general principles do not resolve the problem of interpretive conflicts because the appropriateness of general principles themselves is questioned in interpretive conflicts.

Despite his reservations, Dryzek preserves the role of interpretive conflicts in democratic politics. Based on his defence of discursive democracy against Popper’s rationalism (see Dryek 1987: 656-679; 1990: 57-77), it is possible to establish the significance of interpretive conflicts as contestation of discourses for him. He argues that that it is necessary to approach the issues and problems in the social and political sphere in a more wholesome way. This, according to him, is not possible in the instrumental and objectivist approach of Popper’s rationalism. Popper’s rationalism is effective in offering piecemeal solutions to issues. However, it ignores how one issue can affect other elements in the social structure. The advantage of discursive democracy is that it includes lateral complexities of an issue and considers the whole system of interconnected elements. That is made possible in discursive democracy by two things: communicative rationality and discursive representation. The constellation of discourses in the public sphere allows each discourse to contest substantive matters from its perspective. An environmental discourse brings crucial understanding about economic growth, stability, and security from its own partiality. Feminist discourse brings crucial understanding of social justice from its partiality. The presence of plurality of discourses in the public sphere ensures that deliberation includes many perspectives and proceeds on the basis of a more differentiated picture of the collective.

Thus, Dryzek’s idea of “contest of discourses” preserves interpretive conflicts in democratic politics while mitigating them from devolving into identity conflicts. For Dryzek, the expression of particular experience from a partial point of view can find an easier way to connect to some general principle if it is expressed as part of a particular discourse. For example, the particular experiences of injustice of women must be expressed through an appropriate discourse to make their experience public, and therefore political. The
appropriate discourse for such expression would be feminism. Therefore, in discursive democracy partiality, particularity, and situated understanding of different groups of people must partake in democratic politics through particular discourses.

The public sphere can be inclusive of many perspectives because, as we established earlier, for Dryzek it is a home to a constellation of discourses. This is where interpretive conflicts play out as “contest of discourses”. Such a form of engagement does not result in entrenchment and isolation because it “highlights contestation across discourses rather than engagement across identities” (Dryzek 2000, 75). Here, he is not cutting identity out of the problem because identity and discourses are mutually constitutive. Identity is represented without having to clash as such.

Comparison and contestation between discourses is less of a threat to one’s identity. It is not personal. For Dryzek (2000, chapter 7), the significance of conceiving of interpretive conflicts as contestation of discourses has to do with reflexivity and openness. If identities clash in deliberation, then people tend not to be reflexive and refuse to be open to others. In such clashes, their identity is at stake and so they might be prone to taking categorical positions on their own values, culture, particular experiences, partial and situated understanding.

On the other hand, if democratic politics works out interpretive conflicts in terms of contestation of discourses, then it is, in some sense, a sublimation of clash of identities. For Dryzek, people are more prone to openness when their differences are engaged and encountered as particular discourses (see 2000, chapter 7). Even if discourses constitute identities, people are not prisoners to them. Contestation of discourses induces reflection and helps overcome the influence of discourses on identity. For Dryzek, “the essence of engagement and challenge across discourses is that individuals can be brought to reflect upon the content of discourses in which they move” (2000, 163). Further, reflection enables democratic control of discourses because it gives people agency over the constitutive forces of discourses (Dryzek 2000, 163). Contestation of discourses also promotes openness because the reflexivity it induces does not result in a static outcome. Rather, “it is the (provisional)
outcome of this contest that determines the meaning of ‘public opinion’ at any
given time” (Dryzek 2000, 163).

Thus, the significance of interpretive conflicts between discourses is in
the reflexivity and openness it promotes. Furthermore, its significance is in the
epistemic advantages it offers by bringing many perspectives into deliberation.
Based the premise that Dryzek characterizes plurality in terms of discourses,
the premise that discourses are the expression of hermeneutical situation, and
the premise that his idea of “contestation of discourses” recognizes the
significance of interpretive conflicts that emerge in the engagement and
encounter between different discourses in the public sphere, I will now establish
how Dryzek’s idea of “reflexivity” can be considered as instantiation of
Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic politics.

4.3 Reflexivity as instantiation of openness in democratic politics

For Dryzek, reflexivity suits the world where discourses exert partial and
particular influences on politics and identity. In other words, reflexivity is suitable
for beings with situated understanding within particular discourses. Dryzek
draws his idea of reflexivity from *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition,
and Aesthetics* (Beck et al 1994). In appropriating this idea, he distinguishes
himself from Habermas’ version of deliberative democracy. Since Dryzek
focuses on the role of discourses in politics, “reflexivity” suits his version of
deliberative democracy styled as discursive democracy64.

Dryzek posits the normative function of reflexivity as “sensitivity to the
extent to which key entities and actors, their interests and goals, the shared
norms that constrain them, the relationships that either suppress or empower
them, are themselves continually constituted and reconstituted” (Dryzek 2006,
85). Reflexivity is required because “all actors, be they states, international
bodies, corporations, activists, ordinary people, or non-governmental
organizations, are constrained by the discursive field in which they operate, that
helps condition who they are and what they think” (Dryzek 2006, 122). This
section will establish how the idea of reflexivity is consonant with the argument

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64 Dryzek’s reflexivity can be found in two works. First, a paper titled “Reflexive action in
International Politics” (2000) co-written with Jeffrey Berejikian and second, his book titled
*Deliberative Global Politics* (2006). I focus on the latter because it reproduces his argument in
the original paper in part and develops on it more fully in terms of his goals to outline
translational discursive democracy.
on human finitude in Chapter II. Based on that premise, it will be argued that reflexivity is a suitable instantiation of the principle of openness in democratic politics.

It is necessary to distinguish between my purposes in adapting the idea of reflexivity and Dryzek’s. It will bring the role of reflexivity in democratic politics to sharper view. I aim to include reflexivity as part of a democratic politics that affirms pluralism as engagement and encounter. Dryzek is concerned with including reflexivity as part of transnationally applicable discursive democracy (Dryzek 2006). His focus is global. My focus is more local; it concerns pluralism in well-defined societies. For Dryzek, the normative idea of reflexivity enables actors to engage and encounter one another discursively across nationalities, which may include differences in culture, values, histories, and world-views. The success of “discursive democracy” depends on the extent that reflexivity is upheld by actors and the fact that the world is actually constituted by “discourses amenable to reflective engagement” (Dryzek 2006, 91). It is hard to imagine discursive engagement with radical and fundamentalist discourses that claim the ultimate truth.

We both use “reflexivity” in relation to the same question. Namely, what kind of practices and what manner of their execution can promote engagement and encounter between people that have little in common. Dryzek’s argument that reflexivity makes his discursive democracy applicable across different nations indicates the applicability of reflexivity in the case with pluralism and democratic politics. Though the goal in transnational politics might be different from pluralism, “reflexivity” serves an identical purpose in each. In the former, the aims of engagement are usually instrumental and strategic, whereas the aim in pluralism is understanding across differences. These are two qualitatively different aims. However, the idea of “reflexivity” fulfils the same normative function in both. In transnational politics the normative role of “reflexivity” is to allow for understanding across differences. Achievement of instrumental goals is subject to this condition.

The reason “reflexivity” fulfils the same normative function is because reflexive action has its own distinctive logic compared to other types of action. Drawing on Thomas Risse (2000), Dryzek identifies three types of logics that
constitute three types of actions in politics: “the logic of strategy associated with rational choice theory, the logic of appropriateness characterizing constructivism, and a logic of arguing based on Habermas’ theory of communicative action” (Dryzek 2006, 170 n4). “Reflexive action represents a fourth type, so we can speak of ‘logic of reflexivity’” (Dryzek 2006, 170 n4).

Though, Dryzek does not explicitly develop the “logic of reflexivity”, it can be interpreted as consisting in two aspects: reflexive intelligence and constitutive reasoning. Reflexive intelligence has to do with actors’ “critical awareness” of the “consequences of their actions” as well as the constitutive influence of “circumstances” on their understanding (Dryzek 2006, 112). “Circumstances” can be understood as consisting in the elements of discourses that were established in Section 4.1. Constitutive reasoning requires the actor to ask: “does action X help constitute the world I find attractive” (Dryzek 2006, 113). It is a qualitatively different question compared to strategic and instrumental questions. To further illustrate that reflexivity makes understanding superior to instrumental goals, Dryzek argues “constitutive concerns should often override instrumental ones” (2006, 113). Thus, whether it is an element of transnational politics or democratic politics in pluralist societies, “reflexivity” is more conducive to understanding for its own sake rather that achieving some instrumental aims.

However, the “logic of reflexivity” does not allow constitution of just any kind of world. By definition, reflexivity limits and constrains acts of constitution and re-constitution because actors “are themselves situated within a discursive field that constrains who they are and what they do” (Dryzek 2006, 85). This is where the hermeneutical aspects of Dryzek’s work become visible. Reflexivity is constrained within a discursive field in a similar manner hermeneutical situation constrains understanding. Hence, the distinction between reflexive action and autonomous action that was established in Section 4.1. For Dryzek, reflexive action takes place within a system that “inevitably imposes constraints on action as well as providing opportunities for action”, whereas autonomous action presupposes “the absence of constraints” (Dryzek 2006, 120). Reflexive action is preferable to autonomous action in a world where discourses constitute politics and identity because “reflexivity never forgets that structures and
discourses are constraining as well as enabling, and cannot be transcended” (Dryzek 2006, 85).

Thus, the two aspects of Dryzek’s idea of “reflexivity” make it consonant with Gadamer’s principle of openness. First one has to do with “reflective intelligence”. It means that actors are critically aware of the constitutive influence of their “circumstances”, the constraints and opportunities their discursive field contains, and awareness that their actions have constitutive and re-constitutive consequences for their life-world and politics. For instance, Dryzek writes that “even the most routine action helps perpetuate the discourse in which it is located by affirming the precepts of that discourse (for example, a financial transaction reinforces the monetary system)” (2006, 112). Since reflexivity is induced intersubjectively, the idea of “reflexive intelligence” has the elements of hermeneutical experience and consciousness. This makes its function similar to Gadamer’s “historically effected consciousness”. Therefore, it is suitable to think of Dryzek’s “reflexivity” as fulfilling in deliberative politics a role similar to ‘historically effected consciousness’, which is a regulative idea in ‘fusion of horizons’. It denotes a similar kind of critical awareness about one’s situated understanding.

The second aspect has to do with “constitutive reasoning”. It gives actors a critical sense of future-orientedness. A reflexive actor asks ‘does this action help constitute the world I want?’ It is a forward oriented reasoning that is distinct from forward oriented reasoning in instrumental and strategic actions. It is not related to the kind of reasoning employed in achieving short-term goals and objectives. It is directed at the constitution of “the world”. If “reflexive intelligence” is awareness that actions constitute and reconstitute discourses, then “constitutive reasoning” is the intentionality in taking actions that constitute and reconstitute particular “precepts” of discourses that influence the world. It is an act of reason that preserves, changes, and propagates discourses. It has elements of reason, freedom, agency, and autonomy that are at work in Gadamer’s defence of the authority of tradition as it is passed down from past to present and forward into the future. Gadamer argues:

The fact is that in tradition there is always an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once
existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation and it is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason, though and inconspicuous one. For this reason, only innovation and planning appear to be the result of reason. But this is an illusion. Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value. At any rate, preservation is as much a freely chosen action as are revolution and renewal (Gadamer 2013, 293).

Because “constitutive reasoning” is an aspect of “reflexivity”, its orientation to the future is constrained by what is possible in the given circumstances, the historical moment, the discursive field. It makes reflexivity an action of preservation as well as renewal through openness to change (by reconstitution) in discourses that constitute political practices and identities. For Gadamer, traditions preserve their authority by being open to change, not by claiming immutability. A true tradition is dynamic; it is fluid. A static tradition is not a true tradition; it is dogmatic. Discourses persevere as dynamic constructions in the same manner through “constitutive reasoning”.

Thomas Jefferson’s lines in his letter to John Cartwright are illustrative of Gadamer’s point and the idea of “constitutive reasoning”:

Can one generation bind another, and all others, in succession forever? I think not. The Creator has made the earth for the living, not the dead (1824)\textsuperscript{65}.

Through “constitutive reasoning”, actors free themselves from the past not by denying its authority but by orienting themselves towards the future made possible by it. It is a mode of change and transformation that does not betray the idea of ‘historically effected consciousness’. The two sides of reflexivity, reflexive intelligence and constitutive reasoning, help in this respect. Reflexive intelligence draws attention to the effect discourses have had on one’s understanding. Constitutive reasoning builds on that knowledge towards a desired future. In effect, it is an act of reason that seizes the world from “the dead” and hands it over to “the living”. It is an act of reason that breaks the binds of previous generation not by breaking the relatedness between the past


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and present, but by recognizing the effect the past has had on the present. It is an act of reason oriented towards the future that can be projected from this historical moment (i.e., hermeneutical situation). Thus, constitutedness by discourses does not necessarily mean that the discourses that dominated previous generations exert the same influence on the present and reproduce the same social system. It is by virtue of “constitutive reasoning” of reflexivity that Dryzek asserts that discourses are amenable to reconstitution and preserves agency and freedom of the actors. “Constitutive reasoning” takes up the horizon discourses project into the future. It constitutes a world with awareness of incomplete understanding and finitude.

Thus, it can be established that Dryzek’s idea of “reflexivity” is a suitable mode of instantiating Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic politics. Gadamer’s principle requires that one practices genuine openness towards the other because one’s understanding is incomplete in virtue of its situatedness within a hermeneutic situation. Dryzek’s idea of reflexivity is possible through intersubjective engagement, i.e. engagement and encounter of the other. To be sure, for Dryzek it is the discourses that engage and encounter one another. However, since it is actors that are doing the engaging and encountering between discourses, it is they who must practice reflexivity. Dryzek states, “in an unreflective world – one where traditions are treated as immutable and taken for granted – the norm is one of obedience to and so reinforcement of dominant discourses” (Dryzek 2006, 86-87). “Reflective actors are aware of their status ‘inside’ the world, and of the fact that their actions and messages help constitute or re-constitute the world in which they are operating” (Dryzek 2006, 112).

Given that plurality consists of particular discourses that exert constitutive influence on politics and identity, they situate understanding in particular ways (Section 4.1), and given that interpretive conflicts in a world of discourses plays out as “contestation of discourses” (Section 4.2), “reflexivity” serves as a suitable idea for engagement and encounter between persons whose understanding is situated in part within discourses. It has more appeal for pluralism than Habermas’ idea of reflection because it does not result in reflecting oneself out of one’s particularity but to be present as a particular entity with openness towards the other. Reflexivity does not presuppose autonomy. It presupposes situatedness of understanding.
Conclusion

Dryzek contributed to our understanding of plurality by showing how politics and identity in plural societies can be constituted by different discourses. This chapter established three aspects of Dryzek’s work. First, it has been established that Dryzek’s characterization of particular discourses can be considered as the expression of hermeneutical situation in politics. For Dryzek, discourses are historically and culturally specific. As such, they situate human understanding through the way they partially constitute identity. This has led Dryzek to refocus discourse ethics from universalism, abstraction, and strict rationality towards sensitivity to the way particular discourses influence universalization and rationality in deliberation.

