Abstract

**An agonistic response to deep disagreement**

This paper challenges a Rawlsian solution to epistemic deep disagreement by criticizing Michael Lynch’s Method Game both from within contemporary deliberative theory and by proposing an alternative way of dealing with deep disagreement: an agonistic answer.  
 Some disagreements are solved in a heartbeat. Others lead to divides that are seemingly impossible to cross. Such deep disagreement is sometimes seen as a problem for democratic societies. When policy needs to be made on contested issues, like vaccines, climate change, or immigration policies, deep disagreement about these topics can hamper decision making. In such cases, the disagreement *has* to be resolved or otherwise be dealt with.  
 However, many argue that deep disagreements are not rationally resolvable. If this is indeed the case, how to deal with such disagreements in a democracy?   
 In his book *In Praise of Reason*, Lynch proposes a practical solution that is inspired by and very similar to Rawls’s Veil of Ignorance: the Method Game. The goal of the game is to arrive at a list of epistemic principles that every reasonable person can commit to. This solution fits very well into the widely accepted deliberative approach to democracy, because the Method Game focuses on public reason and aims for consensus.   
 Lynch’s Rawlsian solution to deep disagreements stands hitherto mostly unchallenged. However, given existing diversity and structural epistemic injustices, a Rawsian response might not be a realistic or even a desirable practical way to deal with deep disagreement in a democratic society. It’s not *realistic* because the Method Game has no bearing on the actual world we live in. It is not *desirable* because it puts many restrictions on which kind of reasons can be used. Restricting what counts as a valid public reason, increases the risk of excluding the reasons given by marginalized people.   
 This paper challenges Lynch’s solution from two perspectives: from the contemporary deliberative approach and from the agnostic approach to democracy.  
 Lynch’s practical solution does not take into consideration recent work within the deliberative approach that, since Rawls, has moved away from a focus on consensus and reason giving. Contemporary deliberativism takes into account the diversity of society and the different ways people contribute to a public debate. Lynch’s method game would improve by including these recent trends.  
 The Method Game is also challenged by an alternative answer to deep disagreement: An agonistic answer that does not aim at consensus, rational or otherwise, but instead focuses on the *value of conflict and diversity*. This answer to deep disagreement is more realistic, because it focuses on our actual world and is more in line with the entrenched and unresolvable nature of deep disagreements. An agonistic answer would also be more sensitive to epistemic diversity and the inclusion of marginalized voices.   
 This paper contributes to the epistemology of deep disagreement by challenging Lynch’s Rawlsian solution. At the same time this paper draws attention to the relevance of the agnostic approach for the emerging field of political epistemology.