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Iris Young and the Politics of Difference

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Abstract

The work of the late Iris Marion Young has been highly influential, especially in debates concerning the accommodation of group ‘difference’ in contemporary liberal-democratic societies. In this paper I critically examine Young’s arguments in three related areas: her critique of liberalism, her advocacy of special representation for ‘oppressed’ groups, and her revised version of deliberative democracy. I argue that her arguments in all these areas suffer from a persistent failure to mark out the limits of notions such as ‘respect’ and ‘inclusion’, in large part because her underlying approach to ethics is fragmented, unreflective and confused.

The work of the late Iris Marion Young has been highly influential, especially in debates concerning the accommodation of group ‘difference’ in contemporary liberal-democratic societies. For Young, the individualism of the liberal outlook tends to ignore or deliberately conceal the legitimate claims of groups, especially minority groups that have traditionally been oppressed in ostensibly liberal societies. Rather than the universal individual rights and liberties that liberals defend, it’s democratic participation that should be the center of a just society. Only a more vigorous form of democracy, in which traditionally oppressed groups are given a stronger voice in deciding the terms of ‘justice’, will answer fully to the legitimate demands of contemporary multiculturalism.

In this paper I critically examine Young’s arguments in three related areas: her critique of liberalism, her advocacy of special representation for ‘oppressed’ groups, and her revised version of deliberative democracy.¹ I argue that her arguments in all these areas suffer from a persistent failure to mark out the *limits* of notions such as ‘respect’ and ‘inclusion’, in large part because her underlying approach to ethics is fragmented, unreflective and confused.

Young’s politics of difference

The broad political background of Young’s thought is that of the ‘new social movements’ of the 1960s and 1970s: feminism, Black liberation, American Indian movements, and gay and lesbian groups (JPD 3).² These movements, she argues, have drawn attention to the fact that injustice in modern societies is not only about unfair distribution of material resources – the ‘distributive paradigm’ accepted by most contemporary theorists of justice, such as Rawls. Rather, there are several dimensions or ‘faces’ of injustice that are irreducibly distinct both from distribution and from each other: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (JPD ch. 2). ‘Cultural imperialism’, for example, takes place when the dominant norms of a society reflect the outlook of a culturally dominant group, whose view of other groups (often derogatory) is taken to define their identities, leaving their own perspectives ‘invisible’ – the fate in the United States of women, Blacks and the other groups represented by the new social movements (JPD 58-9). It’s no answer to this kind of injustice to insist on a fair distribution of material resources, since that could take place while cultural imperialism persists.

Beyond the distributive paradigm, justice must therefore concern itself with issues of recognition and participation in collective decision making. Although Young is extremely suspicious of all universal claims in morality, she does subscribe to a broad framework for what counts as ‘the good life’ for all human beings. This has two basic components, contrasting with the two main sources of injustice: first, in contrast with ‘oppression’ (in its various forms), one should be capable of ‘developing and exercising one’s capacities and expressing one’s experience’; second, in contrast with ‘domination’, one should be capable of ‘participating in determining one’s action and the conditions of one’s action’ (JPD 37). So, justice requires an approach to politics that goes beyond fair shares and that emphasizes democratic participation.

Further, it will do so at the level of groups, not just of individuals. Young contends that liberal individualism has led to the ignoring of group-based claims that are real, legitimate and the stuff of the politics of the new social movements. For

Young, social groups are neither mere collections of individuals nor unchanging essences. Rather, they are collectivities held together by the mutual 'affinity' of their members, which gives them a shared identity (JPD 42-8). All groups have a 'culture' in this sense, and 'cultural minority' is defined by Young to include 'any group subject to cultural imperialism', a definition that applies (she says) not only to 'ethnic or national' groups, but also to women, the elderly, the disabled gays and lesbians, and the working class (JPD 175). The members of these groups suffer from collective injustices that can't be reduced to terms of individual mistreatment and can't be corrected by uniform individual rights. For example, women may have the formal right to stand for political office, yet they are often poorly placed to exercise that right because of child-care expectations.

According to Young, such injustices are crucially a function of the various ways in which contemporary liberal democracies deny or devalue legitimate differences among people. This suppression of difference is abetted by the dominant contemporary political theories. Communitarianism, for instance, emphasizes 'the Rousseauist dream' of a wholly unified public in which identities are 'fused' in pursuit of a single particular conception of the common good (JPD 229-232). Alternatively, contemporary liberalism and republicanism appeal to the notion of a 'civic public' in which people transcend their particular interests and conceptions of the good when it comes to decision making in the public realm (JPD 97). So far as particularities of identity are permitted to survive at all, they are relegated to the private sphere of family, business and other personal relationships.