Second, the chapter established the significance of interpretive conflicts for Dryzek. Given his argument on particular discourses, Dryzek sees particularity as a resource for democratic politics. Therefore, he allows the expression of particularity through such forms of communication as Young’s storytelling and rhetoric. However, Dryzek worries that expression of particularity can escalate interpretive conflicts into conflict between identities. This can result in entrenchment and isolation. In order to avoid this problem, Dryzek posits that interpretive conflicts should take place in the form of contestation of discourses. Discourses are not personal but are still representative of concrete people because of the way they constitute identities. Therefore, in a contestation of discourses, the identity conflicts are sublimated. The significance of contestation of discourses has to do with the way different discourses can lead to inclusion of lateral complexities of an issue and consideration of the whole system of interconnected elements in the social structure.

Third, the chapter established Dryzek’s idea of reflexivity as a suitable instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness. Contestation between discourses leads actors to reflexivity because through engaging and encountering different discourses, one becomes aware of the way understanding is situated and partial within particular discourses. Reflexivity consists in two aspects, ‘reflexive intelligence’ and ‘constitutive reasoning’, which help in instantiating it as the principle of openness. ‘Reflexive intelligence’ denotes a kind of intelligence about the way one’s understanding is situated.
This intelligence can be acquired only in an engagement and encounter of others who represent other discourses. This, in effect, contains elements of hermeneutical experience and consciousness. ‘Constitutive reasoning’ denotes an act of reason that does not break from one’s situatedness but builds on it through openness to change.
Chapter V

Antagonism in pluralism and agonism as openness

Introduction

Engagement and encounter of the other in politics may not always be about reaching understanding across differences. The stuff of politics is about conflict over rank-ordering incommensurable values. So, sometimes, engagement and encounter entails a struggle, an uncompromising conflict in which the principles of openness and democratic politics can be at stake. If we are to instantiate Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic politics, then the constituency of plural societies guarantee that we are bound to encounter the kinds of others that will challenge the very principles of openness and democratic politics. We are bound to encounter nationalists, racists, and religious extremists. The encounter with them might involve an uncompromising conflict. The question is, how do we practice openness towards those that deny the principle of openness, democratic politics, those who deny the right to be to others on the basis of their own claims of supremacy and ultimate positions. In this chapter, I draw on Mouffe to answer this question. Drawing on her, I develop an account of agonism as a mode of openness towards those, with whom we can be in a conflictual relationship that entails mutual exclusion.

Mouffe is an odd choice to include among Young and Dryzek, who advocate the Habermasian strand of deliberative democracy. However, I argue that Mouffe is closer to the deliberative democracy than she is willing to admit because agonistic contestation requires discourse ethics. It has already been noted by Keith Breen (2009) and Andrew Knops (2007) that Mouffe’s agonism resembles deliberative democracy. In Section 5.3, I show why Mouffe’s agonism requires the core ideas of discourse ethics. In doing so, I follow Nancy Fraser, who posits that the opposition between deliberative democracy and agonistic models of democracy is over-exaggerated and that they have complementary parts to play in democratic politics (2008, 74). In joining my account of agonism as a mode of instantiation of openness along with
asymmetric reciprocity and reflexivity, I also follow Ricardo Blaug (1996) who argues that ‘deliberation’ cannot be understood as a term monopolized by deliberative democrats such as Habermas and Dryzek. I follow him in his argument that deliberative and agonistic theorists must be read in complementary mode rather than in opposition. For Blaug, ‘deliberation’ is a term that includes a wide variety of democratic politics that involve various forms of (dialogical) contestations and interactions on intersubjective basis. Hence, for him, the ‘postmodern’ strand of deliberative democracy that includes agonists such as Mouffe uncovers modes of conflict and power relations that orthodox deliberative theorists overlook. As far as he is concerned, there should be a more general theory of deliberative democracy based on a complementary reading of different types of democratic politics that emphasise dialogue and contestation (he identifies three: republican, postmodern, universal). Blaug shows that Mouffe helps in pointing out the shortcomings, risks, and dangers of reliance on the rationalism and universalism of deliberation (1996, 74). This can be confirmed by Dryzek himself, who takes into account Mouffe’s critique of deliberative democracy (see Dryzek 2006).

Mouffe helps understand the antagonistic dimension of human affairs and bring to the fore the dangers that pluralism can pose to itself. We can understand this problem from her critique of deliberative democracy. Mouffe argues that the characteristic rationalism and universalism of deliberative democracy represses the dimensions of antagonism and power relations. The reason antagonism must be accounted for is because it has an ontological dimension to human affairs, in which there is always a differentiation between “us” and “them”. If democratic politics does not provide an outlet for the expression of antagonism and instead represses it, there is a possibility that antagonism asserts itself in the form of extremist articulations such as right wing/left wing populism, or as violence. However, if we are to acknowledge the

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66 In his paper, Blaug understands the theory of deliberative democracy as consisting in three main currents: republican deliberative theories that opt for a contextual mode of justification of moral validity, postmodern deliberative theories that “reject the notion of moral validity altogether” and argue on the basis that “knowledge and truth are merely configurations of power”, and universalist deliberative theories, one of which is Habermas’ argument that we can build normative deliberative theory based on universal assumptions we can make about the way we communicate. Blaug thinks that rather than keep separate camps, a more unified theory of deliberative democracy needs to take into account all three camps. For him, if “deliberative politics is to be both legitimate and realistic, their gains must somehow be brought together” (1996: 75).
antagonistic dimension, then how can pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness be possible in politics?

I answer this question by drawing from Mouffe’s theory of radical democracy known as ‘agonistic pluralism’\(^{67}\). I develop an account of agonism in the sense of struggle between equals as a mode of openness in democratic politics. Unlike in the previous chapters, here I do not give an account of plurality as consisting in groups or discourses. My primary focus is to work out how antagonism implicates pluralism and how we can respond to it in a way that does not betray the principle of openness. Thus, I develop an account of agonism based on three features. First, its recognition of relationality between identities as subject to differential positions in the social structure, which makes it consonant with Young and Dryzek as well as points at the requirement for Gadamer’s principle of openness. Second, its recognition of fluidity of tradition in a way that is consonant with philosophical hermeneutics. For Mouffe, democracy is an example of such tradition. Third, I appropriate the “quasi-republican constitutionalism” of agonism, which allows the use of its central categories of “enemy” and “adversary” to protect pluralism and democratic politics.

The chapter consists in four sections.

Section 5.1 gives a general outline of the concept of ‘the political’ in its antagonistic dimension and the central categories of “enemy” and “adversary” in Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism. I draw the implications of acknowledging the antagonistic dimension for pluralism and democratic politics from Mouffe’s critique of discourse ethics. For Mouffe, the rationalism and universalism of discourse ethics make it blind to the antagonistic dimension.

In Section 5.2 I evaluate Mouffe’s alternative to deliberative democracy and argue that agonistic pluralism must rely on discourse ethics. For Mouffe, agonism is possible through a normative move from enemies to adversaries. Enemies become adversaries when they agree to respect each other as equals, follow the same rules of contestation, and pledge their allegiance to the same

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\(^{67}\) I am grateful for my understanding of agonistic democracy to the workshop “Conditions of Agonistic Politics” organized by Andrew Schaap and hosted by the Centre for Political Thought at the University of Exeter in the summer of 2015.
ethico-political principles and values. Once they establish this type of meta-consensus, the sides engage as adversaries who disagree about each other’s interpretations of the principles and values. I show why Mouffe has to rely on discourse ethics in order to make this normative move possible.

I develop Section 5.3 based on the preceding section. Here, I show the terms in which Mouffe recognizes the significance of interpretive conflicts. In agonism, there can be interpretive conflicts only between adversaries. Interpretive conflicts are significant because they provide a democratic outlet for the expression of antagonism in the form of agonism.

In section 5.4 I develop my account of agonism based on the three features listed above and by rejecting Mouffe’s emphasis on “conversion”. I argue that it must be rejected because it runs contrary to the principle of openness. Rather, agonism must accept the forms of persuasion accepted in the deliberative democracies of Young and Dryzek, who posit that persuasion can be in the forms of greeting, storytelling/narrative, and rhetoric. This way, agonism can be conceived as a mode of instantiation of openness in democratic politics.

5.1 ‘The political’ and the limitations of discourse ethics

‘The political’ is a concept that refers to the ontological dimension of antagonism and power relations between people. In On the Political (2005), Mouffe posits that the antagonistic dimension of ‘the political’ is inherent to pluralism (10). Therefore, it is necessary to ask how Mouffe’s argument implicates the idea of pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness. It is also necessary to consider the problems that Mouffe’s concept of ‘the political’ poses for a democratic politics that is committed to such an idea of pluralism. Since it has been established that discourse helps democratic politics in its commitment to pluralism, Mouffe’s critique of discourse ethics is particularly instructive for this consideration.

Mouffe formulated the concept of ‘antagonism’ in Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (1985), co-written with Ernesto Laclau. Yet, this chapter does not draw its ideas from this book. The main ideas are drawn from Mouffe’s Return of the Political (1993), The Democratic Paradox (2000), and On the Political (2005). In these works, as Mouffe explains in the interview published in
Agonistics (2013), she develops the main ideas in Hegemony and Social Strategy into what she calls ‘agonistic pluralism’ and proposes to call the “ineradicable condition of antagonism ‘the political’” (130).

Hegemony and Socialist Strategy is useful for introducing Mouffe’s main ideas. This work elaborates on anti-essentialist discourse theory. Laclau and Mouffe posit radical contingency, negativity, and incompleteness against idealist ontologies aimed at understanding the nature of the social in stable and fixed terms. The central concepts used in this work are ‘antagonism’ and ‘hegemony’. They also constitute the core idea of Mouffe’s understanding of ‘the political’. Antagonism is the ontological dimension of ‘the political’, which means that every objectivity, be that a group or social order, is established over against an external opposition, to which they refer as the ‘constituent outside’. In her later work (2000), Mouffe draws from Schmitt to characterize this dimension as a ‘we/they’ relationship that takes the form of ‘friend/enemy’ relationship in ‘the political’ domain. For Laclau and Mouffe, the fact that ‘antagonism’ is ontological means that that there cannot be a final totality of identity, groups, particular discourses, and political orders such as liberal democracy. It means that there cannot be a final harmonious and transparent society (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 125ff). This conclusion is possible because of the way antagonism constitutes the ontological indeterminacy and contingency of every order.

An identity, collectives, groups, discourses, social and political orders are temporally constituted by hegemonic articulations. A hegemony is a specific ordering of the symbolic content of the discursive field. Because of the ontological dimension of antagonism, it can still be challenged by a different hegemonic articulation. An example of hegemony Mouffe refers to throughout her work is the hegemony of Western liberal democracy that Francis Fukuyama mistakes as the final answer to the question of how we should order our social and political constitutions68. For her, liberal democracy is a hegemony that can be changed by new hegemonic re-articulations of the symbols in the discursive field.

The consequences of Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory are radical because it means that there can never be a society that has constituted itself

68 Mouffe is not against liberalism. She is for more radical version of it. See 1993, 145
fully. It means that there cannot be a final answer to the question of balance between the opposing individual liberty and popular sovereignty in the liberal democracy or Habermas' deliberative democracy set out in *Between Facts and Norms* (1996). It means that no agent or group can assume representation of any totality, and that there cannot be a final understanding and knowledge of the social and political. In this way, ‘the political’ can be considered as an alternative conceptualization of the ontological dimensions of human finitude in politics.

Based on this framework, Mouffe posits ‘antagonism’ as the ontological dimension of ‘the political’. She appropriates ‘hegemony’ as part of ‘politics’. Thus, ‘the political’ and ‘politics’ must be distinguished accordingly. In *On the Political*, Mouffe elaborates:

Some theorists such as Hannah Arendt envisage the political as a space of freedom and public deliberation, while others see it as a space of power, conflict and antagonism. My understanding of ‘the political’ clearly belongs to the second perspective. More precisely this is how I distinguish between ‘the political’ and ‘politics’: by ‘the political’ I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by ‘politics’ I mean a set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political (2005, 9).

Here ‘politics’ is the result of hegemonic articulations of the symbolic content of the discursive field. Thus, democratic politics can only be assumed to be the result of specific hegemonic articulations. And if we think in this manner, we are doing what Mouffe calls “thinking politically”; that is, we do not take any form of politics for granted but as a specific rank-ordering of discursive symbols through hegemonic articulation. And because of the ontological dimensions of ‘the political’, that rank-ordering faces the constant possibility of contestation and reformulation. As Mouffe puts it, “to think politically requires recognizing the ontological dimension of radical negativity” (2013, xi).

Mouffe is critical of theorists that do not “think politically”. In *The Return of the Political* (1993), she argues that liberal theorists cannot think politically because their universalism and rationalism hinders them from recognizing the constitutive dimension of antagonism. She extends this critique to the
deliberative camp too. In *The Democratic Paradox* (2000, chapter 4) Mouffe traces the influence of the universalism and rationalism of the liberal tradition on deliberative democracy, especially in Rawls. For her, Habermas’ deliberative democracy also shares the same universalism and rationalism that is characteristic of the liberal tradition. Moreover, she argues that Habermas’ deliberative democracy is a promotion and defence of the liberal hegemony.

Mouffe’s critique of the liberal democratic and deliberative traditions is based on her careful interpretation of Carl Schmitt’s critique of liberalism\(^6\). In his *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt argues that the liberal tradition’s focus on the individual precludes it from taking into account how collective identities are formed. For him, groups form differentially in opposition to others based on the friend/enemy logic. That is, a ‘we’ is always constituted by differentiating and opposing a ‘they’. Mouffe draws from Schmitt’s account of collective identities. She posits that the specificity of ‘the political’ for collective identities has to do with the criteria of friends and enemy (Mouffe 2005, 11). Thus, for Mouffe, the ontological dimension of antagonism in ‘the political’ has to do with the decision that discriminates between friends and enemy.

