FEDERICA LIVERIERO
University of Piemonte Orientale, Humanities Department
federica.liveriero@uniupo.it

THE SOCIAL BASES OF SELF-RESPECT. POLITICAL EQUALITY AND EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE*

abstract

This paper investigates the limitations of the ideal of political equality under non-ideal circumstances and focuses specifically on the way in which structurally unjust social contexts endanger individuals' perception of their own worth. Starting from Rawls' definition of the social bases of self-respect as a primary good to be fairly distributed, the paper main goal is to provide normative arguments in favor of a power sensitive theory of political agency. A power sensitive theory, in fact, proves to be necessary as it sheds a light over the way in which power relationships affect the very possibility, for some members of the constituency, of fully enjoying the status of political reflexive agents. Against this background, in the paper I defend two main theses. First, I argue that the contemporary debate concerning the implementation of the ideal of equality within liberal democracies has been overlooking the epistemic dimension of the basis of political equality. Second, I claim that specifying the epistemic dimension of political equality has at least two important effects. a. It is important from the perspective of conceptual analysis, as it allows to properly distinguish between the normative job played by moral arguments on the one hand, and the epistemic aspects of political equality on the other hand. b. The specification of the epistemic aspects of political equality has at least on important normative upshot, namely the possibility to show that epistemic forms of injustice are detrimental to the very ideal of political equality as an essential feature of liberal conceptions of democracy.

No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine
own were; any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know for whom
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

(John Donne, Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions and Seuerall Steps in my Sicknes -
Meditation XVII, 1624)

1. Introduction

Democracy is usually justified, as a valid form of government, referring either to instrumental or procedural arguments. According to the instrumental accounts of democracy, democratic procedures are justified in the light of the quality of the outcomes that these procedures achieve. Instrumentalists ground the validity of democracy appealing to different outcome-oriented arguments, such as the fact that democracy is a valid form of government because it grants the defense of fundamental interests of citizens or the fact that democratic decision-making procedures are the most reliable to establish good collective choices (Arneson, 1993; Landemore, 2013; Martì, 2017; Van Parijs, 1998). By contrast, proceduralist views hold that the value of democracy stems from the ideal of political equality incorporated by fair procedures. The non-instrumental value of equality that fair procedures mirror acts as a justification of democracy. More precisely, a proceduralist account claims that democratic processes of decision-making are legitimate in virtue of the equal consideration of the interests and preferences of all those involved in decision-making procedures (Beitz, 1989; Dahl, 1989; Habermas, 1996; Ottonelli, 2012; Rawls, 1993).

Democracy — according to this view — incorporates substantive political values that democratic procedures should contribute realizing. For instance, for Saffon and Urbinati (2013), the significance of democracy, in its historical unfolding, lies upon protecting and enacting the principle of equal liberty. The historical purpose of democracy is also its normative goal: it is an intrinsic feature of democratic processes to be conducive to freedom and therefore no external criterion is required to assess the quality of such achievement.

This is the first feature of a normative version of proceduralism,[1] *procedural correctness*, which refers to the intrinsic fairness granted by pure proceduralism (Rawls, 1971, pp. 73-78). A second aspect of normative proceduralism hinges on a depiction of citizens as agents actively engaged in decision-making processes. The criterion of *responsiveness* plays an important normative role: outcomes of democratic decision-making procedures should address the demands of participants involved in the processes either by meeting their valid claims, or by offering a justification for rejecting them (Mackie, 2011).[2] It follows that democratic procedures should respect the agency of every member of the constituency and ensure everybody the possibility of impacting public choices. Finally, fair procedures are valuable inasmuch they contribute realizing an essential dimension of the ideal of political equality, i.e. the value of *equal respect.* In democracy, the value of equal respect is instantiated by the normative requirement of treating each agent on equal footing and of granting them the chances of pursuing the life-plans they reckon most meaningful.