The liberal model of the impartial or neutral state is a key instance of the denial of legitimate difference, according to Young. Indeed, the whole notion of impartiality as a model for the moral point of view has this tendency. The ideal of impartiality exhibits a traditional pattern in Western thought which, following postmodernists like Derrida, Young calls 'the logic of identity': an urge to find a commonality or universality underlying the apparent variety of things (JPD 98). In morals and politics this becomes a drive to formulate universal rules. Whatever doesn't fit within the perceived universal pattern, whoever doesn't meet the demands of the universal rule, is then stigmatized as 'different' in a negative way implying defect or deviance, an anomaly worthy of suppression or correction.

The ideal of moral impartiality or political neutrality has this malevolently exclusive effect because it demands that people occupy an abstract 'view from nowhere', transcending the particularities of situation, feeling and selfhood (JPD 99-102). This ideal, defended by liberal thinkers like Rawls, is both impossible and dangerous. It's impossible because our concrete situatedness is inescapable, our feelings survive efforts to repress them, and we cannot think of ourselves as wholly detached from the particular affinities that make us who we are (JPD 102-3). The ideal of impartiality is dangerous because it masks the reality that putatively 'neutral' principles and policies always express the preferences and world-view of some privileged group – neutrality is really cultural imperialism in disguise (JPD 115). Liberal neutrality is a mask for the values and outlook of those social classes and cultures whose interests and outlook are served by liberalism. Those groups who fall outside this category are consequently excluded and downgraded, their difference denigrated.

If, in reply, liberals point to the manifest individual and cultural plurality of actual liberal societies, Young's rejoinder is that this is merely privatized difference. Liberalism tolerates differences as long as people keep these to themselves; it does not extend public acknowledgement to difference. So, for example, 'gay pride asserts that sexual identity is a matter of culture and politics, and not merely "behavior" to be tolerated or forbidden' (JPD 161; see also 168). Such differences are not merely to be tolerated – disapproved of but not impeded – but re-evaluated in a positive light, and given the backing of public recognition and support.

In policy terms, the thrust of Young's view is away from 'difference-blind' approaches that aspire to impartiality and neutrality – these ideals are impossible and dangerous, and must be abandoned. Rather, key group differences must be publicly acknowledged and endorsed in a new ideal of 'democratic cultural pluralism' (JPD 163). More specifically, this involves group-specific rights, such as rights of affirmative action and group representation – for example, rules setting quotas for the representation of particular groups in political and other institutions, and 'group veto power regulating specific policies that affect a group directly, such as reproductive rights policy for women, or land use policy for Indian reservations' (JPD 184).

Group representation is especially salient for Young, since it is only when oppressed groups are given an effective voice in making the policies that touch their interests that social justice will be achieved. Special rights of group representation will be granted only to oppressed groups, because dominant group interests are well served already (JPD 187). Such rights will promote justice by ensuring fairness in setting the public agenda and hearing opinions, by making sure all needs and interests are recognized publicly, by testing claims with public discussion, and by adding to the store of 'social knowledge' (JPD 185-6).

In her later work Young endorses democracy in the 'deliberative' form that has become so influential in recent political theory. For Young, as for other deliberative democrats, existing 'aggregative' forms of democracy, in which decisions are reached simply by adding up voting preferences, are deeply inadequate. Problems include the rawness of the preferences aggregated, the privatizing of many important decisions, the thinness of the means-end rationality that underpins the model, and its lack of any test for 'normative and evaluative objectivity' (ID 21). By contrast, deliberative democracy – with its constitutive principles of reason giving, reasonableness and publicity – is more faithful to the basic democratic ideals of political equality and inclusion, and more likely to lead to 'wise and just' outcomes because of its strongly interactive character, hence its greater potential for transforming people's views.

However, Young worries that orthodox forms of deliberative democracy place too much stress on the role of formal argument, a tendency that excludes or marginalizes those groups for whom structured argument from premise to conclusion is not their strong suit. Rather, she argues, democratic interaction should be recognized as including other forms of political communication too, such as street demonstrations. In particular, she urges that argument be supplemented by three modes of political communication, which she calls greeting, rhetoric, and narrative. I shall return to the details of these views later.

Throughout Young's work, her consistent emphasis is on respect for group-based differences and identities in contrast with universalist norms, on decision making through democratic interaction rather than by reference to rules or principles determined independently of democracy, and on inclusion in the democratic conversation of all those affected.