Mouffe notes that “a key point of Schmitt’s approach is that, by showing that every consensus is based on acts of exclusion, it reveals the impossibility of a fully inclusive ‘rational’ consensus” (Mouffe 2005, 11). This implicates discourse ethics because, as Mouffe argues further, any belief on the availability of universal consensus based on reason is bound to deny the antagonistic dimension of ‘the political’ (2005, 11). According to her, discourse ethics must deny ‘the political’ because it wants to “present political debate as a

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\(^6\) By “careful”, I wish to convey Mouffe’s awareness of some of the problems that might be raised with respect to her turn to Schmitt. In drawing on the grammar of Schmitt’s criteria of the political as the basis for critique of liberalism, Mouffe does not want to subscribe to Schmitt’s denial of pluralism in the democratic society. For Schmitt, democracy presupposes a homogenous *demos*, and thus precludes any possibility for pluralism. As Mouffe explains, Schmitt thought that liberalism and democracy could never be reconciled because the former promotes denial of a homogenous society and common good in order to create the conditions of possibility for pursuing plurality of individual interests while the latter requires equality, homogeneity, and a singular common good. The only kind of plurality that could exist for Schmitt was plurality of states. Mouffe wants to go around this conclusion in Schmitt’s thought (see Mouffe 2005: 14f) and she does so by turning to Derrida (see 2005: ch. 1). Another point I would like to raise pre-emptively in Mouffe’s defence is on Schmitt’s membership with the Nazi Party. I think I’m with Mouffe when she argues: “I am perfectly aware that, because of Schmitt’s compromise with Nazism, such a choice might arouse hostility. Many people will find it rather perverse if not outright outrageous. Yet, I believe that it is the intellectual force of theorists, not their moral qualities, that should be the decisive criteria in deciding whether we need to establish a dialogue with their work” (2005: 4).
specific field of application of morality and believe that it is possible to create in the realm of politics a rational moral consensus by means of free discussion” (2005, 13).

Given Habermas’ counterfactual regulative idea of ‘ideal speech situation’, he must deny the antagonistic dimension of ‘the political’. However, he does not deny the dimension of antagonism in discourse altogether. Given the three tier division between forms of discourse, the place where the antagonistic dimension can show itself is the ethical form of discourse. Antagonism prevents consensus on the matters of justice in the moral form of discourse. Habermas argues, “if questions of justice cannot transcend the ethical self-understanding of competing forms of life, and if existentially relevant values, conflicts and oppositions must penetrate all controversial questions, then in the final analysis we will end up with something resembling Carl Schmitt’s understanding of politics” (Habermas 1996 qtd. in Mouffe 2005, 13).

Based on this argument, Mouffe concludes that for Habermas, affirming ‘the political’ undermines democracy itself. Conversely, she argues that “only by acknowledging ‘the political’ in its antagonistic dimension can we pose the central question for democratic politics” (2005, 14). In the permanent conditions of antagonism in pluralist societies, the question “is not how to negotiate a compromise among competing interests, nor is it how to reach a ‘rational’, i.e. fully inclusive, consensus, without any exclusion” (Mouffe 2005, 14)70. Rather, the question is, once we acknowledge the dimension of ‘the political’, how can we envisage politics and practices that maintain pluralism in ways that are compatible with democracy (Mouffe 2005, 14; 1993, 4).

Mouffe’s answer is that the antagonistic dimension of ‘the political’ must be transformed into agonism where competition takes the form of engagement between adversaries rather than enemies. This is Mouffe’s version of agonistic democracy which she refers to as ‘agonistic pluralism’. It is worth noting that with regards to the idea of pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other, with Mouffe ‘the other’ is specified either as an enemy or as an adversary. This

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70 For Mouffe, there can never be a fully inclusive rational consensus: “Politics, as the attempt to domesticate the political, to keep at bay the forces of destruction and to establish order, always has to do with conflicts and antagonisms. It requires an understanding that every consensus is, by necessity, based on acts of exclusion and that there can never be a fully inclusive ‘rational’ consensus” (Mouffe 1993, 141).
kind of specificity makes engagement and encounters a qualitatively different process. This one is not aimed at understanding the other in their otherness. Agonistic pluralism is aimed at struggling against the other. I work around this problem in Section 5.4, where it will be established how agonism can be understood as a mode of instantiation of openness in democratic politics.

To get there, it is necessary to establish how Mouffe recognizes human finitude expressed as hermeneutical situation. Then, it is necessary to show how her critique of discourse ethics is similar to Warnke’s hermeneutical critique and the terms in which she recognizes the significance of interpretive conflicts.

Chapter 2 established that incomplete understanding is a kind of understanding that is situated within a hermeneutical situation. It established that incomplete understanding is partial and particular depending on the historical, cultural, and linguistic contingencies. Chapter 3 established that for Young one’s understanding of the social and political is situated, partial, and particular with regards to one’s social position. Chapter 4 established that for Dryzek one’s understanding is situated, partial, and particular with regards to the particular discourses. The argument on incomplete understanding was drawn from the way Young and Dryzek posit the influence of social position and discourses on ‘the self’. For every person ‘the self’ is a concept formed in the process of self-understanding. Mouffe makes a similar argument on the constitution of the self. For her, one of the characteristics of plurality in modern society is “the multiplicity of subject positions which constitute a single agent” (Mouffe 1993, 12). For that reason, ‘the self’ can consist in multiple selves. Based on that, it can be established that Mouffe presupposes a similar idea of incomplete understanding too.

Furthermore, it is possible to conceive of Mouffe’s understanding of the constitution of the self as a combination of Young’s and Dryzek’s arguments about how social position and discourses have a constitutive influence on people’s understanding of the social and political world. Mouffe accepts that the divided and plural constitution of the self has to do with one’s situatedness in the social structure and the discursive formations because she considers

the social agent as constituted by an ensemble of ‘subject positions’ that can never be totally fixed in a closed system of
differences, constructed by a diversity of discourses among which there is no necessary relation, but rather a constant movement of overdetermination and displacement. The 'identity' of such a multiple and contradictory subject is therefore always contingent and precarious, temporarily fixed at the intersection of those subject positions and dependent on specific forms of identification. It is therefore impossible to speak of the social agent as if we were dealing with a unified, homogeneous entity. We have rather to approach it as a plurality, dependent on the various discursive formations ...

The plurality of selves in one “social agent” differentiates in terms of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, social occupation and etc. Each aspect puts one in a specific ‘social position’ within a distinct locale that is constituted discursively by respective discourses such as feminism, Christian conservatism, LGBT, etc. Thus, one can be a woman, whose social position vis a vis gender relationships might affiliate her with the feminist group, the locale of which is discursively constituted by feminism. The same woman can also identify herself with a religious collective vis a vis her beliefs. In the discursive field of the social, these two positions can often conflict with one another; hence the idea of divided self. The implication of acknowledging the idea of divided self means that there cannot be a democratic politics that presumes a unitary idea of the subject. For this reason, Young offers group representation and Dryzek offers discursive representation which allow the representation not just of plurality of groups but of different aspects of the self too.

With Mouffe, we do not gain a contrasting idea for political practice. Rather, we gain an insight that Young and Dryzek lack. We gain the insight that such differentiation entails antagonism. Because of the antagonistic dimension, human relationships can entail a we/they discrimination. Here, forms of identification are realized by the exclusion and opposition to a ‘constitutive outside’. In other words, every form of identity is constituted by an exclusion and opposition to another identity. There is an antagonistic dimension in the constitution of the divided self too because the self is constituted by excluding the kinds of identities that the self is not. However, for antagonism to have its ontological dimension, Mouffe must presuppose the idea of thrownness the way Young does. One must always already find oneself in some kind of social structure made up of differentiated positions. One is thrown into the social as
male or female, black or white, into a class, into a culture, religion, and historical moment. Thus, it is possible to make Mouffe’s argument that a one is “constituted by an ensemble of ‘subject positions’” by founding it on the idea of throwness (1993, 77).

That being said, it must not be concluded that antagonism is present in all aspects of human affairs. It doesn’t mean that there is constant conflict between groups and individual agents. Rather, for Mouffe antagonism is always a possibility in human affairs. That is because all identities are contingent and temporal, just as all political regimes and orders are. It means that no single agent, group, or politics can claim any kind of ultimate positions or finality. Their establishment can only be the result of acts of power (hence, hegemony) but only contingently and temporarily. Mouffe writes:

coming to terms with the constitutive nature of power implies relinquishing the ideal of democratic society as the realization of a perfect harmony or transparency. The democratic character of a society can only be given by the fact that no limited social actor can attribute to herself or himself the representation of the totality and claim to have the ‘mastery’ of the foundation (2000, 100).

Antagonism, and therefore ‘the political’, cannot be eradicated (Mouffe 1993, 5; 2000, 12). For Mouffe, it means that the very condition of possibility for pluralist democracy is given by the ontological dimension of ‘the political’. To eradicate it means to eradicate pluralist democracy. Thus, “in coming to terms with pluralism, what is really at stake is power and antagonism and their ineradicable character” (2000, 21).

Another noteworthy point in the quote is “that no limited social actor can attribute to herself or himself the representation of the totality and claim to have the ‘mastery’ of the foundation” (Mouffe 2000, 100). It comes close to the idea of human finitude established in Chapter 2 and the way human finitude constricts the idea of ‘moral respect’. It has already been noted several times that the foundational idea of radical negativity in Mouffe’s work can be considered as an alternative to the ontological idea of human finitude established in chapter 2. These are two different ideas that posit a similar conclusion based on the logic of the whole and parts: the whole cannot be reduced to any of its parts and the part cannot be representative of the whole in
isolation. The important thing is that Mouffe’s and Gadamer’s perspectives lead to a similar idea about human affairs: nothing is static, no agent can claim ultimate positions even in the moral universe, and there cannot be a “Philosopher King” who has figured out the normative universe of a world without a common measure of value. Human affairs in the social and political sphere depends on engagement and encounter with those that will present something that was not previously available within one’s horizon, or perhaps points at something that was previously unseen. The only difference is that Gadamer wants to learn by holding a dialogue with the other, whereas Mouffe wants to learn by “fighting” the other. The point to be taken from Mouffe is that conflict is inevitable in politics. ‘The political’ can always “return”.

According to Mouffe, discourse ethics has to eradicate ‘the political’ to make deliberative democracy possible. There is no rational solution to the antagonistic dimension of the political. ‘The political’ precludes the possibility for rational consensus. But, for Mouffe, the rejection of ‘the political’ in order to theorize a condition of possibility for universal rational consensus threatens democracy (2000, 22). In contrast to Young and Dryzek, who want to weaken the rationalism of discourse ethics, Mouffe argues that rationalism constitutes an obstacle to understanding how a stronger adherence to democratic values can be established (Mouffe 2000, 70). However, her grounds for making this argument are similar to Young’s and Dryzek’s because like them she argues that it precludes the possibility for further challenges. Challenges are precluded by the presuppositions of Habermasian consensus because conceptually it requires homogenous and uniform demos.

For Mouffe, Habermasian consensus is possible in two ways. First, its possibility requires antagonism between the members of society to be ignored. Second, elimination of antagonism requires transcendence and abstraction from particularities. In Chapter 2, discourse ethics was criticized from a hermeneutical perspective. It was established that abstraction is impossible

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71 In On the Political (2005) Mouffe warns that when antagonism is ignored, ‘the political’ can return in the form of extremist populisms. The current situation with US elections, the rise of right wing populisms in Europe are an example but not a proof of Mouffe’s diagnosis. It is yet to be shown that the right wing populists are riding repressed antagonisms that burst back into politics. Nevertheless, Mouffe shows how fragile our democracy and pluralism are. We need to reckon with that.
given the situated character of incomplete understanding. Chapters 3 and 4 established that Young and Dryzek criticize discourse ethics on similar terms. Mouffe accepts that one cannot transcend one’s hermeneutic situation fully with specific reference to Gadamer\(^\text{72}\) (1993, 15). Thus, it is possible to establish that Mouffe’s view of discourse ethics is consonant with the hermeneutical critique\(^\text{73}\).

The difference between the hermeneutical argument and Mouffe’s argument is that Mouffe takes a much more radical position against discourse ethics. She denies any possibility for rational consensus. She denies that agents can transcend their particular circumstances at all. For her to require agents to transcend their particularities in order to hold a discourse on rational grounds and achieve consensus is to enact an un-democratic and un-pluralistic principle. That is, transcendence and abstraction serve one purpose for discourse ethics: to achieve homogeneity and unanimity (see 2000, 19). For this reason Mouffe is wary that discourse ethics threatens pluralistic democracy. It requires eradication of difference in favour of consensus and closure.

Mouffe argues that it is necessary to give up on the idea that ‘rational universal consensus’ because first, it pretends to be all inclusive which the ontological dimension of ‘the political’ makes impossible\(^\text{74}\) (see 1993, 140; 2000, 32), and second it cannot eradicate the antagonistic dimension because ‘the

\(^{72}\) She writes: “It is always possible to distinguish between the just and the unjust, the legitimate and the illegitimate, but this can only be done with within a given tradition, with the help of standards that this tradition provides; in fact, there is no point of view external to all tradition from which one can offer a universal judgement. Furthermore, to give up the distinction between logic and rhetoric to which the postmodern critique leads – and where it parts with Aristotle – does not mean that ‘might makes right’ or that one sinks into nihilism. To accept with Foucault that there cannot be an absolute separation between validity and power (since validity is always relative to a specific regime of truth, connected to power) does not mean that we cannot distinguish within a given regime of truth between those who respect the strategy of argumentation and its rules, and those who simply want to impose their power” (Mouffe 1993: 15)

\(^{73}\) This is also evident from her discussion and analysis of the debate between universalists and communitarians. See Chapter 2 in *The Return of the Political* where Mouffe accepts the hermeneutic aspects of the communitarian critique; namely that any universalisation takes with itself substantive ideas of the good. It is also evident in her celebration of Rawls’ admission that his theory of justice refers to specific communities that adhere to liberal values.

\(^{74}\) Recall that above we described ‘the political’ as consisting of antagonism and hegemony. Antagonism implies a radical negativity. It means that all acts of establishing any kind of objectivity depends on we/they discrimination. There cannot be consensus without exclusion because consensus implies an act of power that establishes certain objectivity, be that consensus on certain form institution or general principle. Such an act of power always happens within an antagonistic relationship with a ‘constitutive outside’.
political’ is always beyond rationality (1993, 123). Mouffe points at contemporary politics to illustrate the ineradicability of ‘the political’. It used to be that ‘the political’ played out in the antagonistic relationship between the left and right. It used to be about the two competing views of the way the world should be constituted. Today, argues Mouffe, the “the political is played out in the moral register” and the blurring between left and right politics by the parties that occupy centre positions cannot be presented as an overcoming of ‘the political’ (2005, 5). That is, ‘the political’ has not been eradicated by the “centre” positions that the left and right occupy as a point for bipartisan consensus. For Mouffe, there is still a we/they discrimination but “instead of being defined with political categories”, the discrimination “is now established in moral terms” (Mouffe 2005, 5). That is, nowadays ‘the political’ manifests itself not in the struggle and opposition between left and right but as a “struggle between right and wrong” (Mouffe 2005, 5).