Notwithstanding this large agreement on the value of equality as a political aim, the normative notion of political equality requires a more careful analysis. Holding that equality is intrinsically valuable does not imply that the discussion about the basis of equality is settled (Carter, 2011; Cupit, 2000; Waldron, 1999). Along these lines, the main goal of this paper is assessing the very possibility for democratic institutions to establish a social environment in which each and every citizen can be fully respected, notwithstanding the asymmetries of power and structural forms of injustice that characterize real-world democracies. Since justice is not always realized in real-world democracies even when procedures are designed to be fair, then it is fundamental to consider the limitations of the ideal of political equality under non-ideal circumstances. In section 2, I discuss the Rawlsian notion of self-respect. Then, section 3 is devoted to the introduction of the theme of epistemic injustice, showing how the asymmetrical relations of power affect not just the actual legitimacy of democratic decisions and institutions, but shape how members of disadvantaged groups understand themselves as political actors and develop epistemic and practical capacities. In section 4 I argue that the normative notion of political equality is twofold: being grounded on both moral and epistemic aspects. In conclusion, this paper does not offer a solution to the difficulties exposed. Rather, the main goal is to provide normative arguments in favor of a power sensitive theory of political agency. A power sensitive theory, in fact, proves to be necessary as it brings to light the epistemic dimension of political equality and problematizes the way in which power relationships affect the very possibility, for some members of the constituency, of fully enjoying the status of political reflexive agents.

2. The Social Bases of Self-Respect

The main research-question investigated in this paper was prompted by John Rawls's (1971) well-known thesis that the social bases of self-respect is one of the primary social goods that are to be distributed fairly in a just society. According to Rawls, self-respect is one of the necessary preconditions for developing citizens's awarness that their plans of life are worth

---

1 Within the proceduralist tradition, we can distinguish between a minimalist view and a normative one. Minimalist accounts (Dahl, 1956; Riker, 1982) appeal to descriptive categories and provide a thin account of democracy, grounding its legitimacy in the existence of a set of rules of the games, rather than referring to some normative values promoted by procedures. The rationale behind the minimalist tactic rests on the acknowledgment of the fact of pluralism and of the difficulty in reaching a final agreement on relevant political matters avoiding any anti-democratic form of decision-making. By contrast, normative accounts of proceduralism claim that democracy incorporates substantive political values that democratic procedures should contribute to realise.

2 Saffon and Urbinati (2013: 20-22) include responsiveness among the important features of their account of procedural democracy along with uncertainty; openness and contestation; participation, emendation, and non-triviality.

carrying out. Rawls is clear in stating that the sense of one's worth is dependent upon the social environment in which one happens to live, therefore the mutual relationships among citizens (and among citizens and political institutions) are fundamental for granting the social bases of self-respect to each citizen. This intuition is extremely important, explaining in political-institutional terms, why "no man is an island", and why political societies are not just the aggregation of self-interested individuals, but something more complex and nuanced. The social bases of self-respect comprise both the attitude of others toward me, and the social environment where my identity is shaped. First and foremost, a social condition of self-respect depends upon the relationship of equal respect that should be established in a fair intersubjective context. Second, in order to pursue my conception of the good life in a meaningful way, it is probably necessary that in the society I live my identity, and/or my preferences, are not stigmatized or wrongfully misrecognized.[3]

Regarding the condition of enjoying the respect of others, in the recent years many authors have investigated the normative notion of equal respect, specifying the distinction, firstly introduced by Steven Darwall (1977), between recognition respect and appraisal respect. *Recognition-respect* is attributed in virtue of the recognition of others as persons, hence it is ascribed by default, being independent from the evaluation of actions, deliberative processes and characters of any particular individual. In this regard, recognition-respect is a priori and unconditional and it does not admit degrees. By contrast, *esteem-respect* expresses the positive consideration of the deeds, achievements, character of a person; hence it is a posteriori, conditional on actual conducts and comes in degrees (Carter, 2011; Galeotti, 2011). Probably Rawls has in mind a comprise of both these forms of respect when he stated that "our self-respect normally depends upon the respect of others. Unless we feel that our endeavors are respected by them, it is difficult if not impossible for us to maintain the conviction that our ends are worth advancing" (Rawls, 1971, pp. 155-156). I agree that both these forms of respect are probably necessary for agents to properly see their accomplishments acknowledged and for establishing a relational-sensitive awareness of agents' own value. However, I maintain that recognition-respect has a priority over esteem-respect when dealing with the social bases of self-respect. In fact, the liberal-democratic framework requires us to recognize the status of free and equal agent to any member of the constituency, independently from her personal achievements, characters flaws or rational abilities. In democracy, every citizen should be fully respected qua member of the constituency, referring to the status of person as such, regardless of their attitudes, preferences, ascriptive characteristics, intellectual capacities, conceptions of the good, merits, etc. According to this reading, the social aspects of self-respect are strictly related to the institutional framework that grants equal political powers and public recognition to each citizen. In fact, a state cannot provide self-respect directly, but only assuring the adequate social conditions for it to develop. It follows, that the first social condition of self-respect consists in a proper institutionalization of the normative notion of recognition-respect due to every member of the constituency.