The critique of liberalism

Young's arguments raise many critical issues. The first of the main topics I want to examine more closely is her attitude to liberalism. Young to some degree builds on liberal principles, such as the commitment to the equal moral worth of all human beings. But she is also highly critical of liberalism, and of moral universalism more generally. With certain very basic exceptions, she tends to associate moral universals with the denial of important differences among people, and liberal notions of impartiality or neutrality with disguised forms of social and cultural domination.

As explained above, Young bases her assault on the idea of universality in morals and politics on the postmodernist critique of 'the logic of identity' – that is, the tendency to look for commonalities that end up generating exclusions and hierarchies of values and groups. One obvious problem with this critical approach is that it amounts itself to a thesis of immense generality. Further, what really is its practical significance? What meaningful claims can be made without reference to generalizations, commonalities, and indeed universals? Young's own theory is full of general identifications, beginning with her division of the social world into the 'oppressed' and the unoppressed, proceeding to her very broad account of the human good under the headings of self-development and self-determination (in contrast with oppression and domination), and ending with her recommendation of 'democratic cultural pluralism', which presumably excludes the alternatives.

The point is that there's nothing sinister about the logic of identity in itself. Any significant claim in morality or politics is going to exclude something – for example, it's better to live well than to live badly, better not to be an axe-murderer than to be one. Whether the results of 'thinking things together' are good or bad depends entirely on what is excluded or devalued, and what is included or recommended.

So, Young's argument against liberalism has got to be that it fails to accommodate what should be accommodated. Here she seems to take it for granted that comprehensive or perfectionist forms of liberalism will be inadequate, since they appeal to distinctively liberal conceptions of the good. The only serious contenders are neutrality-based theories, which Young sees as aiming at an impartiality that is both impossible and dangerous, invoking putatively universal principles that actually favour some groups over others and deny significant group differences.

It might be objected that this picture of the liberal terrain doesn't take account of those forms of liberalism, such as Will Kymlicka's, that explicitly support group-differentiated rights. To this Young would respond that the public recognition of groups under liberalism is still subject to principles that purport to be universal but are in fact culturally biased. Groups can be recognized, but only so far as they adhere to liberal norms that may be alien to them. That would apply, for example, to

Kymlicka's master-value of personal autonomy. Difference is still insufficiently respected.

How far is that true? On the alleged impossibility of liberal neutrality, Young's basic objection is that this ideal depends on adopting a 'view from nowhere'. But being impartial doesn't mean stepping back into a void.³ On the contrary, a better metaphor may be putting oneself in the shoes of others – the view from *everywhere*. Young regards this, too, as a denial of difference, since it depends on the possibility of an empathy with others that crosses group boundaries (JPD 105). But surely, to empathize with others is not necessarily to ignore differences. On the contrary, to insist that inter-group empathy is impossible is to suggest an image of groups as 'windowless boxes' within which there can be no sense of what people are like outside the group except as faceless 'others' (Berlin 1990: 85). This image is neither helpful to Young's own vision of a society in which group identities are publicly celebrated in an atmosphere of mutual respect, nor is it a realistic view of inter-group understanding.

It's also at odds with Young's own commitment to universal – and therefore impartial – values, such as the self-development and self-determination that she sees as components of the human good. Why don't *those* commitments amount to adopting an impossible view from nowhere? And if they are possible, then impartiality (in the relevant sense) is possible. Explicitly endorsing universal equality of moral worth, she nevertheless places this in the category of 'universality in the sense of the participation and inclusion of everyone in moral and social life', as opposed to 'universality in the sense of the adoption of a general point of view that leaves behind particular affiliations, feelings, commitments, and desires' (JPD 105). But how does the general point of view that commends, for example, the liberal commitment to human rights 'leave behind' the particularities mentioned? To ascribe the right of freedom of speech to someone, for example, is not to deny that she has affiliations, feelings, commitments and desires.

Young goes on to claim that liberal impartiality is not only impossible but also a dangerous ideal because it amounts to cultural imperialism in disguise: the 'neutral' principles are no more than the values of some dominant group, excluding the norms of oppressed groups. But are the core liberal values of equality of moral worth, individual liberty, toleration and human rights really just the norms of a privileged class or culture? Young does little to demonstrate that this is so. Indeed, once again she relies on these values herself – for example, in her basic commitment to the universal values of 'self-development' and 'self-determination', goods that appear equivalent to traditional liberal concerns for individual autonomy and equality of opportunity.