For Mouffe, discourse ethics attempts to achieve a closure in politics that ‘the political’ cannot allow. In responding to Habermas’ admission that there are empirical obstacles for discourse ethics regulated by the ideal speech situation, Mouffe notes that due to the ontological dimension of ‘the political’, there are ontological obstacles too (2000, 48). That is, if Habermas is willing to take into account that discourse ethics can be constrained by the fact that people cannot fully transcend their hermeneutic situation, Mouffe posits further that “democratic logic itself” denies the possibility for Habermasian discourse (2000, 48). For this reason, Mouffe’s critique of discourse ethics is more radical than Warnke’s hermeneutical critique. Nevertheless, the next section argues that when it comes to laying out the theoretical framework for “agonistic pluralism”, Mouffe is forced to make concessions to the Habermasian deliberative democracy. The section establishes that Mouffe’s requirement for consensus on the ethico-political must presuppose procedural consensus entailed in discourse ethics. Therefore, Mouffe appropriates discourse ethics in order to address the problem of ‘the political’ in plural societies.

75 For Mouffe, politics is the limits of rationality: “The rationalist longing for an undistorted rational communication and for a social unity based on rational consensus is profoundly antipolitical because it ignores the crucial place of passions and affects in politics. Politics cannot be reduced to rationality, precisely because it indicates the limits of rationality” (Mouffe 1993, 115; emphasis as in the original).
Even though Mouffe argues that in order to take pluralism seriously, it is necessary to give up on rationalism and consensus (2000, 98), she retains some aspects of rationalism and consensus in discourse ethics. They are necessary in the normative move that she makes from antagonism to agonism. This is evident in her *The Return of the Political* (1993). Similar to Young and Dryzek, who argue that rationalism must be weakened to allow the expression of plurality and particularity, Mouffe argues that we must affirm that rationalism and consensus are plural, discursively constructed, and entangled with power relations (1993, 7). Let us look at Mouffe’s appropriation of discourse ethics more closely in the following section.

5.2 Discourse ethics in Mouffe’s normative move from antagonism to agonism

In her three main works, *The Return of the Political* (1993), *The Democratic Paradox* (2000), and *On The Political* (2005), Mouffe proposes ‘agonistic pluralism’ that acknowledges the dimensions of antagonism and power in ‘the political’ as endemic to plural societies. This acknowledgement implies several things that are different from Habermas but bears resemblance to Young’s and Dryzek’s appropriations of his discourse ethics. Mouffe’s recognition of ineradicability of antagonism does not negate communicative ethics that Young and Dryzek rely on to accommodate the extra-rational aspects of ‘the political’. ‘Agonistic pluralism’ recognizes that antagonism cannot be resolved by rationalism and accepts that antagonism precludes any kind of final reconciliation. Previously, it was noted that Mouffe characterizes the antagonistic dimension between human beings by drawing on Schmitt’s concept of ‘the political’ as a domain where groups identify one another according to the friend/enemy discrimination. For Mouffe antagonism involves the relationship between enemies that are set out to destroy each other.

The first step in Mouffe’s theory, and it is a normative move, is to assert that the friend/enemy distinction is not the only form that antagonism can take (see 2000, 13). Antagonism can also be between adversaries. Mouffe makes a normative move when she distinguishes between ‘enemy’ and ‘adversary’. There can be antagonism “between enemies, that is, persons who have no common symbolic space” and antagonism between ‘adversaries’, “adversaries being defined in a paradoxical way as ‘friendly enemies’, that is, persons who
are friends because they share a common symbolic space but also enemies because they want to organize this common symbolic space in a different way” (Mouffe 2000, 13). Elsewhere, Mouffe defines ‘adversary’ in similar terms: “an adversary is a legitimate enemy, an enemy with whom we have in common a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of democracy” (1999, 755). For Mouffe, if we share a common bond in our allegiance to such things as liberty and equality, then the struggle between us is a struggle between adversaries. If, on the other hand, I contest your allegiance to liberty and equality, that is, we do not have a “common symbolic space” that consists of such symbols as liberty and equality, then we are enemies.

By definition, adversaries compete in organizing the common symbolic space as equals. That is the fundamental thing to keep in mind about ‘agonistic pluralism’ – the struggle presupposes equality between the competitors. If antagonism is a constant possibility in plural democracy and we want to maintain political practices that adhere to democratic values and principles, then we must engage not as enemies but as adversaries. This is Mouffe’s normative move. ‘Adversary’ has a normative function as a key category that defines ‘agonistic pluralism’. Thus, antagonism can take two forms: one that occurs between enemies that do not share a common symbolic space (antagonism proper) and one that occurs between adversaries that share a common symbolic space. Mouffe establishes the second form antagonism as agonism. Etymologically, the term ‘agonism’ denotes competition and struggle between equals, usually competitors that follow the same rules of the competition. Hence Mouffe’s ‘agonistic pluralism’, which “requires that the opponent should be considered not as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an adversary whose existence is legitimate and must be tolerated. We will fight against his ideas but we will not question his right to defend them” (1993, 4).

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76 From a Gadamerian perspective, “common symbolic space” is a technical term specific to the postmodern discourse theory that bears a family resemblance to Gadamer’s ‘historically effected consciousness’. Recall that the structure of ‘historically effected consciousness’ consists of hermeneutic situation, hermeneutic experience, and hermeneutic consciousness. It also implies Gadamer’s hermeneutic phenomenology of prejudice, tradition, and authority. In other words, “common symbolic space” and “historically effected consciousness” share the idea that we need a common continuity of history and traditions in order to understand things in ways where we can recognize that our disputes are a matter of interpretation rather than epistemology.
In making this normative move for the category of ‘adversary’, Mouffe must rely on the basic precepts of discourse ethics: communicative ethics and procedural consensus. This argument can be supported by looking at the definitions of Mouffe’s terms. Given the way Mouffe defines and distinguishes antagonism from agonism by making a normative move from the category of enemies to the category of adversaries, it can be established that antagonism can be transformed into agonism only when enemies agree to become adversaries by agreeing to follow the same rules and adhere to the same symbols like liberty and equality. This resembles the procedural consensus that Young and Dryzek rely on. In other words, there must be some form of, even if only contingent, consensus on the rules of the game. Discourse ethics specifies exactly the kind of pragmatic assumptions we must make as language users in order to make consensus on the rules achievable. This must be the presupposition for the possibility of transforming enemies into adversaries and antagonism into agonism.

Before turning to this argument, let us first look at the problems Mouffe finds with Habermas’ discourse ethics in coming to terms with antagonism. Above, it was established that Habermas’ discourse ethics must negate the antagonistic dimension of ‘the political’ in order to make the procedural conditions for consensus possible. Since ‘the political’ entails relationship between ‘enemies’ and/or ‘adversaries’, and since ‘the political’ is the domain where the extra-rational and passions manifest themselves (see Mouffe 2005, 24), it poses a real problem for using the principles of discourse to reach universal consensus on the validity of any given norm, rule, or principle. Therefore, Habermas must distinguish between ethical and moral discourses and relegate the antagonistic dimensions of ‘the political’ into the ethical form of discourse. Thus, the moral form of discourse requires that we leave passions, historical and cultural particularities, ethics behind when we come to discuss the validity of universalizable norms. Let us now look at the issues that Mouffe raises.

Mouffe makes her argument for why she thinks Habermas’ deliberative democracy cannot grasp the real nature of democratic politics and provide a real alternative to the aggregative models of democracy in her article “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism” (1999, 745-758). She puts
forward two critical arguments against Habermas. In the first one, she draws on Wittgenstein to challenge Habermas’ “conception of procedure and to challenge the very idea of a neutral or rational dialogue” (Mouffe 1999, 749ff). Here Mouffe raises issues with the distinction that Habermas makes between moral and ethical discourses. She relies on Wittgenstein’s argument on procedures as consisting in specific ethics to support her argument. Mouffe argues:

According to him [Wittgenstein], procedure only exists as a complex ensemble of practices. Those practices constitute specific forms of individuality and identity that make possible the allegiance to the procedures. It is because they are inscribed in shared forms of life and agreements in judgements that procedures can be accepted and followed. They cannot be seen as rules that are created on the basis of principles and then applied to specific cases. Rules for Wittgenstein are always abridgements of practices, they are inseparable of specific forms of life. Therefore, distinctions between ‘procedural’ and ‘substantial’ or between ‘moral’ and ‘ethical’ that are central to the Habermasian approach cannot be maintained and one must acknowledge that procedures always involve substantial ethical commitments (1999, 749).

In the previous chapters, it was established that Habermas’ distinction between ‘moral’ and ‘ethical’ discourses cannot be maintained. Namely, it cannot be posited that procedures and the conditions for reaching agreement cannot be the result of impartiality and neutrality because understanding is situated within specific ethics and forms of life. Mouffe’s argument above is similar. She points out that procedures themselves are ready to hand and already present in the specific forms of life. Our agreement on the procedures, before there is consensus on the validity of any norms, must be the result of our sharing in a common (ethical) form of life. Therefore, consensus on the validity of the norms also depends on how the way they are understood is informed by the hermeneutical situation. The implications Mouffe draws from this are also similar to the hermeneutical critique of Habermas: “such an approach requires reintroducing into the process of deliberation the whole rhetorical dimension that the Habermasian discourse perspective is precisely at pains to eliminate” (Mouffe 1999, 749). Both Young and Dryzek concede that the rhetorical dimensions, along with storytelling, must be admitted into discourse. These kinds of elements enter deliberation because of the overlap between the moral and ethical discourses.
We have seen in Chapter 2, Section 2.3 that in this overlap the application of the principle as well as its appropriateness for concrete situations can be contested. When appropriateness is contested, it might be necessary to decide between two competing principles backed by the ethical discourses. The issue of whether right to life or freedom of choice or human (women’s) rights is appropriate in the case of abortion is illustrative of these kinds of interpretive conflicts. Mouffe amplifies these concerns when she quotes Wittgenstein:

where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and an heretic. I said I would ‘combat’ the other man, but wouldn’t I give him reasons? Certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes persuasion (Wittgenstein 1969, 81e qtd. in Mouffe 1999, 750; emphasis as in the original).

The point at which narratives/storytelling and rhetoric enter deliberation, discussion becomes persuasion. This is one of the points at which Mouffe’s ‘agonistic pluralism’ bears resemblance to Young’s and Dryzek’s deliberative democracies. All three affirm, based on arguments that are hermeneutical at their core, that there cannot be democratic politics based on neutral and impartial procedures, and there cannot be purely rational argumentation. They are hermeneutical at their core because their argument is based on the recognition of the contextuality and historicality of understanding and language.

In the second critical argument, Mouffe takes issue with the regulative function of Habermas’ ‘ideal speech situation’. Here she draws on Lacan to show that ‘ideal speech situation’ is not as free from coercion as Habermas intends. She argues that “a Lacanian approach reveals how discourse itself in its fundamental structure is authoritarian since out of the free-floating dispersion of signifiers, it is only through the intervention of a master signifier that a consistent field of meaning can emerge” (1999, 751). In the paper Mouffe relies on Zizek’s interpretation of Lacan. The idea is that in addition to being sensitive to coercion and authoritarian influence by agents in discourse, it is necessary to be aware that discourse is based on the authoritarian ordering of signifiers such as equality, liberty, and individual rights. Thus, discourses such as libertarianism are constituted by an authoritarian form of subjection of a multitude of signifiers such as popular sovereignty, equality, and rights by the
master signifier ‘individual liberty’. The master signifier distorts the discursive field that contains those signifiers to create a meaningful whole that we can identify as libertarianism. Mouffe draws to our attention that such constitutions can distort the shared discursive field itself. There must be a distortion because distortion constructs meaningful wholes from the symbolic content of the discursive field. Mouffe concludes, “Lacan undermines in that way the very basis of Habermasian view, according to which the inherent pragmatic presuppositions of discourse are non-authoritarian, since they imply the idea of a communication free of constraint where only rational argumentation counts” (1999, 751).

Mouffe’s second argument expresses Young’s and Dryzek’s concerns that communication might already be taking place in terms and rationality ordered by a particular way of life or discourse that favours the dominant group. In other words, what these three thinkers bring to our attention in their own distinct ways is the fact that unconstrained communication can be constrained by the limited ways we understand such things as liberty, equality, justice and the very rationality that is specific to our (ethical) form of life. Young expresses this in terms of her concerns that some groups may even lack the language to express their experience and make a rational argument to support their appeal. Dryzek also expresses this concern in his notion of ‘reflexivity’ by which he wants to draw our attention that rationality may be influenced by the constitutive features of particular discourses as structures of power. All three thinkers see in Habermas’ discourse ethics a tendency to favour one form of reason that can erase the conditions of possibility for pluralism.

For Mouffe, the main question that Habermas cannot answer is how should we engage antagonism and constitute forms of power that are compatible with democracy if we cannot and should not eliminate them? Her own answer to this question consists of four parts that define her theory of democratic politics as agonism. First, it is necessary to “de-universalize” political subjects and “break with all forms of essentialism” (Mouffe 1999, 754). Second, it is necessary to reject extreme forms of particularism and contextualism. Here she calls to break “not only the essentialism that penetrates to a large extent the basic categories of modern sociology and liberal thought and according to which every social identity is perfectly defined in the historical process of the
unfolding of being; but also with its diametrical opposite: a certain type of extreme post-modern fragmentation of the social that refuses to give the fragments any kind of relational identity” (Mouffe 1999, 754). For Mouffe, it is important that we don’t fall into the extreme kind of heterogeneity and incommensurability because “such a view impedes recognition of how certain differences are constructed as relations of subordination and should therefore be challenged by radical democratic politics” (1999, 754). In other words, we must be careful that our celebration of difference for difference’s sake does not ignore the constitutive dimension of power. Third, it is necessary to distinguish between ‘the political’ and ‘politics’. By ‘the political’ Mouffe refers “to the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in all human society” and by ‘politics’ she refers “to the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of ‘the political’” (1999, 754). Finally, fourth, we need to distinguish between ‘antagonism’ and ‘agonism’ based on the distinction of the categories ‘enemy’ and ‘adversary’. These four are the characteristics of Mouffe’s ‘agonistic pluralism’ that reckons with ineradicability of antagonism.