The second social condition of self-respect is related to the social environment in which personal identities are formed and shaped. There is a sense in which our subjective identity is inescapably related to the perception of our identity in the social world. Many authors have highlighted the social aspects of personal identity (Alcoff, 2010; Butler, 1990; Connolly, 2002; Gilligan, 1993; Haslanger, 2012; Okin et al., 1999) and showed the effects that public

---

3 For further analyses concerning the concept of self-respect, see Bird, 2010; Hill, 1991; McKinnon, 2002; Schemmel, 2018 and Whitfield, 2017.

identity disempowerment, double standards and cultural domination have on agents' ability to perceive their worth (Cudd, 2006; Pateman & Mills, 2007; Young, 2000). Looking at real-world democracies, it is evident that many citizens have to fight for being recognized as first class citizens, given the instances in which some aspects of their identities are mistreated, or the burdens they have to endure in order to accommodates their identities to an historically and contextually shaped public space.

3. Non-Ideal Circumstances of Politics and Political Agency

There are different circumstances of real-world democracies that affect the way in which people shape their identities and, consequently, impact on the likelihood that the social bases of self-respect are distributed equally and without imposing to some citizens unjustified burdens in order to "fit in". In this section I shall focus on three specific circumstances, namely pluralism, conflict and power. The analysis of these three circumstances of politics is important for understanding the structural aspects that impact the implementation of the ideal of political equality in actual circumstances.[4] Such structural (unequal) circumstances very often provoke a disempowerment of the members of disadvantaged groups and cause questioning regarding their ability to meet the standards (moral and epistemic) from which derives the public recognition of citizens as fully autonomous agents.

Pluralism is a fact of contemporary democracies. From a liberal perspective, it can actually be defined as "the normal result of the exercise of human reason within the framework of the free institutions of a constitutional democratic regime" (Rawls, 1993, p. xvi). This definition reflects the intuition that agents disagree not simply because some of them (or everyone) reason in a flawed way. Rather, the argument goes, pluralism is the most likely outcome of intersubjective deliberative processes. Many authors have investigated the epistemic circumstances that make pluralism an inescapable fact of contemporary democracies. First, the appraisal of evidence is always agent-mediated and agents tend to employ different epistemic norms. Second, agents start their reasoning from different and not reducible doxastic perspectives. Third, agents hold extremely different conceptions of life, ideologies and set of preferences, and they tend to trust their own opinion over the opinions of others (Christensen & Lackey, 2013; Enoch, 2011; Feldman & Warfield, 2010; Goldman, 2010; Peter, 2013a, 2013b; Sosa, 2010).

Granted that pluralism is a stable feature of democratic contexts, some accounts of democratic legitimacy have defined deep disagreement as the proper expression of citizens' freedom and willingness to state their own perspective publicly (Benhabib, 1994; Biale & Liveriero, 2017; Gaus, 1996; Peter, 2008; Rawls, 1993; Talisse, 2012). According to this view, democracy is a political system in which the equal worth of the members of the constituency is reflected in the equal right to have control over political decisions as well as the possibility of dissenting publicly and effectively from the decisions they do not agree with. Confrontation and disagreement legitimize democracy by distinguishing it from any other form of government.

Conflict is a second fundamental feature of real-world democracies. Conflict can be positively described as the outcome of a functioning democracy, where the satisfaction of one essential criterion of democratic legitimacy, namely that no member of the constituency should be required to be epistemic deferent toward the majority decisions, is meet consistently. But also,

---

4 It is important to distinguish between structural and aggregate explanations (Haslanger, 2016). A structural explanation assumes that a social phenomenon can be properly explained as part of a larger phenomenon that sets constraints on the behavior of agents. According to this kind of explanations, the reference to structuring causes helps explaining patterns and shows how structure can impact agents' identity formation and deliberative processes. Since social structures are often hidden (or anyway not properly laid out), a critique of social structures and the impact they have on agents requires normative analysis.

conflict reflects the fact that citizens are committed to values that do not want, or cannot, easily change, revise, or abandon. Since agents tend to show epistemic trust in their own perspective more than others, they usually lack the motivation for finding a middle ground with others. Consequently, albeit conflict should not be depicted as detrimental to democratic goals,[5] it is indeed true that democratic procedures are required to at least manage conflicts in order to avoid indeterminacy over public choices (Gaus, 1996).