On the whole, Young's rejection of liberal approaches to cultural accommodation is unconvincing. She appeals to on a narrow reading of liberal neutrality that doesn't do justice to people's capacity for empathy, and fails to acknowledge the extent to which she herself depends on liberal-universalist values and assumptions.

Group representation

Further problems arise with Young's positive proposals in favour of democratic cultural pluralism, in particular group representation. Her case for special group representation begins with a general case for democracy: people are most likely to be treated justly, their basic claims to self-development and self-determination advanced, if they have some say in the decisions that affect them. Yet in contemporary liberal democracies certain groups tend to be under-represented in the various institutions and forums where influential decisions are made. Such groups are typically those that have been historically oppressed or marginalized in various ways – 'working-class people', women, gays and lesbians, and ethnic, racial and cultural minorities (ID 141).

Consequently, these and other disadvantaged groups have a case for special representation – that is, measures aiming 'to promote greater inclusion of members of under-represented social groups' (ID 141). Such measures may involve, for example, 'quotas in electoral lists, proportional representation, reserved seats, [and] the drawing of boundaries for electoral jurisdictions'. These particular devices concern the legislature, but the general principle of special representation extends to other government and quasi-governmental bodies together with the non-governmental organizations of 'civil society'. Reform of this kind is needed, in Young's view, in order to overcome historical exclusion of particular groups from political influence, to expose the partiality of existing norms and institutions, and to take advantage of the 'situated knowledge' possessed by hitherto marginalized groups that could add to a society's overall stock of 'social knowledge' (ID 144).

Young's case for special group representation faces several objections. First, some democrats would say it doesn't go far enough, since any talk of representation falls short of the democratic ideal of direct participation. To this Young plausibly replies that any realistic democratic theory under contemporary conditions must cope with the fact of mass societies with populations in the millions, hence a need for representation (ID 8). Alternatively, more orthodox liberal democrats sometimes insist that the primary level of representation must be individual rather than group-based. Here Young responds that group orientations are unavoidable and salutary in contemporary politics, since people 'are better represented when they organize together to discuss their agreements and differences with each other and with officials' (ID 143) – a reasonable extension, one might argue, of the lessons learned by organized labour.

A more difficult set of issues is introduced by the question: *which* groups should be represented? According to one of Young's earlier formulations, what defines a 'social group' is the fact that certain people identify themselves as belonging to it as a matter of 'affinity'. But clearly, if every collectivity that identifies itself in this way must be represented, the results would be chaotic. Why not special representation for book clubs or craft circles?

Young's answer to this is to insist that only oppressed groups should have such special rights. But which groups count as 'oppressed'? Someone might argue that any group is oppressed whose interests and opinions are unpopular or rejected by the majority. But that would include neo-Nazis or the Ku Klux Klan. Young responds by drawing a distinction between 'social perspectives', which should be represented if they are disadvantaged, and 'interests and opinions', which do not

qualify for special representation. Social perspectives are ‘basic in a way that many interests and opinions are not’ (ID 146). While social perspectives are unchosen, ‘structural’ features of people’s experience ‘that position many people in similar ways whether they like it or not’, interests and opinions tend to be ‘voluntarily formed and organized’. More importantly still, according to Young, ‘some asserted interests or opinions may be bad or illegitimate, whereas a social perspective is not in itself illegitimate’. For example, the social perspective of white people is not illegitimate, but white supremacist opinions are (because they deny basic equality).

This distinction is unpersuasive. Can interests and opinions be separated from social perspectives as neatly as Young supposes? Arguably, many interests and opinions are virtually unchosen given the broader perspectives from which they emerge, while social perspectives are not necessarily unrevisable. For example, white supremacist opinions are hard to shake off given certain kinds of upbringing. If Young responds that it’s always possible for people to question and revise their interests and opinions, then the same point could be made about the more general perspectives that support such views. Nor is it obviously harder to revise social perspectives than opinions, since the two are so closely connected.

Young’s interests-perspectives distinction also has an ad hoc feel about it. One wonders whether she might look more favourably on special support for interests and opinions if they were on the side of the angels – and indeed, she does allow such a possibility for groups ‘with legitimate interests but few resources’ (ID 147). This suggests is that what really matters is not whether we’re dealing with an interest or a perspective, but whether either is (1) ethically unobjectionable and (2) unfairly disadvantaged in some way. But if that’s the test for special representation, then hardly any group would fail to qualify. Even middle-class white males may be able to work up a case if they can point to at least one component of their identity in virtue of which their self-development and determination are less than they might be. As Amartya Sen points out, any one person has multiple identities and that these cut across one another (Sen 2006). A wealthy CEO may be physically unattractive or have high cholesterol. Young acknowledges this but doesn’t seem to notice its implications for her own view (ID 171). Kymlicka does notice the implication, suggesting that those who count as oppressed on Young’s definition ‘seem to include 80 percent of the population’ (Kymlicka 1995: 145).