These characteristics mark the difference between ‘agonistic pluralism’ and Habermas’ version of deliberative democracy. First, in making the normative move from antagonism to agonism by getting the enemies to adhere to the “ethico-political principles of democracy”, Mouffe rejects the rational standards of discourse ethics. She writes, “contrary to the model of ‘deliberative democracy,’ the model of ‘agonistic pluralism’ that I am advocating asserts that the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions nor to relegate them to the private sphere in order to render rational consensus possible, but to mobilise those passions towards the promotion of democratic designs” (1999, 755-756). Second, Mouffe denies the possibility universal rational consensus. To assume that there can be consensus is to contradict modern democratic logic. For Mouffe, “modern democracy’s specificity lies in the recognition and legitimation of conflict and the refusal to suppress it by imposing an authoritarian order” (1999, 756). For ‘politics’ to be democratic, it must allow “the expression of conflicting interests and values” (Mouffe 1999, 756). Habermas’ discourse ethics requires that such conflicts be kept outside ‘moral
discourse’ in order to make rational consensus on universal norms possible. Young and Dryzek take issues with this requirement but they do not reject it fully. Rather they argue to expand the rationality to allow the expression of conflict without losing the overall (procedural) constitution of discourse ethics. I argue that Mouffe makes a similar move. There is evidence in her work to support this claim.

Throughout her main body of works (1993; 2000; 2005; 2013), and especially in the paper on Habermas (1999), Mouffe concedes that consensus is necessary. She takes a nuanced position on consensus, just as Young and Dryzek do. She writes, “to be sure, pluralist democracy demands a certain amount of consensus, but such a consensus concerns only some ethico-political principles” (1999, 756). However, for Mouffe, it is important that consensus remains open as “conflictual consensus” (1999, 756). It must remain open to further challenges. In other words, we will agree that we want to adhere to democratic principles like liberty and equality but we will disagree about our interpretations of them and we will compete as adversaries in trying to constitute ‘politics’ in terms of our interpretation of the values. That is how we establish ‘hegemony’. Ultimately, it is an act of power. But the prior agreement on the values themselves is necessary. It is precisely this agreement that keeps us as ‘adversaries’ without becoming ‘enemies’. Also, being ‘adversaries’ does not simply require adherence to the symbols such as liberty and equality without having to agree on what those symbols mean. Being ‘adversaries’ in an agonistic struggle that is true to its own definition requires that the adversaries are equal, that is, one does not exercise coercive power over another and it also requires that we ‘struggle’ according to the same rules. In other words, adversaries follow the same “democratic rules of the game” (see Wenman 2003, 181-182).

Habermas must be aware that deliberation is not always a friendly exchange between like-minded intellectuals. After all, discourse for Habermas is a problem solving mechanism, a sort of domain where conflicting claims can be resolved. As such, it requires that the sides do not coerce one another or threaten with violence. It also requires that the sides follow the same rules and regulations in exchanging their arguments such as giving each side equal opportunity to speak, etc. It is the strict rationality, tendency to abstract and
universalize, and pretence for neutrality and impartiality that I am quarrelling with. The value of Habermas’ theory of communicative action is in finding these kinds of normative regulations strictly in our capacity as beings that communicate and use communication as means to induce and organize action. Mouffe has to rely on similar grounds to postulate that there can be adversaries instead of enemies, and that there can be transformation of antagonism into agonism.

It may be strange to consider Mouffe along with deliberative democrats because she argues for an alternative to the theory of deliberative democracy. However, I interpret her as an appropriator of discourse ethics in a way that addresses its shortcomings on the problems that come with antagonism. Thus, I read her as someone who appropriates discourse ethics rather than proposes something radically different because she recognizes that “in the end what is necessary for a democratic society to function is a set of institutions and practices which constitute the framework of a consensus within which pluralism can exist” (Mouffe 1992, 13-14).

All deliberative democracies rely on consensus and adherence to some ethico-political ideals. Young argues that inclusion of extra-rational forms of communication must still be regulated by common adherence to respecting ‘self-determination’ and ‘self-development’ and a kind of meta-consensus that communication should follow democratic values of “inclusion, political equality, reasonableness, and publicity” (2000, 17). Dryzek offers similar kinds of tests for checking on what kinds of extra-rational forms of communication can be included in deliberation. He also concedes to Mouffe and acknowledges the dimensions of antagonism and power (Dryzek 2010, 113-114). He allows antagonism but argues that it must be subject to “meta-consensus” (Dryzek 2010, 114). In similar terms with Mouffe, meta-consensus means adherence to democratic values and accepting different interpretations of these values as legitimate.

Mouffe’s ‘agonistic pluralism’ involves appropriation of discourse ethics in a way that is similar to Young’s politics of difference and Dryzek’s discursive democracy. Particularly, Mouffe’s push for common adherence to ethico-political norms depends on a form of consensus. Wenman interprets it as a form
of “quasi-republican political constitution” (see Wenman 2003, 165-186). He suggests that “Mouffe reworks the civic-republican tradition in order to develop a theory of single sovereign authority, which is constitutive of the agonistic games of a diverse citizenry” (2003, 178). He shows that for Mouffe the main question is about having a framework and a constitution that is compatible with pluralism and that such a framework is possible within a quasi-republican constitution of agonistic politics. The ‘republican’ part of Mouffe’s agonism is in her argument that it is possible to have a community not based on substantive idea of common good but on common bond and adherence to ethico-political principles. That is a form of overlapping consensus because to engage as adversaries, the enemies must have an overarching agreement on the “democratic rules of the game” (Wenman 2003, 181). However, this consensus is not final and can always be renegotiated.

5.3 Agonistic contestation as interpretive conflicts

Building on the previous discussion, I now show how agonism can be appropriated to include interpretive conflicts as a resource. Based on Mouffe’s theoretical framework, it can only be argued that interpretive conflicts occur between ‘adversaries’. ‘Enemies’ cannot have interpretive conflicts because they do not share the symbols in the discursive field. Adversaries share a common allegiance to the democratic principles of ‘liberty and equality for all’ while disagreeing about their interpretation.

Mouffe argues that “in a pluralist democracy, disagreements about how to interpret the shared ethico-political principles are not only legitimate but also necessary” (2013, 8). They are necessary because they make democratic politics more inclusive of difference. The “stuff of democratic politics”, as Mouffe refers to it, is the conflicts of interpretation of values and principles to which everyone should pledge their allegiance. Allowing interpretive conflicts permits “different forms of citizen identification” (2013, 8). Namely, it allows the other to contest one’s understanding from its own particular perspective. If interpretive conflicts are not allowed, then there is no “democratic outlet” for difference to express itself. Mouffe warns that a politics without interpretive conflicts turns into “various forms of politics articulated around essentialist identities of a nationalist, religious or ethnic type, and for the multiplication of confrontations
over non-negotiable moral values, with all the manifestations of violence that such confrontations entail" (2013, 8)

Today, it is uncertain what will come with the general election in the USA but one thing is certain: some factions are just off the political spectrum and they do not even want to recognize the interpretive aspects of politics. Extreme right is on the rise in Europe. Russia is longing for Stalinist monism. In China, the established interpretation of free market capitalism according to socialist ideals cannot be challenged. In all cases, there is a move away from interpretive conflicts which signals that democratic politics and pluralism are in danger. I think it is necessary to take Mouffe’s warning seriously. She warns that if we do not give democratic expression to interpretive conflicts, they can transform into violent conflict. The two kinds of conflict are different in nature. The former presupposes dialogue and persuasion while accepting that the different other is valid, whereas the latter presupposes undermining the validity of the different other altogether.

Hence, interpretive conflicts is not just the stuff of democratic politics but the only way in which adversaries can engage and encounter one another. Another kind of conflict would transform them into enemies. Having taken the problems and dangers of disregarding interpretive conflicts from Mouffe, it must be noted that her solution is not fully in line with our ideal of pluralism. Mouffe wants to establish agonistic contestation in the form of a *dia*-logue between left and right, whereas the dialogue in pluralism as engagement and encounter is more in the sense of a *pluri*-logue. One could say that Mouffe’s idea of interpretive conflicts is purely political. In politics, there cannot be anything but the left and right. She wants the return of ‘the political’ in terms of the interpretive conflicts between the Left and the Right.

However, in plural societies interpretive conflicts over values involve such issues as women’s rights, freedom of speech, right to life, where the antagonism between the left and the right does not clarify anything. In light of these problems that show a more complex picture of plurality in modern societies, I wish to appropriate agonism as a mode of interpretive contestation when the ethico-political consensus comes under question and communication breaks down because there are competing interpretations of the guiding values
and principles themselves. For instance, we can engage in an agonistic mode of contestation over concrete ways of interpreting and instantiating openness. It does not need to be a conflict between left and right. It is a conflict between understandings, and therefore, a conflict of interpretations.

5.4 Agonism as instantiation of openness in democratic politics

If we accept the argument in chapter 2 that pluralism as engagement and encounter entails interpretive conflicts because of the nature of understanding, then in my view it is necessary to take into account that the dimension of “conflict” can take another form. If we accept Mouffe’s account of ‘the political’, then we need to acknowledge that engagement between, for instance, social groups or discourses can be based on a we/they discrimination in two forms (see Mouffe 1993, 77): antagonistic (as enemies) and agonistic (as adversaries). Antagonism is inherent and always a possibility, hence its ontological dimension, and agonism depends on the normative move specified in Section 5.2. I think in politics it is necessary to be ready for openness to a kind of other that poses an antagonistic relationship, i.e. the kind of other that denies the very principles by which we are open to it and are willing to encounter it. As Mouffe writes, “indeed, we approach the moment of antagonism when the ‘other’, who up until now has been considered as different, starts to be perceived as someone who is rejecting ‘my’ identity and who is threatening ‘my’ existence” (Mouffe 1994, 108).

When pushing for engagement and encounter of the other, it is necessary to be aware of the possibility that there is a we/they plurality that can turn into friend/enemy confrontation. Mouffe’s argument that antagonism cannot be eliminated or confined to the private sphere is compelling (see Mouffe 1993, 111; 2000, 21). Liberal democrats as well as Habermas are aware of this problem. That is why the former promote the principle of tolerance and the latter advocates leaving our particularities behind. Obviously, the idea of pluralism I pursue in this research overrides these “measures”. If we still want to promote

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77 Mouffe writes: “The novelty of democratic politics is not the overcoming of this us/them opposition – which is an impossibility – but the different way in which it is established. The crucial issue is to establish this us/them discrimination in a way that is compatible with pluralist democracy. Envisaged from the point of view of ‘agonistic pluralism’, the aim of democratic politics is to construct the ‘them’ in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an ‘adversary’, that is, somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question” (Mouffe 2000: 101-102)
that participants do not leave their particularities behind and encounter each other’s commitments, we need to have a normative idea that can prevent “interpretive conflicts” from turning into antagonism, which Mouffe has shown as a constant possibility⁷⁸. Neither Gadamer’s principle of openness, nor asymmetric reciprocity or reflexivity give us guidance on how to practice openness towards an “enemy”.

For this reason I find Mouffe’s argument to transform antagonism into agonism through a normative move from enemy to adversary particularly useful. Drawing on Mouffe, in this section, I develop an account of ‘agonism’ as a mode of openness that can complement asymmetric reciprocity and reflexivity in democratic politics.

Previously, ‘agonism’ was defined as struggle between adversaries. An adversary, is a “legitimate enemy, an enemy with whom we have in common a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of democracy” (Mouffe 1999, 755)⁷⁹. On this basis, antagonism as a form of conflictual relationship between enemies can be transformed into agonism as a form of conflictual relationship when enemies become adversaries. That is, once we agree that we all adhere to follow such principles as openness, liberty, equality, we do not contest the principles themselves, only our interpretations of them and the way we want to organize our common discursive field in relationship to them. Thus, the normative move from enemies to adversaries involves us recognizing that we all adhere to the same principles and agree to contest according to set rules. Agonism implies a struggle between equal adversaries, and therefore

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⁷⁸ For example, “In a pluralist democracy, disagreements about how to interpret the shared ethico-political principles are not only legitimate but also necessary. They allow for different forms of citizenship identification and are the stuff of democratic politics. When the agonistic dynamics of pluralism are hindered because of a lack of democratic forms of identifications, then passions cannot be given a democratic outlet. The ground is therefore laid for various forms of politics articulated around essentialist identities of a nationalist, religious or ethnic type, and for the multiplication of confrontations over non-negotiable moral values, with all the manifestations of violence that such confrontations entail” (Mouffe 2013: 8).

⁷⁹ More specifically, Mouffe defines adversary as “an enemy, but a legitimate enemy, one with whom we have some common ground because we have a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy: liberty and equality. But we disagree concerning the meaning and implementation of those principles, and such a disagreement is not the one that could be resolved through deliberation and rational discussion. Indeed given the ineradicable pluralism of value, there is no rational resolution of the conflict, hence its antagonistic dimension” (Mouffe 2000: 102)
eliminates strategic contestations that can be supported by financial resources, power relations and etc.

Further drawing on Mouffe, we should not think of adversaries in liberal terms as competitors. Competitors can compete with regards to different economic and political interests without challenging the underlying political institutions or hegemonic interpretations of set values and principles (see Mouffe 2013, 8f). The category of adversary maintains a critical edge that “competitors” does not because it allows for articulations that challenge the underlying institutions and hegemonic establishments. It is a radical form of dissent without threatening the underlying principles of openness, liberty, and equality. An adversarial confrontation is “a real confrontation, but one that is played out under the conditions regulated by a set of democratic procedures accepted by the adversaries” (Mouffe 2013, 9). It is on the basis of this term that, for instance, Fraser notes a fundamental similarity between Mouffe and deliberative democrats80.

However, there is a crucial difference between the deliberative democrats we have looked at here and Mouffe81. It has to do with Mouffe’s emphasis that her formulation of agonistic struggle in terms of confrontation between adversaries entails a certain form of “conversion”, whereas deliberative democrats of the Habermasian strand emphasise on the “process of rational persuasion” (Mouffe 2000, 102; emphasis added). This distinction raises an important problem for my own approach based on Gadamer’s principle of openness. On the one hand, the hermeneutic premises on which I rely to develop an account of asymmetric reciprocity and reflexivity do not allow “conversion” per se; on the other hand, however, given the argument that “hermeneutic experience” entails a shift in self-understanding, there is certainly

80 Dryzek, for instance, argues (or, perhaps, even frustrated) that he cannot identify a radical difference between his way of “practicing” democratic politics and Mouffe’s (see Dryzek, 2010: 113).

81 Of course, there are other ways to differentiate deliberative democrats from agonists. Wenman, for instance, argues that agonists have three aspects in common: constitutive view of pluralism, tragic view of the world, and value of conflict for democratic politics (see Wenman 2013). According to him, those who see Mouffe and deliberative democrats in similar terms ignore that there is a “basic incommensurability between a model of democracy where contest and fallibility are understood as contingent limitations on otherwise potentially rational forms of democratic will formation, and the wholeheartedly tragic vision of agonistic democracy where conflict is understood as intrinsic to political life” (Wenman 2013: 85).
conversion in the sense of an aspect change present in the encounter with the other.