Finally, a third circumstance of real-world I want to concentrate on is *power*. In non-idealized political contexts, the access to political resources is distributed unequally among political actors. Moreover, the positional power for establishing and revising social norms and standards is often monopoly of members of historically established majorities (Galeotti, 2002; Liveriero, 2015b). If we look at the concept of public space, for example, it is quite intuitive to understand the role played by power asymmetries in shaping it. Public space, within liberal democracies, has been traditionally defined as a neutral and impartial space, where every identity can feel included and treated fairly, since such space, by definition, should not be partisan or hostage of one party. However, the so-called neutrality of the public space is actually infringed by the fact that groups that historically have been holding the almost totality of power shaped the public space in their image, unfairly favoring specific social standards and norms (Galeotti, 2017). Very often, when social movements or political actions demands a revision or a complete rebuke of unfair social norms they encounter harsh opposition from members of the majority. Members of established majorities usually raise concerns that are vulnerable to double standard fallacies. Indeed, the requests by disadvantaged and/or misrecognized groups are often perceived as unjustified pressures for obtaining special rights or undue privileges. In order to contrast these unfair – at yet rhetorically effective – oppositions to build a less power-sensitive public space (and consequently the political society overall) it is important, in my opinion, to relate the fight against power asymmetries with a specific definition of political agency that hinges upon the normative concept of equal respect. Indeed, the way in which the public space, being it symbolic (concerning social standards and the mainstream perception of differences) or involving the actual distribution of rights and opportunities, is shaped has a strong impact on the fair or unfair distribution of the social bases of self-respect.

One fundamental aspect to focus on for understanding the normative significance of the social bases of self-respect is the definition of political agency. Again, from a strictly theoretical perspective, each member of a political constituency, in a properly functioning democracy, should have an equal possibility of impacting public choices. However, looking at the non-idealized circumstances I just laid out, it appears that not every voice counts in the same way in the actual political processes. This descriptive conclusion raises more than one flag at the normative level. First, there are serious concerns relatively to the effective implementation of the duty of respecting the moral standing of each citizen and granting them recognition-respect. Second, the fact that structural power asymmetries strongly affect the way in which conflicts are solved (most often in favor of the group that holds more power) has a major impact on the democratic ideal of being responsive toward each citizen, recognizing the status of reflexive agent shared by every member of the constituency.

---

5 It is worth mentioning that the traditional paradigm of deliberative democracy was built around the goal of reaching stable consensus among citizens, rather that managing disagreements and conflicts (Estlund, 1993; Habermas, 1996; Nino, 1996). This consensualist approach to deliberative democracy has been lately criticized by pluralist democrats (Besson, 2005; Mansbridge, 2006; Waldron, 1999) who accused the consensualists of neglecting the value of pluralism, and by agonistic theorists (Laclau, 1990; Mouffe, 2000; Tully, 1995) that highlighted the fundamental role played by conflicts in politics.

This second concerns, in my opinion, can be better understood in relation with the debate on *epistemic injustice*. Members of disadvantaged minorities have to fight way harder to have their voice at least heard – and, of course, the fight for being able to actually impact political decisions is even more strenuous. And very often, their requests and preferences are ignored or treated as not as relevant or epistemically grounded as the requests of members of the non-disadvantaged groups. In this regard, members of disadvantaged minorities have been suffering unfair treatments that involve, among others, forms of epistemic wrongs. Any public attempt to silencing opinions or any instance in which disadvantaged citizens perspectives are misrecognized or diminished threatens a fundamental democratic value, namely that any individual should be afforded opportunities to express and defend their views in public forums, and to have those views heard respectfully. Consequently, members of minorities that endure epistemic injustice see their political reflexive agency constantly publicly questioned, as they end up lacking the standard entitlement to have their words heard. Also, they ususyally suffer from a lack of public responsiveness towards their structural disadvantages. I maintain that these instances of epistemic injustice are detrimental to the fair distribution of the social bases of self-respect, therefore making the case for a pressing need for redressing such forms of injustice, otherwise endangering the legitimacy of the democratic basic-structure in its entirety.