Supposing that some plausible class of oppressed groups can be identified as deserving of special representation, who will speak for these groups? Must the representative be a member of the relevant group or could he or she be an outsider? One line of objection to Young’s approach takes her to be advocating a narrow ‘descriptive’ or ‘mirror’ theory of representation, according to which ‘to represent’ is narrowly interpreted to mean ‘to stand for’, like a copy, rather than the more active sense of representation required for advancing the political interests of a group (Pitkin, cited by Young ID 142). Women must represent women, Hispanics must represent Hispanics. Young replies that this is a narrow reading of her position, which looks for better representation not of particular group attributes (e.g. gender or cultural identity) but of the group’s social perspective. For this purpose it’s not essential that the representative possess the ‘descriptive attributes’ typical of group members, although for someone to be able to represent the perspective without the attributes would be ‘not very common’ (ID 148).

But that response raises another set of problems. Given that it's the group's social perspective that is to be represented, how is this to be identified? For one thing, can it be identified without invoking an 'essentialist' account of the group, attributing to it a core set of values and norms that express a permanent character, and thus ignoring the dynamic and internally contested nature of all groups? Young argues that while negative, imperialist images of groups are always essentialist, the positive re-evaluations asserted by the groups themselves can take account of their own constructed nature. But she also concedes that 'to be sure, it is difficult to articulate positive elements of group affinity without essentializing them, and these movements do not always succeed in doing so' (JPD 172). This problem is likely to be exacerbated by her insistence that the special rights she champions must be conceived not as temporary routes to integration but as permanent markers of abiding difference.

Further, whether or not a group's perspective can be identified without essentialism, who is to decide what that perspective is? Groups can be just as oppressive of their own members as larger societies can be of minority groups in their midst. This is especially so in the case of 'traditional' ethnic and religious groups dominated by elite leaders, usually male and/or elderly, who see themselves as guardians of a fixed way of life involving a strict division and hierarchy of roles, usually gendered. This problem of intra-group domination and conflict is very common, and it's rightly a major liberal concern.

Once again, Young formally acknowledges the difficulty, but does little to address it. She notes the objection that group representation may 'obscure differences within the group', and concedes that social perspectives are not so unified that they exclude the likelihood of divergent views within them (ID 143, 148). In reply she raises the idea of 'pluralizing' group representation: a group could be represented by 'a small committee' rather than just one person (ID 148). But this would do little to solve the problem of the 'traditional' group dominated by an elite, since the committee would likely be just another forum for those with influence. More reliable protection is likely to be provided by respect for individual rights, but, as we saw in the last chapter, Young's hostility to liberal universality and her insistence on respect for cultural difference make the fate of rights in her democracy uncertain.

Perhaps this problem weighs less with Young because the groups she usually has in mind are exemplified by the new social movements rather than by indigenous or religious groups – the example she gives of representation by committee concerns representation of 'the perspective of women' (ID 148). But, as mentioned before, her theory is explicitly intended to encompass ethnic and cultural groups, such as native-American groups. And even in the case of the new social movements, she allows that 'separation and self-organization risk creating pressures toward homogenization of the groups themselves, creating new privileges and exclusions' (ID 167-8). Still, Young's salient message is that group autonomy is to be pursued in the name of democracy and justice. How emancipatory is that course likely to be without the kind of liberal constraints that Young condemns as false neutrality and cultural imperialism?

A final set of issues concerns the practical application of special group representation. Reviewing the main candidates for institutions that might turn the

principle into practice, Young concedes that all have problems. For example, reserved seats (exemplified by the Maori seats in the New Zealand parliament) tend to freeze group identity and inter-group relations, marginalize the represented group, and make it complacent about stating its case to the wider public. Young concludes that reserved seats 'should be a last resort and temporary option' (ID 150). Similar difficulties attach to group quotas within party lists and the redrawing of electoral boundaries. On the whole, Young insists that all these measures are just, but allows that they all have serious costs. She herself seems to doubt whether these costs are always worth paying.⁴

Overall, Young's case for special group representation, while somewhat more persuasive than her critique of liberalism, raises more questions than it answers. The general idea of giving people more of a say in deciding the rules and policies that govern them is undeniably attractive. But it remains unclear in Young's argument which groups count as distinctively 'oppressed' and therefore worthy of representation that other groups are not entitled to. And, despite her occasional protestations to the contrary, Young places too much stress on the idea of groups as bounded and univocal entities with essential identities. If she paid more attention to difference and conflicts *within* groups, she might concede greater importance to the universal individual rights that she tends to disvalue.