It is necessary to understand the difference between these two forms of conversion. I wish to reject Mouffe’s idea of “conversion” for two reasons. First, it can preclude bilateral understanding presupposed in Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’. Two, I think the Gadamerian argument for a shift in self-understanding is based on a conception of reason that resembles more closely persuasion (recall that for Gadamer the heart of hermeneutics has to do with assumption that the other might be right) rather than conversion. I imagine that Mouffe’s idea of conversion does not sit well with Gadamer’s philosophy because it implies a certain form of “appropriation” of the other. Let us resolve this by first looking at Mouffe’s argument. For Mouffe,

To accept the view of the adversary is to undergo a radical change in political identity. It is more a sort of conversion than a process of rational persuasion (in the same way as Thomas Kuhn has argued that adherence to a new scientific paradigm is a conversion). Compromises are, of course, also possible; they are part and parcel of politics, but they should be seen as temporary respites in an ongoing confrontation” (Mouffe 2000, 102; emphasis as in the original).

Mouffe’s line “to accept the view of adversary is to undergo a radical change in political identity” bears resemblance to what Taylor draws from Gadamer as “goal-revision”. Recall that for Taylor it is necessary to be ready to undergo a change in ourselves because we have an identity investment in our view of the other. This feature of “conversion” keeps democracy vibrant. If “conversion” is defined as accepting the adversary’s view, then not accepting the other’s view constitutes the we/they differentiation. This differentiation is the stuff of adversarial struggle in Mouffe’s agonism. The struggle is to convert the other, which the antagonistic dimension never brings to completion.

I am concerned that Mouffe’s conversion falls short of Gadamer’s idea of ‘fusion of horizons’, which I have taken as a model of understanding in this research. According to Mouffe’s definition of the term, it is not necessary that conversion is bilateral. It is enough that one of the adversaries undergoes a shift in identity, rather than both. My Gadamerian position is different. I would rather think about conversion as bilateral in the sense of ‘fusion of horizons’ in which
both sides undergo a change. Recall that for Gadamer’s “fusion” both horizons must undergo a shift and change. I think a Gadamerian articulation of conception is more conducive and committed to the ideal of pluralism than Mouffe’s because it promotes engagement and encounter to reach understanding between parties rather than strategic conversion and appropriation of the other. I am aware that in the political field Mouffe’s idea of “conversion” is a more realistically descriptive term. If struggles between adversaries persist on conversion, I think that at least it is necessary to maintain Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’ as a normative ideal against which Mouffe’s conception of “conversions” can be evaluated.

The other question then is: if Gadamerian premise draws me away from Mouffe’s idea of “conversion”, where does it put me in relation to Habermasian “persuasion”? In Habermasian terms, persuasion is always the result of rational argumentation, i.e. rational redeeming of validity claims. In a certain sense, I am obliged to be persuaded when presented with a rational argument. In the end, I am the judge of whether I am persuaded or not, however, I also need to offer rational argument for rejecting persuasion. Given the dangers of Habermasian rationality that I identified previously, “persuasion” also depends on certain qualifiers.

According to Gadamer, ‘fusion of horizons’ involves the relationship between reason, prejudice, and tradition. From his perspective, Habermasian emphasis on persuasion is based on the Enlightenment’s conception of reason as diametrically opposed to authority and tradition. That is, persuasion must be accepted by the other side only when reason appeals to rational principles rather than to the authority of any particular tradition or prejudice. In this way, Habermasian deliberative democrats make sure that no one blindly obeys any general norms and principles based on arbitrary authority and the will of any individuals or traditions.

82 An issue rises here: fusion of horizons can then mean that all competing interpretations at some point converge into one single view (which would be an un-Gadamerian) and eradicate conflict, whereas Mouffe’s “conversion” implies a certain resistance between adversaries because precisely accepting the articulation of one would convert the other. Therefore, Mouffe preserves the role of adversarial conflict as conditions of possibility for democratic politics. With Gadamer, fusion does not necessarily mean that the two parties ascend, so to speak, to a common understanding. They do not “walk away” with identical understanding. Therefore, there is no final and complete understanding to be arrived at when all horizons have completed fusing. Recall that Gadamer rejects the finality of Hegelian dialectics.
Gadamer challenges the opposition between reason and tradition. For him, authority indeed cannot be arbitrary. “The authority of persons is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgement and knowledge – the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgement and insight and that for this reason his judgement takes precedence – i.e. it has priority over one’s own” (Gadamer 2013, 291). It is easy to conclude that the difference between Gadamer and Habermas is that the former has in mind the authority of a definite subject such as a teacher, a lawyer, an expert and the latter has in mind the authority of the subjectless rationality in general and rule of law in particular. However, according to Gadamer, authority cannot just be bestowed upon anybody (see 2013, 291ff). It must be backed by reason, otherwise it is arbitrary. On this basis, he argues that the person who simply obeys something without reason is slavish and one who obeys authority backed by reason is undogmatic (Gadamer 2013, 364-369).

I do not assume to reconcile Habermas’ opposition to Gadamer on this matter. However, there is certain sense of persuasion that must take place Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’ too. That is, one must be persuaded by the authority and tradition to take into account what it has to say and perhaps even give it priority on the account of that persuasion. For this reason I am more inclined to lean towards “persuasion” rather than Mouffe’s “conversion”. Especially, given that in chapters 3 and 4 it has been established that forms of communication such as greeting, narratives, and rhetoric are also a form of persuasion rather than conversion of the other. Thus, persuasion can maintain difference. It does not preclude ‘fusion of horizons’, or engagement and encounter across difference, or result in the appropriation of the other. With persuasion, it is possible to retain an aspect change that comes about with “goal-revision” or a change in self-understanding.

Gadamer too is a proponent of rule of law and he would object to interpreting him as someone who promotes something other than the rule of law. For instance, Gadamer argues that legal hermeneutics would be impossible if there was no rule of law: “Thus it is an essential condition of the possibility of legal hermeneutics that law is binding on all members of the community in the same way. Where this is not the case – for example in an absolutist state, where the state will of the absolute ruler is above the law – hermeneutics cannot exist” (Gadamer 2013, 338).
Having identified the aspect of Mouffe agonism to which I think we should not subscribe, I will now focus on the aspects of agonism that I appropriate as a mode of openness. First, it is the ethico-political bond that agonism requires (see Mouffe 1993, 69-73). Agonism requires that parties are equal, that they follow the same rules, and have well-defined boundaries for their engagement. The analogue to agonism is a sports game or a competition, for instance a boxing match, in which both fighters must be equally matched and fight each other according to set rules. Otherwise, it is not boxing. Similarly, adversaries agree that they will adhere to, for instance as Mouffe suggests, “liberty and equality”, they agree to respect each other’s interpretations of these principles and respect each other’s rights to fight for this interpretations, and they also agree to fight for it on equal terms. When defined in such a way, agonism gives a definite political boundary to democratic politics that instantiates openness in the modes of asymmetric reciprocity and reflexivity.

In chapter 1, I noted that Gutmann and Thompson critique of prioritizing procedures over constitutional constraints must be taken into account (see Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 17, 200, 216; see also 2005, chapter 3). They argue that it is important to impose some constitutional constraints on the procedure. I also noted that it is worth turning to Mouffe in addressing this critique because she gives a better account of what is at stake in establishing constitutional constraints.

Part of the problem in the challenge of plurality is to constitute a commonality between people that have little in common. In part, politics is about rank-ordering values that are otherwise incommensurable and cannot be rank-ordered. This task entails conflict between different sources of values. What Mouffe puts on the table is that commitment to pluralism does not only entail an engagement and encounter to reach understanding. It also entails a sense of confrontation, so there is a conflictual dimension to engaging and encountering the other. Mouffe helps me answer the question: if there is a conflictual dimension in the relationship with the other, how is it possible to practice openness towards the other who contests the very principles that allow our engagement and encounter. Agonism contains the categories of enemy and adversary that are important in answering this question.
However, turning to Mouffe’s agonism poses certain issues for my project. My research assumes a position within Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics and claims that what should take place above and beyond engagement and encounter is understanding. Mouffe’s agonism is not concerned with understanding. Rather, it is concerned with strategic discursive articulations by different groups; it is concerned with practices and activities that constitute identity (Wenman 2003, 167) and, above all, Mouffe’s agonism is concerned with preventing the “return of the political” in its antagonistic form: an uncompromising conflict between enemies that are out to destroy each other. Therefore, it is necessary to address the question how to appropriate agonism as a mode of openness that somehow does not eliminate the need for understanding, engagement, and encounter of the other in their otherness and whether, given its strategic orientation to dominate the shared discursive field, agonism runs contrary to the principle of openness. In other words, if we are to introduce agonistic struggle as an element of democratic politics, do we not nullify the normative function of openness in pluralism?

I think rejecting Mouffe’s emphasis on conversion softens this problem. As I argued above, conversion resembles appropriation of the other rather than understanding the other and therefore runs contrary to Gadamer’s hermeneutics. However, just rejecting conversion as the force that fuels agonistic struggle does not make it conducive to understanding and the criteria of pluralism I am promoting here. Additionally, I think it is necessary to amplify first, her argument that subject positions are relational (be they individual identities or social groups as in Young) because it allows Gadamer’s hermeneutical experience and openness, second, her emphasis on the role of tradition, and third, what Wenman identifies as the “quasi-republican” features in Mouffe’s thought (Wenman 2003).

Recall that the ontological dimension of antagonism points at the radical negativity of the social. This means that construction of identities, articulation of discourses, establishment of objectivities – all are relational and cannot be in isolation. In the *Return of the Political*, Mouffe argues that in order to make democratic politics capable of meeting the challenges of growing plurality in the contemporary world,
it is indispensable to develop a theory of the subject as a
decentred, detotalized agent, a subject constructed at the
point of intersection of a multiplicity of subject positions
between which there exists no a priori or necessary relation
and whose articulation is the result of hegemonic practices.
Consequently, no identity is ever definitively established, there
always being a certain degree of openness and ambiguity in
the way the different subject positions are articulated (1993,
12).

In my opinion, this prevents the sense of finality that the strategic aspects of
agonistic struggle entails and allows a certain level of hermeneutical
experience. It does so because the impossibility of finality and the radical
negativity must presuppose the inevitability of negative experience the way
Gadamer means it. In the book, a few pages later Mouffe accepts the
importance of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics for understanding the
conception of divided self (see 1993, 16-17)\(^84\). More importantly, she accepts
how situatedness and finitude of understanding make it necessary for us to turn
to Gadamer’s model of understanding outlined above: “it is precisely these
prejudices that define our hermeneutical situation and constitute our condition
of understanding and openness to the world” (Mouffe 1993, 17)\(^85\). Emphasising
this point brings Mouffe closer to the way Young (2000)\(^86\) and Dryzek (2010b,
6)\(^87\) understand divided self and exposes the compatibility of central features of
agonism with the ontological dimension of human finitude, which points towards
the necessity of openness.

\(^84\) In this work, Mouffe points at the importance of conservative philosophy for better
ways to think politically on the relationship between tradition and democratic politics. She writes:
“This importance afforded to tradition is also one of the principal themes of Gadamer’s
philosophical hermeneutics, which offers us a number of important ways of thinking about the
construction of the political subject” (1993: 16-17)

\(^85\) Though she explicitly turns to Wittgenstein in order to make the “conception of
tradition found in Gadamer … more specific and complex” (see 1993: 17f)

\(^86\) For Young the complexity of divided self is constituted by perspectives, interests,
opinions, and groups.

\(^87\) However, Mouffe is not interested in the problems the idea of divided self poses for
representation. While Mouffe is concerned with it in terms of the problems it poses in thinking
about politics generally, Dryzek and Young are concerned with the problems it poses for
representation. Dryzek understands himself and Young to be consistent with what Castiglione
and Warren put: “From the perspective of those who are represented, what is represented are
not persons as such, but some of the interests, identities, and values that persons have or hold”
Still building on Gadamer’s rehabilitated conception of tradition, Mouffe argues that it is necessary to think of tradition as fluid and amenable to change. For Mouffe, the democratic tradition is an exemplar of what counts as a Gadamerian view of tradition. The democratic tradition is “composite, heterogeneous, open, and ultimately indeterminate”; “several possible strategies are always available, not only in the sense of the different interpretations one can make of the same element, but also because of the way in which some parts or aspects of tradition can be played against others” (Mouffe 1993, 17-18). For Gadamer, hermeneutics can only be possible in such a tradition. In the section on legal hermeneutics, one can understand Gadamer, as Michael Marder does (2010, 307), as arguing that hermeneutics requires a tradition like the democratic tradition. Gadamer writes: “thus it is an essential condition of the possibility of legal hermeneutics that law is binding on all members of the community in the same way. Where this is not the case – for example in an absolutist state, where the state will of the absolute ruler is above the law – hermeneutics cannot exist” (2013, 338). Recall that for Gadamer the bridge between tradition and reason is built by reflection: reflection, as he argued against Habermas, can only be from within tradition not outside it and tradition can have legitimate authority when it allows reflection and reflexive change. Democratic tradition is an example of this. It is crucial to underline that Mouffe understands tradition in these terms in order to amplify the “quasi-republican” features of Mouffe’s agonism, the third aspect to draw from in develop an account of “agonism” as a mode of instantiation of openness.

We have seen that in order to agonism to be possible, plural political community needs to be based on a certain common bond on ethico-political principles. I follow Wenman (2003) in conceiving Mouffe’s emphasis on ethico-political principles as a reworking of the “civic-republican model in order to develop a theory of single sovereign authority, which is constitutive of agonistic games of a diverse citizenry” (178)\textsuperscript{88}. He calls it a “quasi-republican constitutionalism”, which “imposes neither a culturally homogenous Gemeinschaft model of the political nor any spurious liberal notion of cultural neutrality” (Wenman 2003, 181). The “quasi-republican constitution” that we get from Mouffe resembles the function of meta-consensus in deliberative

\textsuperscript{88} See, for example, Mouffe 1993: 19-20
democracy (see Dryzek and Niemeyer 2006; Dryzek 2010, chapter 5). Both establish the necessary democratic rules of the game in which exclusions can occur but they can always be renegotiated (see Wenman 2013, 182). It is this conception of conflictual and temporary consensus and a sense for unity that separates Mouffe from other agonists (see Wenman 2013, 197-201) and offers the basis for Breen (2009) and Knops (2007) to argue that Mouffe's agonism resembles deliberative democracy.

