Chapter Five

Group Representation and Deliberative Liberalism

The interest pluralism model explored in chapter three is reflected in what remained until the 1990s the dominant paradigm for understanding democratic politics in Western democracies. As Dahl described the system of polyarchy, the competition between interests drove and contained the political process. Those with shared interests organized with the rational aim of capturing the support of legislators, who in turn competed for the support of organized interest groups. Those with political claims that could not be formulated in terms of competing interests were marginalized from the political process. As a result, identity claims that originally concerned recognition were for the most part expressed and interpreted in terms of the demands of interest.

Recently, however, this interest pluralist model has been replaced by a more deliberative model of democratic politics, which emphasizes multilayered processes of debate and exchange over policies amongst those affected by them, with the ultimate goal of the collaborative formation of policy in more formal deliberative arenas. Advocates of deliberative democracy see it as a more accurate description of the political process, as well as a normative ideal, which can be used to construct frameworks for political decision-making. In deliberative democratic theory, process is as important as outcomes, and because of this, participants are presumed to be attached to outcomes at a deeper level than is possible under interest pluralism. As Iris Young describes, deliberative theorists, when describing features of the dominant model to which they object, have tended to subsume even interests to preferences, and to focus on the market model of competition between preferences/interests.1

I argue in this chapter, however, that deliberative theory arises not only as a critical counter to the market model of the political process, but also as a response to the frustrations of identity politics. There has been considerable argument about the extent to which deliberative democracy is accommodating...
to identity groups’ demands for voice. In the first part of this chapter, I argue that while the deliberative model offers the best approach for ensuring representation and political participation given the liberal pluralism for which I have argued, the model must be revised to allow for the recognition of identity groups, as precedent to the reasoned exchange of ideas and perspectives. Underlying the question of what constitutes deliberative speech, are issues concerning the acknowledgment of the status of deliberating participants. I explore the status of greeting, testimony, and apology as forms of speech in deliberation, and argue that all of these either express the need for, or confer recognition. I conclude that while deliberative politics has aimed to sidestep the politically difficult question of identity, the recognition of parties in their own self-identifying terms must precede deliberation. Having considered participation in the democratic process, I turn in the second part of the chapter to consider strategies for the representation of identity groups in formal deliberative bodies—both legislative and advisory. I discuss and reject the formalized and permanent representation of minority groups, and advocate a decentralized and issue-specific approach to the representation of different identity groups, particularly at the local level.

**Deliberative Politics and Recognition**

Deliberative democracy has enjoyed widespread popularity as both a normative and descriptive paradigm for democratic politics in recent years. Its advocates describe it as a response to the kind of persistent moral disagreement that frustrates policy making in an ethically pluralist society. From this perspective, it is political liberalism of the variety I described in chapter one, applied to the democratic process. But political liberalism does not necessarily require deliberation, and is compatible with a less participatory democratic process. Moreover, ethical pluralism is a perennial problem for liberal societies. In fact, the popularity of deliberation can best be understood not because of the way the theory incorporates moral pluralism, but in terms of its successful response to the challenges posed to the previously dominant interest pluralist model by two significant and related developments in the postwar politics of Western pluralist democracies. The first of these was the movement for participatory democracy, which emerged in the 1960s amongst New Left student groups, and which shaped the philosophical foundations of the new social movements organized around gender, race, and sexuality. Participatory democracy challenged the notion that the political process was engineered by political elites responding to organized popular interests, expressed through voting. Like the civic republican tradition from which it derived, participatory democracy focused on the moral value of public action, which accrued to both actors and the community.