Deliberative democracy expanded

In the final phase of her democratic thought, Young endorses a broadly deliberative framework, but expands this to be more inclusive of groups for whom reasoned argument is not their favoured or dominant mode of political expression. She approves of the general commitment to deliberation in contrast with mere aggregation of preferences, but regards certain versions of deliberative theory as too narrow and exclusionary. These tend to be the more mainstream forms of the theory, associated with Habermas and Rawls, that emphasize reasoned argument as the primary form of deliberation. The basic problem with that emphasis, according to Young, is that argument needs shared premises to get it off the ground, and these are lacking under conditions of social and cultural difference.⁵ In addition, the privileging of argument tends to bring with it the privileging of the kind of articulateness characteristic of highly educated people, and the kind of formal and dispassionate reasoning specific to certain cultures rather than others.

Further, Young objects to the tendency of the mainstream deliberative theories to privilege other ideals in addition to argument. First, there is the notion of a unified common good, conceived either as a precondition for deliberation or a goal at which deliberation should aim. Here Young invokes her long-held view that any notion of a unified public with a single common good is likely to express, in reality, the outlook of some particular dominant sub-group. There are many 'publics' each with its own outlook. Second, mainstream deliberation tends to privilege 'face-to-face' discussion, when the reality of mass society makes representation a necessity, along with a 'decentred' conception of deliberation in which political power is not exercised in any single and decisive arena but disseminated throughout a society and always subject to review. Third, deliberation is often equated with 'orderliness', thus 'excluding modes of political communication deemed disorderly or disruptive' – for example, 'rowdy street demonstrations' (ID 47).

In all these respects, Young believes, leading theories of deliberation have the effect of excluding certain kinds of people from the democratic process. The exclusion may be 'external', where groups are kept out of public discussion altogether, or more subtly internal, where they are formally admitted but effectively ignored, marginalized or denigrated once there. Young is especially concerned with this second, internal form of exclusion, and proposes that our understanding of legitimate political communication be framed more expansively.

She states a case for three alternative modes of political communication in particular. First, 'greeting' is the public acknowledgement of the parties to a discussion, exemplified by the elaborate greeting of Maori tradition and by the protocols of international diplomacy (ID 57-62). Such practices affirm the presence and standing of different groups in a given arena, and thus communicate norms of respect and willingness to listen.

Second, the role of 'rhetoric', or *how* things are put across, should be acknowledged (ID 63-70). While orthodox deliberative theory emphasizes dispassionate reasoning, a more natural mode of communication for many groups is to speak passionately or figuratively, or to convey their message without speech – for example, through gestures. Communication shouldn't be dismissed simply because it's rhetorical rather than more narrowly rational. Rhetoric may be important, for example, in identifying and addressing a particular audience.

Third, there is an important role for narrative or storytelling – again, a more natural form of communication than structured argument for some groups (ID 70-77). Narrative can advance public discussion in various ways: as a bridge between groups when shared assumptions are lacking, as a way of raising people's consciousness of their shared experience and identity, as a means of overcoming prejudice – personal testimony can be a highly effective weapon against generalization and stereotype – as a route to understanding a group's deep values and assumptions, and as a device for eliciting the 'situated knowledge' of particular groups, thus contributing to a cumulative 'social knowledge'.

Overall, these three modes of communication are not intended to displace reason-giving and argument in deliberation, but rather to supplement it (ID 77). In this way, democracy will remain broadly deliberative, but in a manner that's more inclusive of different groups, with their varying communicative idioms, than the orthodox deliberative theories, with their stress on argument.

One obvious objection to Young's position is that her non-argumentative modes of political communication are open to abuse and manipulation. Greeting may be pro forma and insincere, rhetoric may be calculated to appeal to prejudice and stir up irrational and destructive feelings, and narratives may be misleading or misled or simply fabricated. In particular, disorderly demonstration may degenerate into violence or coercion.

Young concedes all this but responds that argument is open to abuse too. The remedy for manipulative greeting, rhetoric and narrative is the same as 'for false or invalid argument', namely 'criticism': applying 'standards of evaluation to them as well as to argument' (ID 79). Such standards include the characteristic deliberative

principles of justifiability, respectfulness and publicity. Similarly, street demonstrations and the like can be disorderly and still satisfy the requirement of reasonableness, which involves, among other things, non-violence.