The internal debate within agonistic tradition with regards to Mouffe notwithstanding, the “quasi-republican constitutionalism” of agonism makes it a suitable mode of openness towards the kinds of others with whom there is a possibility of antagonism. By appropriating agonism, we retain the crucial distinction between antagonism and agonism, enemies and adversaries that are helpful in defining the relationship with the other and the boundaries for the conflict that might emerge. Given the inherent interpretive conflicts in pluralism, it is necessary to take seriously the different forms interpretive conflict can take. Agonism is a suitable mode of openness that protects the principle of openness itself.

I insist on including Mouffe in a predominantly Habermasian corps of thinkers because she points out the dimensions of human relations I would otherwise ignore. She poses the problem of the dimension in human affairs that is hard to solve. What Wenman identifies as her exclusive focus on avoiding “the return of the political by sublimating the irreducible potential of antagonism” (2013, 182) is a bit too narrow indeed. Yet, Mouffe poses a problem that, I think, is staring us in the face today. If we want to remain true to pluralism, then we must be ready to engage and encounter the kinds of others that deny pluralism its rightful place in democratic societies. Agonism is the way to be open towards them. It offers categories that establish boundaries within which this encounter takes place: we either encounter the otherness within a shared discursive field and common political bond, and proceed as adversaries, or we encounter the otherness with which we do not share a discursive field or allegiance to principles that give us a common political bond, and on that basis the other denies our right to be, and so we proceed as enemies.
In appropriating agonism as a mode of openness, I have rejected Mouffe’s emphasis on conversion and amplified her argument that in order to think agonistically we need to think of subject positions as relational, we need to take into account the role of tradition, and we need to conceive of unity in the political field in terms of political bonds in adherence to ethico-political principles. For us, they would be openness, liberty, and equality.

This last point is consistent with Gadamer’s idea of wholeness and completeness. For Gadamer, the extent of mutual benefits in engagement between different interpretations of a text depends on fitting one’s interpretation (differentially) within the whole meaning of the text. Every interpretation anticipates certain completeness and wholeness. It is interesting how Wenman observes that Mouffe’s agonism offers a quasi-republican constitution that gives an overlapping order, unity, and authority to the complex plurality that plays out in the political field (see Wenman 2013, 200-201). It gives an anticipation of completeness, even if completeness is never achieved, wholeness, and directedness to different interpretations, practices, articulations, activities that would otherwise look chaotic. Difference, contestation, and plurality in democratic theory make it seem like democracy overall is hopeless. However, the fact that we agree that we want “democratic politics” and “pluralism” gives a certain unifying discursive field within which we offer one or another ways to rank-order values and principles.

With Mouffe, we can answer the question how can there be pluralism and democracy if we accept the dimension of ‘the political’. The dimension of ‘the political’ shows that pluralism as engagement and encounter may not always be about understanding across differences. If politics is about rank-ordering incommensurable values, and there will always be a conflict with gains and cost, then pluralism can also entail a struggle and competition between different sources. The question is, how openness can be practiced if in such political struggle openness can result in a cost one is not ready to accept. The answer we get with Mouffe is to differentiate between enemies and adversaries. If the struggle consists in interpretive conflicts over common values and principles, then we compete as adversaries. Adversaries want to adhere to pluralism and democracy, they just disagree about the specific ways of instantiating them and the rank-ordering of other principles. It does not mean
that understanding across differences is eliminated. To be sure, there could not be a struggle if the sides did not understand each other’s differences in their otherness. But the goal in agonism is not reaching understanding. It is establishing a commonality in a such a way that will allow the other to contest it. So, in the agonistic mode of openness, we are open to the other’s otherness, we accept its validity, and its right to express itself. It is a mode of openness because agonism is about struggle that lets sides challenge each other’s prejudices. Only, this struggle does not have understanding as its end. This struggle must have a winner, albeit a temporary one.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have developed an account of agonism as a protective mode of openness that protects pluralism and democratic politics from the kinds of others that might challenge the principles of pluralism and democracy. If we are committed to be open to the other in their otherness, then we need to know how to be open to those that take extremist positions and claim ultimate truths that can override the principles of openness and democracy. I have developed this account by drawing from Mouffe’s work. In section 5.1 I drew the implications of the antagonistic dimension of ‘the political’ for pluralism and discourse ethics. The danger of pluralism is engaging and encountering the other who might pose an antagonistic relation. Discourse ethics endangers democracy because it does not let antagonism express itself through such democratic outlets as interpretive conflicts. In Section 5.2, I brought Mouffe closer to the core ideas of deliberative democracy by arguing that agonistic contestation must rely on discourse ethics. In order to transform enemies into adversaries, there must be a procedural consensus between the sides and an agreement to adhere to the same ethico-political principles. I argued that in order to make this a possibility, it is necessary to rely on discourse ethics. In light of this premise, I have appropriated ‘agonism’ with its normative function in creating a common ethico-political bond and transforming enemies into adversaries. In Section 5.3, I looked how interpretive conflicts can be understood in the agonistic framework. I established that interpretive conflicts allow a democratic outlet for the passions and the expression of the antagonistic dimension in such a way that does not threaten democracy and pluralism. In Section 5.4, I have amplified three aspects of agonism that help
instantiate it as a mode of openness and rejected its emphasis on “conversion” because it consonant with Gadamer’s principle of openness. I amplified her argument that subject positions are relational because it allows Gadamer’s principle of openness. I amplified her emphasis on the fluidity of the democratic tradition, which is in accordance with Gadamer’s view of tradition. This has allowed to amplify the quasi-republican features of agonism in the way it requires a commonality in the ethico-political principles. The last feature is useful in practicing openness to the kinds of others that pose a threat to democracy and pluralism in terms of the distinction between enemies and adversaries.
Conclusion

In the course of this dissertation, I have argued that democratic politics requires a commitment to pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness in order to address the problem of incomplete understanding. I have established Gadamer's principle of openness as a guide for such a commitment. I have suggested that democratic politics can instantiate the principle of openness in the modes of asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism.

In Part 1, I established the connection between discourse, pluralism, and democratic politics by drawing on Habermas’ discourse ethics and clarified how incomplete understanding complicates the commitment to pluralism by drawing on Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. I have highlighted the significance of encountering and engaging the other in their otherness in addressing the problem of incomplete understanding, showed why incomplete understanding is a permanent feature of human understanding and how it gives rise to interpretive conflicts, and established the significance of Gadamer’s principle of openness for a democratic politics that is committed to pluralism.

With Habermas’ help, we have understood that one of the implications of incomplete understanding can be the breakdown of communicative action. Communicative action is important for coordinating social and political affairs in modern societies. A breakdown occurs due to misunderstanding between parties or misunderstanding of the general values and norms. When this occurs, participants enter into discourse situation in order to restore understanding. As Habermas puts it, the challenges of plural societies leave us “no alternative except to locate normative basis for social interaction in the rational structure of communication itself” (Habermas 1993, xix). Thus, we have looked at discourse as a problem solving mechanism in plural societies, which makes it central for democratic politics in plural societies. Without discourse, democracy and pluralism can be endangered as the alternatives are restoration through the principle of majority rule or coercion. So long as there is discourse to fall back to in the cases of moral disagreement and division that come from incomplete understanding, pluralism and democratic politics can be maintained. This signalled us the mutual relationship between discourse, pluralism, and
democratic politics in the context of modern politics. Without discourse, democratic politics cannot commit to pluralism as engagement and encounter. It can only commit to pluralism as power sharing and processes of government on the basis of the normative functions of such ideas as separation of powers, separation of church and state, checks and balances, and individual liberties.

Thus, we adopted two features of discourse: first, discourse as problem solving mechanism when incomplete understanding results in the breakdown of coordinated action, and second discourse as a medium in which participants’ understanding can go “beyond the provincial limits of their particular form of life” (Habermas 1990, 202). In this manner, we understood discourse as a medium for intersubjective engagement and encounter that mitigates the problem of incomplete understanding because it “excludes surreptitious privileging of individual viewpoints and demands the coordination of all of the interpretive perspectives that tend toward individualism and pluralistic fragmentation” (Habermas 1993, 52).

With Gadamer’s help, we saw how the problem of incomplete understanding complicates commitment to pluralism through discourse in a fundamental way. For Gadamer, incomplete understanding is a permanent feature of human understanding because we are historical beings. This means that incomplete understanding gives rise to interpretive conflicts, which Habermas relegates from moral discourse into ethical discourse. However, since incomplete understanding is a feature of understanding itself, interpretive conflicts become unavoidable and blur the distinction between ethical and moral discourses.

Discourse itself is the medium where engagement and encounter across differences can happen, and therefore, it is necessary to expand the strict standards of rationality of Habermas’ discourse ethics which govern it. We saw that the ontological dimension of human finitude and the hermeneutic dimensions of understanding require the rethinking of discourse ethics. For instance, a Gadamerian perspective on discourse makes the Kantian idea of moral respect problematic because we cannot assume to view things from the perspective of the other because we cannot fully occupy their hermeneutic situation – the totality of their life-story. Rather, we must depend on them to
disclose their perspective to us, which requires that we abandon the requirement of abstraction and strict rationality of Habermas’ discourse ethics. For the other to disclose itself to us, we need to allow particularities.

This has shown the importance of Gadamer’s principle of openness in addressing the problem of understanding. We have seen that the principle is suitable for beings with incomplete understanding by drawing from Gadamer’s use of hermeneutical experience as “genuine experience”. Thus, we have sought to appeal to deliberative theory of democracy and work out how the principle of openness can be instantiated in democratic politics.

To this end, in Part 2, we turned to three theorists that critically engaged with discourse ethics: Young, Dryzek, and Mouffe. By drawing from them, we have developed accounts of asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism as modes of instantiation of the principle of openness in democratic politics.

For a liberal commitment to pluralism, a democratic politics consisting in separation of powers, checks and balances, separation of church and state, neutral processes of government, strict distinction between the private and the public, individual rights and freedoms are sufficient. If we accept that this does not solve the problem of incomplete understanding in plural societies, and that to solve it we need a kind of pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other, then it is necessary to instantiate the principle of openness in democratic politics. I suggest my account of asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism as a way for democratic politics to do so and commit to pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other.

**Asymmetric reciprocity**

In chapter 1, we saw that in discourse ethics for agreement to be possible in moral discourse, the universalization principle (U) requires that participants take the “moral point of view”, which “requires that maxims and contested interests be generalized, which compels the participants to transcend the social and historical context of the particular form of life and particular community and adopt the perspectives of all those possibly affected” (Habermas 1993, 24). By taking the moral point of view participants can transcend the “provincial limits of their own particular form of life” (Habermas 1999, 202). In chapter 2, we have seen from Gadamer’s perspective that this
kind of Kantian transcendence is impossible due to the ontological constraints of human finitude and the hermeneutic dimensions of understanding. With Gadamer we saw that incomplete understanding is a permanent feature of human understanding because we are historical beings and, as historical beings, we are finite in our understanding. Therefore, the very problem which discourse ethics is set up to address in plural societies constrains it.

We are finite within our hermeneutic situation. And our transcendence from this situatedness cannot be achieved monologically. Habermas is correct to underline the intersubjective feature of discourse which helps one to leave the “provincial limits of their own particular form of life”; however he ignores the role of the other in this task. Gadamer highlights the role of encountering and engaging with the other in expanding our finitude. The strangeness of the other illuminates our own prejudices and our own individuality. We are always already alienated by this strangeness because in each case "alienation is inextricably given with the individuality of the Thou" (Gadamer 2013, 186).

In making this argument, Gadamer was responding to Schleiermacher, who universalized hermeneutics as a method for interpreting not just texts but the discourse of everyday life. For Schleiermacher it was important to understand the context and author’s idiosyncrasies in order to fully transpose oneself to the author’s perspective, to see things as s/he did, and understand her work within its own horizon. This is similar to taking the moral point of view, which requires the presumption that we know and understand fully the person whose perspective we are taking. Gadamer argued that Schleiermacher’s task is not possible. That is because we are distant from the author not just by time and space but, more importantly, because we cannot relive the same life as the author. Same goes for encountering and understanding the other. Habermas’ moral point of view presupposes the mistaken view that we can adopt accurately “the perspectives of all those possibly affected”. Taking the moral point of view this way means elimination of the strangeness of the other, appropriation of the other into our own horizon, and erasing the otherness of the other. This undermines pluralism. To encounter, engage and understand the other in their otherness, Gadamer shows, it is precisely ourselves in our own
individuality that we must bring to this encounter. Asymmetric reciprocity does just that.

Asymmetric reciprocity helps to genuinely encounter and engage the other in their otherness as instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic politics. We have followed Gadamer in his argument that in order to truly learn from the text and expand our horizon from this experience, we need to be open to its otherness, we need to be open for it to say something new to us, and we need to be open to its otherness to challenge our own prejudices. We can only learn from the text if we are willing to put our prejudices to the test. Gadamer’s concept of openness means readiness to revise our prejudices and, if need be, revise our own self-understanding.

Habermas’ discourse ethics requires us to transcend ourselves rather than make ourselves available to the encounter with otherness. That is required in order to realize the ideal speech situation and achieve understanding. As we have seen in chapter 2, the hermeneutical dimensions of understanding show that not only is it impossible to transcend and detach from our particularity, but that it is also undesirable. It is impossible because the particularities still inform our understanding and draw the lines of its finitude and it is undesirable because by detaching from ourselves we make our own prejudices unavailable to the other, we do not let the other illuminate our finitude, and we do not encounter the other in their otherness. Following Young, we have established that this kind of transcendence brings about “politically suspect” results.

Thus, if we accept the Gadamerian account of finitude and incomplete understanding, and if we accept his principle of openness as suitable for beings with incomplete understanding, then it is necessary to appeal to deliberative democracy with something different from the Kantian formulation of moral respect. In chapter 3, I have developed an account of asymmetric reciprocity as a substitute for Kantian moral respect that is consonant with Gadamer’s principle of openness.

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89 Gadamer writes: “This is necessary, of course, insofar as we must imagine the other’s situation. But into this other situation we must bring, precisely, ourselves, only this is the full meaning of ‘transposing ourselves’. If we put ourselves in someone else’s shoes, for example, then we will understand him – i.e. become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person – by putting ourselves in his position” (2013, 315).
Drawing on Young, I have developed an account of asymmetric reciprocity as mode of instantiating openness in democratic politics. This has been possible because of the three hermeneutic aspects of Young’s concept of asymmetric reciprocity that come from her recognition of human finitude, situatedness, and historically effected consciousness respectively. These aspects add to the normative function of asymmetric reciprocity as instantiation of openness because in the mode of asymmetric reciprocity one starts with the recognition of one’s finitude and incomplete understanding, followed by a question directed at the dialogue partner that comes from a genuine interest in his/her otherness, and ends with letting the otherness of the other challenge one’s prejudices and, perhaps, change one’s self-understanding and understanding of the other in his/her otherness. In the mode of asymmetric reciprocity, one is open to difference and otherness that challenges what one already knows, assumes, and understands.