4. Epistemic Aspects of Political Agency

The conclusion I drew in the previous section has an important normative impact, showing that political institutions have a duty to contrast forms of epistemic injustice, because these injustices do not simply concern the horizontal interpersonal relationships among citizens but, rather, are detrimental to the enactment of the ideal of political equality in institutional contexts as well. In order to support this normative standpoint more effectively, in this section I introduce a specification of political agency that hinges upon both moral and epistemic features. Granted that the moral ground of political equality is not contested within a liberal-democratic paradigm (what is debated being the normative reasons in support of such moral ground), I shall analyze the specific epistemic aspects of political equality.

Starting from the procedural paradigm of democracy I introduced in the first section, and relating this general paradigm with the non-ideal circumstances of politics, an agency thesis can be drawn. *Agency thesis*: the proper exercise of political agency requires actors to politicize specific interests and ideals and to challenge the views of other fellow citizens (Biale & Liveriero, 2017). This general account of the agential capacities of citizens is compatible with the definition of disagreement as the proper expression of citizens' freedom and equality, rather than the outcome of an imperfect or defective decision-making procedure. It is possible to conclude, then, that it is exactly in virtue of the fact of disagreement that democracy is the best method for collective decisions. If consensus and unanimity were always available as stable solutions to political conflicts, in fact, democracy would not be as normatively relevant as a collective-choice method. Instead, the political circumstance of disagreement makes democratic procedures necessary for: i. overcoming indeterminacy; ii. establishing legitimate accountability processes; iii. granting political equality to each member of the constituency; iv. respecting the agential perspective of any member, notwithstanding the contextual history of social advantages and disadvantages.

In establishing democratic procedures that should prove to be responsive to any agent involved, consequently granting all citizens the possibility of impacting public decisions, epistemic deference need to be avoided. To understand such concept, it is important to distinguish between members of the party that got defeated in a political decision being able to still acknowledge the democratic authority of such decision, and the same party being compelled to surrender their opposing judgments to the political decision (Biale and Liveriero,

2017; Estlund, 2008; Gaus, 1996). The requirement of avoiding any form of epistemic deference appeals to the normative intuition that agents' doxastic perspective cannot be bracketed when dealing with the political practice of making collective decisions.[6] In this regard, public decisions should be either justified publicly or being sustained by reasons that are compatible with the agent-relative systems of beliefs.

When we couple the recognition of disagreement as a stable feature of contemporary political societies with the normative requirement of avoiding illegitimate forms of epistemic deference, it appears that disagreement can be solved referring to an external epistemic authority if and only if agents that disagree are at least agreeing in being ready to defer to an epistemic authority both parties acknowledge as legitimate. However, the possibility to solve instances of deep disagreement referring to external epistemic authorities is extremely unlikely when evaluative matters are at stake. The same goes for public battles concerning the monopoly of the positional power in establishing the social standards and in shaping the public image of a specific society.

When an appeal to an external epistemic authority is not available for solving deep disagreement, the conciliatory value of democratic institutions and public decision-making processes becomes even more relevant. My proposal here is to look at the *mutual accountability requirement* that democratic processes impose on citizens, namely the fact that they have sound normative reasons to recognize each other as equally fallible agents who are capable of reasoning and that they owe each other some sort of fair hearing and response.[7] This normative requirement of mutual accountability has important effects on the concept of democratic legitimacy. Democratic procedures are considered legitimate and preferable over other collective-choice procedures because they allow solving conflicts and avoiding indeterminacy, while respecting every agent that takes part in the deliberation.[8] Even when my preferences are not included in the final decision, if I had all the opportunities to have my voice heard and to impact the final decision, then I should have good reasons for acknowledging the legitimacy of the decision and respect the authority that follows from it. However, if some members of the constituency have not been properly addressed in the deliberative processes and have been treated as less-than-a-fully-autonomous-and-capable-agent, do they have normative reasons to consider political decisions legitimate? One of the main goals of this paper is to argue that members of political societies, that have seen their agential capacities diminished for their belonging to ascriptive groups, have a strong normative argument against the legitimacy of the democratic institutional setting *at large*. Whenever, in a political setting, members of the politics are disadvantaged, both as recipient of distributive collective procedures and as epistemic fully functioning agent, the overall legitimacy of the institutional setting should be put under scrutiny.