Does this mean that Young regards argument as no more central to democracy than the other kinds of communication she discusses? She sometimes gives the impression that whether someone makes her point through argument or rhetoric doesn't matter, as long as she observes the norms of reasonableness and publicity. But Young's position is ambiguous. On the one hand she asserts that 'an inclusive theory and practice of communicative democracy should not privilege specific ways of making claims and arguments' (ID 80). So, presumably, storytelling is just as good as argument in principle. There may be varying levels of excellence in the way people perform in each of these spheres – some people are better at argument, others at narrative – but the spheres themselves are equally valid and appropriate for democratic debate. On the other hand, she more than once insists that her stress on narrative and the other modes is intended 'to add to rather than replace theorizing that emphasizes the role of argument', suggesting that argument is central after all and that the other forms are adjuncts (ID 57, 79).

Whatever Young's own view, there is good reason to insist that it's argument that should be primary from a democratic perspective. The other forms of communication she discusses, while significant and valuable, should be regarded as secondary. First, disorderliness does carry a risk of descent into violence. Indeed, it's arguable that even formally non-violent forms of disruptive protest can be coercive – as in the case of the howling down of unpopular speakers.

Second, if rhetoric, narrative and disruption are allowed to override argument, that may well worsen the position of precisely those disadvantaged groups whose interests Young is most concerned to advance. It's those groups that, historically, have most often been the victims of inflammatory rhetoric, invented narratives and intimidating public gatherings. The German Jews provide the classic example.

More generally, Young's account lacks any adequate sense that argument and the other forms of communication can be in tension with one another. She assumes that the latter will 'add to' the former, never that they will obstruct or inhibit argument. In part this is because she wants to get away from the opposite assumption that argument and the other modes are always opposed. But the truth is probably somewhere in between: greeting, rhetoric, narrative and disruption can support argument, but they can also undermine it. Disruption is especially troubling in this regard. Young suggests that disruptive protest is acceptable as long as those doing the disrupting are representing disadvantaged groups. But even if that can be justified along affirmative action lines, it returns us to the fraught question of which groups count as 'disadvantaged' and who are entitled to speak for them.

Third, while it's true that argument can be abused too, it doesn't follow that it's just as open to abuse as greeting, rhetoric, narrative and disruptive protest – that all these modes are ethically symmetrical. Argument is self-correcting in a way that Young's other modes of political communication are not. Bad arguments are corrected by better arguments. But the abuse of rhetoric, for example, is not corrected simply by better rhetoric, since 'better' here just means more effective, not truer or

more just. It takes the methods of argument – analysis and questioning – to test rhetoric thoroughly. The same goes for greeting and narrative. The abuse of these forms of communication can only be reliably checked, in the end, by argument. Argument, on the other hand, polices itself.

The upshot is that, while Young is right to point to a significant role in democracy for modes of communication other than formal argument, she goes too far when she suggests that neither of these should be privileged and that they operate on the same ethical level. The most basic feature of the deliberative model, which Young says she accepts in general, is the idea that democratic decisions should be justified by reasons. Reason giving, analysis and questioning are fundamental to this whole approach. To the extent that Young denies this, she is no longer working within a deliberative framework. More importantly, she is to that extent inviting a form of politics that is not only chaotic but likely to disadvantage further those very groups she claims to champion.

Ethical foundations

The unresolved tensions in Young's work go deeper still – indeed, they go right down to her ethical foundations. Her emphasis on inclusion raises, once again, the question of limits that was provoked by her earlier work. There we asked, should *all* differences be respected? Must *any* disadvantage qualify for special representation? Young's answer was no, but where exactly the line should be drawn, and why, was much less clear. Similarly, it has to be asked whether 'inclusion' is necessarily desirable irrespective of who or what is being included. Here Young's basic formula is that 'the normative legitimacy of a democratic decision depends on the degree to which those affected by it have been included in the decision-making processes and have had the opportunity to influence the outcomes' (ID 5-6). Does that mean that the Ku Klux Klan have to be included in decisions concerning African-American civil rights? Obviously, Young doesn't want this, but on what ethical basis does she justify that exclusion given her strong presumption in favour of inclusion?