If we want to expand our incomplete understanding at all, then hermeneutical philosophy shows us that we need to be open to negative experience that is only possible when we encounter and engage with the other in their genuine otherness. In the mode of asymmetric reciprocity, one is open for the other to express its otherness in different forms of communication, not just rational. They are narration/storytelling and rhetoric.

Asymmetric reciprocity requires two things from us when we are set out to engage with and understand the other: we need to be genuinely interested about the otherness of the other and the other must be understood in their otherness. Now, “genuine” interest, I claim, suggests a certain inwardness and selfishness. That is, our interest is genuine when we are interested in the other to teach us something, to say something new to us, to help us have a negative experience which will illuminate our prejudices and limits of understanding. That is, genuine interest not just for the sake of the other, but for our own sake too. For that to be possible, the other must be encountered in their otherness. Genuineness of any motivation has to do with the self of the one who expresses it, it denotes certain selfishness. The selfishness that I advocate is selfishness in self-understanding, that is, our selfish interest in encountering and engaging with the other should first of all be in the interest that the other will expand our incomplete understanding and make our prejudices present-to-hand. If we are
open to the idea that the other will show us something about ourselves in a new light, we are genuinely interested in it. Fusion of horizons is achieved when each side has learned something new from the other and walked away with an expanded horizon, a shift in their perspective, and incomplete understanding that is less incomplete.

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is another mode of instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic politics. It complements asymmetric reciprocity. In chapter 2, it was established that Gadamer’s hermeneutic experience enables hermeneutic consciousness of the hermeneutical situation. That is, being open to experiencing the otherness of the other makes one aware that one's understanding is finite and limited within the historical, cultural, discursive contingencies of the time. This awareness comes from the encounter of the other. Encountering the other, on the other hand, requires an awareness of our finitude. Therefore, asymmetric reciprocity and reflexivity mutually complement one another.

Towards the end of Chapter 2, we noted that the concept of reflectiveness that Habermas’ uses in discourse ethics risks breaking the relationship between reflection, understanding, and the hermeneutical situation. While reflection for Habermas means situating oneself within the life-world, according to him, it must allow one to transcend from that situatedness. Given the ontological dimension of human finitude, Gadamer has helped us question whether through reflection one can really achieve the status of detached understanding that discourse ethics requires. Two differences emerge between Habermas and Gadamer on this account. First, for Habermas reflectiveness takes on the function of transcending one out of the influence of tradition, and historical and cultural contingencies, whereas for Gadamer this function is impossible because reflection can only be possible within tradition and it starts from definite hermeneutical situation. Based on this difference we concluded that if one takes the Gadamerian position, then it becomes hard to maintain a strict distinction between ethical and moral discourses and that interpretive conflicts are unavoidable. The second difference is that while Habermas sees reflectiveness as inherent to discourse situation, Gadamer goes further in highlighting the role of the different other in reflection and in bringing about
better self-understanding. If we are finite in our understanding, then our reflection depends on the engagement with a different other whose otherness illuminates our own individuality and finitude. The otherness of the other illuminates our prejudices, particularities, and differences (but only if we are open to this kind of experience, hence the importance of asymmetric reciprocity for reflexivity).

In chapter 4, I developed an account of “reflexivity” as a mode of instantiation of openness in democratic politics by drawing on Dryzek’s discursive democracy. I have shown that reflexivity fulfils a similar regulative function in democratic politics as does Gadamer’s notion of ‘historically effected consciousness’.

Reflexivity fulfils this role in virtue of its two aspects: reflexive intelligence and constitutive reasoning. Reflexive intelligence means that actors are critically aware of the constitutive influence that their circumstances have had on their understanding of the social and political world. In other words, it is awareness about the situatedness of understanding. Reflexively intelligent actors are aware of the opportunities and constraints that their discursive fields have. Reflexive intelligence can only be acquired through an intersubjective interaction with different others because it is only possible to know about the particularity and partiality of one’s understanding by encountering a different other. Furthermore, reflexive intelligence allows for constitutive reasoning that is future-oriented, yet does not break the relatedness between understanding, reflection, and the hermeneutical situation. We established that constitutive reasoning proceeds from the awareness of the opportunities and constraints within the hermeneutical situation. In Dryzek’s case, constitutive reasoning allows for reconstitution of discourses.

These two features of reflexivity make it distinct from Habermas’ idea of reflection. For Habermas, the purpose of reflection is autonomy and autonomous action. Drawing on Dryzek, we have established reflexivity as distinct from autonomous action as a mode of openness that is aware of its own constraints and opportunities within the hermeneutical situation. It comes close to ‘historically effected consciousness’ because it is aware of the influences that
one’s understanding has had and does not break the relation between reflection and hermeneutical situation.

Reflexivity and asymmetric reciprocity are mutually complementary because together they instantiate Gadamer’s concepts of hermeneutical experience and consciousness. Recall, that hermeneutical experience is a negative experience through which one’s prejudices become present-to-hand. It leads to hermeneutical consciousness. Now, hermeneutical experience creates its own conditions of possibility because it is a kind of experience by which one expands one’s horizon and therefore is open for new experiences. It is a kind of experience that shows the value of negative experience, and so makes one open to new experiences. An experienced person is open to new experiences, to encounter something strange and alien, and try to engage with it in a way that puts the status quo of the person’s own understanding at risk. This kind of experience can be acquired through the engagement and encounter of a different other. Thus, asymmetric reciprocity leads to reflexivity while reflexivity creates the conditions of possibility for asymmetric reciprocity. In other words, what I am trying to say is that by being open to the otherness, we become aware of our finitude and are able to expand our incomplete understanding. This kind of experience reinforces further openness to different others because the previous encounter was illuminating. There is a positive reinforcement between asymmetric reciprocity and reflexivity in the similar manner that openness to other leads to more openness.

Since we define reflexivity as awareness of the situated nature of understanding, and awareness of how understanding is constituted by particular discourses, as Dryzek uses it, then it must mean that a reflexive person must admit that there are many different ways of understanding something. A reflexive person accepts that there are different and equally valid ways of justification, especially in the context of rank-ordering incommensurable values in politics. Thus, a reflexive person is an open person and approaches others not through the Kantian idea of moral respect, but through asymmetric reciprocity that allows the other to disclose its otherness. One engages and encounters the other on that basis. Given that we have defined incomplete understanding as partial and particular, reflexivity is suitable for beings with
incomplete understanding as a mode of instantiation of Gadamer’s principle of openness in democratic politics.

**Agonism**

Instantiation of the principle of openness in democratic politics does not give guidance for engaging and encountering the kinds of others that pose a threat to pluralism and democratic politics. If we want to admit particularity and allow the expression of particular and partial understanding, and conceive conflict in terms of interpretive conflicts, then we preclude the possibility to appeal to discourse ethics alone for addressing these others since discourse ethics requires detachment and bracketing of particularities. Drawing on Mouffe, we have acknowledged the antagonistic dimension of human affairs and developed an account of agonism that helps answer the question of being open towards the kinds of others who pose an uncompromising conflict and a relationship of mutual exclusion. Agonism is also helpful in allowing different justifications and interpretations of pluralism and the principle of openness itself.

Specifically, we have appropriated agonism as a kind of constitutional framework within which antagonism (conflict) can be transformed into agonism (struggle) according to the central categories of enemies and adversaries. These categories are particularly useful if we acknowledge that in politics engagement and encounter is not always about reaching understanding across differences. Since politics is, in part, about rank-ordering incommensurable values, and since there is no guarantee that values will not be rank-ordered without a cost to someone, politics can entail strategic struggles or just an outright confrontation. Thus, when communication breaks down because of contestation of the very principles and values that all must adhere to (such as openness), agonism is a mode of openness towards the other in a strategic struggle to establish one’s own interpretation.

Since we have characterized plurality in terms of social groups and discourses, it is possible to apply Mouffe’s categories and posit that engagement and encounter between different groups and discourses can be threatened by antagonism. If we push for pluralism according to the principle of openness, we are bound to encounter some groups and discourses that deny the others’ right to be and threaten their rightful position in the social structure,
or, to put it as dramatically as Mouffe, threaten the others’ existence (1994, 108). We will be open to them in an agonistic struggle once we establish that we are contesting each other’s interpretations of the guiding principles and values.

In agonism, we might forgo reaching understanding across differences in competition against each other, but we do not lose respect for the other, the other’s right to have its otherness, express and defend this otherness, and we remain open to their particularity and reflexive of our own particularity. It is a protective mode of openness that prevents pluralism from collapsing in on itself because by definition it has to be open to those who deny its principles, yet allows for there to be different justifications for accepting pluralism and democratic politics and different ways of instantiating them. To be more precise, the kinds of groups and discourses I seek protection from are radical religious groups and religious fundamentalism, extreme right/left wing populists and discourses, groups and discourses that deny their members the possibility for encountering and engaging others, misogynists, and chauvinists. When encountering such groups and discourses, agonism is a way to struggle against them because to defeat them, we need to fight their ideas, not them. To fight their ideas, we need a democratic outlet that allows them to express their particularities and partiality that they mistake for ultimate reason and truth.

One could argue that Habermas’ discourse ethics has better means to fight them. And this person would be right. It is possible to appeal to the logic of “performative contradiction” if we fear that some groups will appeal to our principle of openness in order to override the principle itself. However, this logic leads to exclusion of those groups from the struggle, which Mouffe has shown is a form of repression of antagonism that is bound to return in the form of violence. Either way, I wish to work out the problem of how to be open in such a way that would not betray Gadamer’s principle of openness towards those that threaten me.

To this end, I have drawn from Mouffe’s agonistic perspective, in which “the central category of democratic politics is the category of the ‘adversary’, the opponent with whom one shares a common allegiance to the democratic principles of ‘liberty and equality for all’, while disagreeing about their
interpretation” (Mouffe 2013, 7) by following Wenman’s (2003) suggestion that Mouffe offers a quasi-republican constitutional framework for democratic politics. In this manner, while openness denotes a certain disposition on the personal level of each participant, agonism provides a framework with categories for engagements and encounters that have strategic political goals apart from reaching understanding across differences. We recognize that we might compete and struggle against one another in interpreting how exactly we want our common ethico-political values reflected in our democratic politics, but we do so as friendly enemies that do not forget that each speaks from a finite position, has an incomplete understanding of the other, the situation, and him/herself. So, what I would like to bring in along with agonism are: recognition of the ontological dimension of antagonism between different others, the categories of enemy and adversary, and the normative move (the quasi-republican idea) that enables transforming enemies into adversaries.

Now, it is time to answer the question how does instantiating the principle of openness in the modes of asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism help address the problem of incomplete understanding, to which some problems and challenges of plural societies are attributable?

Gadamer has shown us that incomplete understanding is a permanent feature of human understanding. He has shown that incomplete understanding must be conceived not only in terms of ability to understand something fully. Incomplete understanding is partial and particular. It is incomplete in virtue of its situatedness within the hermeneutical situation. We will always have incomplete understanding because it is part of our individuality. It does not matter how much we share in common, there is always a remainder between us which makes us strangers to each other. In each case, our strangeness constitutes our otherness in relation to the other. In part, that strangeness is where understanding becomes incomplete.

However, incomplete understanding emerges as a problem when we try to answer the question ‘what ought we do’ as a collective and engage in politics because our answer requires rank-ordering values. This is where incomplete understanding gives rise to moral disagreements and division. These problems
can become acute if we forget that our understanding is always already incomplete and make the mistake of forgetting of the ontological dimension of human finitude. If we accept the incompleteness of our understanding from Gadamer’s perspective, then we recognize that actually others can help us expand it. Others can help us push the boundaries of our finitude further out; they are helpful to us in gaining perspective and expanding our horizons.

To this end, we need to be open to others. We need to be open to their otherness, that which strikes us as odd, strange, and alien, because it is the otherness of the other that will help our self-understanding by illuminating the prejudices and other elements within our hermeneutical situation. This is the feature of what Gadamer calls “genuine” experience, the experience of negation. Prejudices illuminate when something challenges them and contradicts them. Our openness enables the other to contradict our prejudices and assert its otherness against us. Asymmetric reciprocity allows for this kind of experience because in this mode we let the other assert its otherness. We gain reflexivity from it. We can reflect from within our own boundaries and achieve better self-understanding.

For example, for a person who loves poetry and is convinced that poetry reveals some kind of truth, reading Plato for the first time can be an “experience” in the hermeneutical sense. This person can either put the book down and declare Plato as someone who wants to ban poetry, or open up to Plato’s text and let the text challenge one’s prejudice about poetry. This can be a fruitful engagement as this negative experience causes one to be reflexive of one’s understanding of poetry as well as push the reader to re-read and interpret Plato’s text. Therefore, openness is a virtue for beings whose understanding is always already incomplete. Its instantiation in the modes of asymmetric reciprocity and reflexivity transfers this function into democratic politics where people might have little in common but hold prejudiced (and therefore incomplete) understandings of each other.

What use are they for a discourse as an element of democratic politics? At its simplest articulation, discourse solves problems that come from misunderstanding or lack of understanding. But solutions to ethical and moral disagreement do not only depend on understanding speech acts and norms.
Understanding speech acts and norms is only part of discourse. The other part is understanding the other, for which self-understanding is an important foundation. As Taylor put it, we cannot understand the other without understanding ourselves first. To this end, asymmetric reciprocity and reflexivity are important. By being open to the encounter and engagement with the other and reflexive about what the other reveals about ourselves, we can fulfil the fuller scope of possibilities that discourse offers to us; we can understand ourselves better.

Agonism is a mode of openness that helps sustain pluralism despite the antagonistic dimension of human affairs that can show itself in political engagement and encounter. I have shown that it offers us a framework within which we can encounter and engage the other when pluralism itself is at stake. Its categories help adopt a protective mode of openness that does not betray our commitment to pluralism when ‘the political’ “returns”.

Finally, how do asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism assist in committing to pluralism in democratic politics? Democratic politics is well equipped to commit to political pluralism through power sharing and processes of government. We have the principles of separation of powers, checks and balances, separation of church and state, neutrality of the processes of government. However, they do not help in commitment to pluralism as engagement and encounter of the other in their otherness because they cannot address the problem of understanding that is central to this idea of pluralism. To this end, I have developed an account of asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism as instantiations of openness. Gadamer’s principle of openness has shown itself to be conducive to reaching understanding in philosophical hermeneutics. It is a principle that is most suitable for beings with incomplete understanding. If I have been successful in showing how the three concepts resemble Gadamer’s principle, then they should enable openness to the other and letting the other disclose its otherness in democratic politics. If they let the other disclose its otherness in a way that reveals something about ourselves, then asymmetric reciprocity, reflexivity, and agonism help us address the problem of understanding in democratic politics.
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