---

6 According to the *doxastic presupposition*, the epistemic role of justification is not exhausted by the introduction of a set of reasons *R* that provides a *propositional justification* (non-doxastic) for *p*. Since the epistemic value of a justification partly hinges on agents' deliberative performances, any comprehensive justification should involve a *doxastic analysis* that assesses whether agent S actually has grounded her belief that *p* on the reasons that propositionally justify it. For further analyses see Brink (1989); Feldman (2002); Turri (2010).

7 A similar analysis is laid out by Fabienne Peter (2013a and 2013b). Analyzing the normative requirements imposed by the deliberative structure within a non-ideal setting, Peter observes that reasonable citizens have sound reasons for mutually acknowledge each other the status of epistemic peer. This mutual accountability among epistemic peers can then be described as the epistemic side of the normative requirement of reciprocity.

8 Famously, Jeremy Waldron (1999) urged that, as long as neutrality is the leading criterion for justifying selecting procedures, tossing a coin and majority-rule would both be procedurally valid; therefore neutrality per se does not grant fairness. Normative proceduralists, pressed by this critique, have developed procedural models that also reflect the commitment of giving equal weight to each person's opinion, a feature that lacks in random selection.

Miranda Fricker (2007, p. 1) distinguishes between: i. *testimonial injustice* that "occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word" and ii. *hermeneutical injustice* that "occurs when a gap in in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences". I maintain that both these instances of epistemic wrongs are suffered by members of disadvantaged groups when they fight to achieve full recognition within a democratic society whose standards and norms have been established historically by powerful members of a contextually established majority. The lack of empowerment that follows from these chronic forms of epistemic wrongs strongly affect the self-perception of agents, that tend to internalize the power asymmetries as constitutive of their identities (Dotson, 2012, 2014; McConkey, 2004; McNay, 2014; Medina, 2012, 2013). In this way, asymmetries of power end up preventing an equal distribution of the social bases of self-respect as well as directly impacting the processes of self-identity formation of disadvantaged agents.

Naturally, this conclusion has deep effects on the assessment of the ability of real-world democracies to meet normative standards and to satisfy the requirement of granting equal respect to any member of the society, regardless of their personal specifications. Members of disadvantaged groups are not fully respected for at least two reasons. First, the practice of publicly exchanging reasons is legitimate if and only if each agent is treated on an equal footing. Second, the agency thesis requires that each citizen is treated and respected as a *putative epistemic authority*. This second normative request can be derived from the normative concept of equal respect (in the Darwall sense of recognition-respect) that grounds normative approaches to proceduralism. I have showed that democracy, for being a legitimate system for selecting publicly political decisions, should grant to everybody the default position of equal respect, without first requiring an assessment of the actual cognitive, moral, and practical abilities of each citizen. Hence, democratic procedures are legitimate if and only if they grant a normative ascription of reasoning powers and agential capacities to each member of the constituency, granted the satisfaction of minimal criteria.[9] This request relies upon the epistemic intuition that, within a collective-decision framework, when dealing with evaluative matters, agents possess no conclusive epistemic reasons for assuming that their belief is necessarily true and for dismissing the beliefs that other parties hold doxastically. And granted that with reference to evaluative disputes it is unlikely that conflicts could be solved appealing to an external, publicly recognized, authority; then citizens, have both moral and epistemic reasons for mutually recognizing each other as putative epistemic authorities — where such authority is strictly dependent on their different doxastic systems of beliefs (Liveriero, 2015a). According to this interpretation, the normative core of the concept of political equality within a democratic procedural paradigm involves two different aspects of equality: i. one is the proceduralist tenet that equality is a non-instrumental value that should be mirrored in political institutions that distribute the power of impacting political choices equally (practical authority); ii. the second aspect of equality is intrinsically epistemic and requires citizens to acknowledge each other the status of putative epistemic authorities, in order to avoid any forms of epistemic wrongs (that usually target the members of chronically disadvantaged groups). This twofold definition of political equality, if correctly put in practice, should get rid of any form of epistemic wrong that can be prevented institutionally.