The problem is not that Young's reasoning lacks ethical grounding; rather that it appeals to multiple sources of justification that are unco-ordinated and even in conflict with one another. At different times she draws on liberal universalism, Marxism, Habermasian communicative ethics, and postmodernism. She regards all of these as 'useful tools' for analysis and argument, and breezily declares that she will not inquire into 'metatheoretical questions about the criteria for evaluating theoretical approaches to social and normative theorizing' (JPD 8). Such inquiries, she says, lead us into a realm of abstract thought that distracts from the urgent business of contextualized social criticism. The trouble is that these tools can work against each other: liberal rights and Habermasian norms are opposed by Marxism and postmodernism, and the latter are in turn rejected as excessively relativistic by liberals and Habermasians. Unless the social critic attends to these foundational matters, her judgements run the risk of being incomplete, unpersuasive, and even incoherent.

So, when Young's readers come to ask why the KKK should not be respected or represented or included, they get no coherent answer. What they get are various fragmentary responses, each with its own problems and each in tension with the others. The appeal to 'critical theory' (in Young's sense) is nearly empty, because in itself it says nothing about which of the 'possibilities' we can detect within our

existing practices amount to ‘something better’ – ‘better’ by what standard? Habermasian communicative ethics tell us a bit more, because they establish norms of reason-giving, reasonableness and publicity, but are these enough to guarantee justice, as Young seems to suppose? The imperative to give reasons doesn’t by itself tell us which reasons are acceptable or decisive. Similarly, the norms of reasonableness and publicity require only that we listen respectfully to others and communicate in comprehensible terms, but the more controlled kind of racist or religious bigot could meet both of these conditions and still maintain her basic views – although it’s true that they will have to be translated into a more rationalistic language than usual.

The most substantial component of Young’s ethical groundwork is her universalist notion of the human good as consisting in ‘self-development’ and ‘self-determination’. These ideas, if they were suitably developed, would give Young a more powerful tool for settling the limits of inclusion and dealing with the likes of the KKK. But, first, they would need to be elaborated in much greater detail than Young herself provides.⁶ Second, she would have to concede that, even in the very general terms she uses, they place much more substantial limits on the celebration of ‘difference’ than she allows. According to Young, the two norms are, at least at the level of abstraction she employs, ‘not enormously controversial’ (ID 33). But ‘self-determination’ in particular amounts to a norm of personal autonomy, which is perhaps the most vigorously contested ideal in the field of multiculturalism. At this level Young’s whole framework simply assumes what is being disputed.

Conclusion

Young’s work is representative of the celebration of ‘difference’ and ‘inclusion’ in contemporary political thought, and also symptomatic of the shortcomings that have tended to characterize that tendency. A good-hearted acceptance of multiple ways of life is compromised by an unjustified hostility to liberal principles (on which it tends to depend anyway), and by a demand that the norms of ‘groups’ be respected regardless of their content. In particular, inadequate attention is paid to the consequences of group norms for the group’s own members, especially for those other than the dominant voices who claim to speak on behalf of the group. There is a general tendency to reify the group as an essentialised entity whose identity and practices cannot be legitimately challenged.

Finally, Young’s later turn towards deliberative democracy, qualified by her insistence on various dimensions of ‘inclusion’, provides a further illustration of the unresolved conflicts found throughout her work as a whole. In Young’s hands the deliberative demand for reason-giving is confronted rather than supplemented or balanced by an excessively confident endorsement of greeting, rhetoric, narrative and ‘disruption’. This reflects again her failure to set adequately justified limits to her abiding enthusiasms for difference and inclusion, a failure that results from, and is exacerbated by, her lack of sustained attention to ethical grounding.

Notes

¹ I thus leave to one side a significant issue much discussed by commentators on Young's work, namely the relation between her stress on recognition of identity and the more traditional concern of 'left-wing' reformers with economic redistribution. For this, see Nancy Fraser (1997), and Brian Barry (2001).

² Young 1990 and 2000 will be abbreviated in-text as JPD and ID respectively.

³ Young's argument here is a version of the familiar communitarian claim that the liberal commitment to individual autonomy implies an impossible 'metaphysical' conception of the self. Liberals respond that individual autonomy is a person's capacity to choose her way of life for herself, but that doesn't require that she distance herself from all particular identities, affinities and orientations simultaneously. For discussion see, e.g., Mulhall and Swift (1996).

⁴ For further critical discussion of the practical political implications of Young's proposals for group representation, see Chandran Kukathas (1997)

⁵ In this connection Young cites Lyotard's notion of the 'differend', where a dominant discourse of justice does not recognize the kind of injustice suffered by some people, and in effect silences them: ID 37.

⁶ Perhaps the capabilities theory of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum might provide a model. Young does refer approvingly to Sen's version of capabilities: ID 31-2.

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