In conclusion, I maintain that, in the practice of exchanging reasons to reach a public agreement over political matters, citizens should share practical and epistemic authority, both as co-authors

5. Conclusion

---

9 These minimal criteria can be envisioned in the term of the basic capacities required to be granted the right to vote.

of the political decisions and as fallible epistemic agents that disagree but have good reasons (normative and epistemic) for respecting each other as putative epistemic authorities. This twofold description of the normative concept of political authority hinges upon a definition of political equality that relies on both moral and epistemic features. Specifying this dualist account of political equality is extremely relevant for at least two reasons: i. it provides a fuller account of the normative ideal of political equality; ii. it helps developing a framework that defines epistemic forms of injustice as instances of social suffering that endanger the very possibility for agents to be granted the social bases of self-respect. According to my analysis, being disempowered epistemically has an harmful impact of the way in which members of disadvantaged groups understand themselves as political actors and consequently negatively affects how they develop their political agency. In conclusion, suffering structural injustices related to epistemic wrongs have constitutive detrimental effects on the ideal of ascribing full reflexive agency to every member of real-world democratic societies.

REFERENCES

Alcoff, L. M. (2010). Epistemic Identities. *Episteme*, 7, 128-137;

Arneson, R. (1993). Democratic rights at national and workplace levels. In D. Copp, J. Hampton & J. E. Roemer (Eds.), *The idea of democracy* (pp. 118-148). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;

Benhabib, S. (1994). Deliberative Rationality and Models of Democratic Legitimacy. *Constellations*, 1 (1), 26-52;

Beitz, C. R. (1989). *Political equality: An essay in democratic theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press;

Besson, S. (2005). *The morality of conflict. Study on reasonable disagreement in the law*. London: Hart publishing;

Bird, C. (2010). Self-Respect and the Respect of Others. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 18 (1), 17–40;

Brink, D.O. (1989). *Moral realism and the foundations of ethics*. New York: Cambridge University Press;

Biale, E. & Liveriero, F. (2017), A multidimensional account of democratic legitimacy: how to make robust decisions in a nonidealized deliberative context. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 20 (5), 580-600.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble. Feminism and Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge;

Carter, I. (2011). Respect and the Basis of Equality. *Ethics*, 121 (3), 538-571;

Christensen, D. (2009). Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy. *Philosophy Compass*, 4(5), 756–767;

Christensen, D. & Lackey, J. (2013.). *The Epistemology of Disagreement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press;

Connolly, W. (2002). *Identity\Difference. Democratic negotiations of political paradox*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press;

Cupit, G. (2000). The Basis of equality. *Philosophy*, 75, 105-125;

Cudd, A. (2006). *Analyzing Oppression*. Oxford: Oxford University Press;

Dahl, R. A. (1956). *A Preface to Democratic Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press;

Dahl, R. A. (1989). *Democracy and its Critics*. New Haven: Yale University Press;

Darwall, S. (1977). Two Kinds of Respect. *Ethics*, 88(1), 36-49;

Dotson, K. (2012). A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression. *Frontiers*, 33, 24–47;

Dotson, K. (2014). Conceptualising Epistemic Oppression. *Social Epistemology*, 28 (2), 115-138;

Enoch, D. (2011). Not Just a Truthometer: Taking Oneself Seriously (but not too seriously) in case of peer disagreement. *Mind*, 119 (476), 953-997;

Estlund, D. (1993). Making truth safe for democracy. In D. Copp, J. Hampton, & J. Roemer (Eds.), *The idea of democracy* (pp. 71–100). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;

Estlund, D. (2008). *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework*. Princeton: Princeton University Press;

Feldman, R. (2002). *Epistemology*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall;

Feldman, R. & Warfield, T.A. (2010), *Disagreement*, Oxford: Oxford University Press;

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press;

Galeotti, A. E. (2002). *Toleration as Recognition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;

Galeotti, A. E. (2011). Equal Respect. A fundamental principle of liberal democracy. *Nordic studies in education*, 31 (2), 127-138;

Galeotti, A. E. (2017). Cultural Conflicts: a Deflationary Approach. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 20 (5), 535-555;

Gaus, G. F. (1996). *Justificatory Liberalism: An Essay on Epistemology and Political Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press;

Gaus, G. F. (2011). *The Order of Public Reason*. New York: Cambridge University Press;

Goldman, A. (2010). Epistemic relativism and reasonable disagreement. In R. Feldman & T. Warfield (Eds.), *Disagreement* (pp. 187-215). Oxford: Oxford University Press;

Habermas, J. (1996). *Between Facts and Norms: Contribution to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. Trans. W. Rehg. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press;

Haslanger, S. (2012). *Resisting reality: Social construction and social critique*. Oxford: Oxford University Press;

Haslanger, S. (2016). What is a (social) structural explanation? *Philosophical Studies*, 173 (1), 113-130.

Hill Jr, T. E. (1991). *Autonomy and Self-Respect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Laclau, E. (1990). *New reflections on the revolution of our time*. London: Verso;

Landemore, H. (2013). *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many*. Princeton: Princeton University Press;

Liveriero, F. (2015a). Epistemic Dimension of Reasonableness. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 41 (6), 517-535;

Liveriero, F. (2015b). Open Negotiation: The Case of Same-sex Marriage. *LPF Annals*, n. 1, 1-27;

Mackie, G. (2011). The Values of Democratic Proceduralism. *Irish Political Studies*, 26(4), 439-53;

McKinnon, C. (2002). *Liberalism and the Defence of Political Constructivism*. New York: Palgrave and MacMillan;

Mansbridge, J. (2006). Conflict and self-interest in deliberation. In S. Besson & J. L. Martí (Eds.), *Deliberative democracy and its discontents. National and post-national challenges* (pp. 107–132). London: Ashgate;

Martì, J. L. (2017). Pluralism and consensus in deliberative democracy. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 20 (5), 556-579;

McConkey, J. (2004). Knowledge and Acknowledgment: Epistemic Injustice as a Problem of Recognition. *Politics*, 24, 198–205;

McNay, L. (2014). *The misguided search for the political. Social weightlessness in radical democratic theory*. Cambridge/Malden: Polity Press;

Medina, J. (2012). Hermeneutical Injustice and Polyphonic Contextualism: Social Silences and Shared Hermeneutical Responsibilities. *Social Epistemology*, 26, 201–220;

Medina, J. (2013). *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice and Resistant Imaginations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press;

Mouffe, C. (2000). *The democratic paradox*. London: Verso;

Nino, C. (1996). *The constitution of deliberative democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press;

Okin S. et al. (1999). Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women? Princeton: Princeton University Press;

Ottonelli, V. (2012). *I principi procedurali della democrazia*, Bologna: Il Mulino;

Pateman, C. & Mills, C. (2007). *Contract and Domination*. Malden: Polity Press;

Peter, F. (2008). Pure Epistemic Proceduralism. *Episteme*, 5 (1), 33-55;

Peter, F. (2013a). The Procedural Epistemic Value of Deliberation. *Synthese*, 190, 1253-1266;

Peter, F. (2013b). Epistemic Foundations of Political Liberalism. *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 10 (5), 598–620;

Rawls, J. (1971) (1999 revised edition). *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press;

Rawls, J. (1993). *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press;

Riker, W. H. (1982). *Liberalism Against Populism*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman;

Schemmel, C. (2018). Real self-respect and its social bases. Canadian Journal of Philosophy, doi: 10.1080/00455091.2018.1463840, 1-24;

Sosa, E. (2010). The epistemology of disagreement. In A. Haddock., A. Millar & D. Pritchard (Eds.), *Social Epistemology* (pp. 278–297). Oxford: Oxford University Press;

Talisse, R. (2012). *Democracy and Moral Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;

Tully, J. (1995). *Strange multiplicity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;

Turri, J. (2010). On the Relationship between Propositional and Doxastic Justification. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 80 (2), 312-326;

Urbinati, N. & Saffon M.P. (2013). Procedural Democracy, The Bulwark of Equal Liberty. *Political Theory*, 20 (10), 1-41;

Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press;

Van Parijs, P. (1998). The disfranchisement of the elderly, and other attempts to secure intergenerational justice. *Philosophy & public affairs*, 27 (4), 292-333;

Waldron, J. (1999). *Law and Disagreement.* Oxford: Oxford University Press;

Whitfield, G. (2017). Self-Respect and Public Reason. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 20 (4), 446–465.