

**Taking the Engagement in  
Civic Engagement Seriously**

# **Taking the Engagement in Civic Engagement Seriously**

**University of Illinois at Chicago  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences**

**Anthony Simon Laden** Ph.D.  
Department of Philosophy

May 2012

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The research brings together the definition of civic engagement with an eye to developing a framework for distinguishing projects that are forms of genuine civic engagement that foster the habits of democratic citizenship from other forms of public spirited action.

Although an attractive generosity of spirit marks much work on and in civic engagement, a disconcerting generosity towards the meaning of terms mars many reflections and debates about it. The generosity of spirit leads educators and theorists of both education and democracy to look for processes and practices that will invigorate our democracy,<sup>1</sup> overcome civic empowerment gaps and other forms of inequality,<sup>2</sup> and cultivate such social virtues as compassion and concern for the marginalized. The generosity in terminology, however, sometimes makes it hard to bring clearly into focus where the lines of debate and controversy are, and what aims various forms of civic engagement promote and what aims they surreptitiously subvert. The problem begins with the very extension of the term civic engagement, which sometimes covers any form of social activity aimed at some social good,<sup>3</sup> and sometimes points to a subset of a rather wide range of educational practices, from community service requirements to service learning to experiential civics education and action civics.<sup>4</sup> And it extends into reflections about the aims of civic engagement, and whether they

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Peter Levine, *The Future of Democracy* (Lebanon, NH: Tufts University Press, 2007), National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, International Association for Public Participation, the Co-Intelligence Institute, "Core Principles for Public Engagement," May 1, 2009, <http://www.ncdd.org/pep/> (accessed May 1, 2012). *To Serve a Larger Purpose: Engagement for Democracy and the Transformation of Higher Education*, ed. Matthew Hartley, John Saltmarsh (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> The term "civic empowerment gaps" is from Meira Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Barry Checkoway, "Civic Engagement, Civic Learning, and Higher Education," in *Civic Provocations*, ed. Donald Harward, 25-30 (Washington, DC: Bringing Theory to Practice, 2012), 25.

<sup>4</sup> These last two terms, and arguments in favor of them are found in Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind*. For a discussion of the shift in emphasis on community service and service learning to more fully active forms of civic education, see the Introduction and Chapter 1 of Matthew Hartley and John Saltmarsh, ed., *To Serve a Larger Purpose*.

include political reform or transformation and what those things involve.<sup>5</sup> This paper attempts to bring our vision of at least some of these matters a little more sharply into focus, so that we can see more clearly where various approaches to civic engagement and civic education disagree and where they may be talking past one another. In particular, I want to bring some recent work in moral and political philosophy to bear on a set of related questions that arise in the literature on civic engagement. My hope is that the conceptual framework this philosophical work provides can help us think more clearly about at least these problems and perhaps point the way to a set of questions that those in the business of establishing, assessing and implementing various programs aimed at fostering civic engagement can use in assessing the democratic potential of such programs. At the end of the paper, I will suggest a sample set of such questions.

There is, I think, a fair amount of confusion about just what philosophical interventions into practical questions can contribute. So I want to state straight off that I do not think of philosophy as the discipline of theory construction. That is, philosophers (at any rate this philosopher) do not work out theories, whether of democracy or education or politics that can then be applied to the practical questions that citizens, educators or policy-makers face. Rather, philosophers are better thought of as playing the role of conceptual optometrists.<sup>6</sup> We try to bring the vision of people engaged in various specialized and not so specialized activities into focus.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Peter Levine's contribution to *Civic Provocations*, and the essays in *To Serve a Larger Purpose*.

<sup>6</sup> I develop this metaphor and apply it to related questions about civic education and the democratic nature of schools in Anthony Simon Laden, "Learning to be Equal: Just Schools and Schools of Justice," in *Education, Justice and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

That may mean clarifying the use and extension of key terms and concepts. It may mean offering alternative conceptual frameworks from which a problem can be seen from a different direction and certain of its otherwise occluded features brought into relief. But even when philosophy of this sort is successful, the result falls well short of a theory or a solution. Bringing our vision into clear focus may help us identify paths forward, but it doesn't on its own set us off down one or the other. That is work we must do together, whether as citizens or teachers or students.

Moreover, philosophical claims, even those about messy real-world topics like democracy and politics, are not causal but conceptual, and so they are not best thought of as the result of or predictions about empirical research into such questions as how participation in a variety of civic activities shapes participation in other activities later in life. Such empirical work is generally used to support and test causal claims. Causal claims make assertions about things that are conceptually distinct. Exercising regularly promotes health. Going to church regularly leads to longer lives. Participating in non-sports extra-curricular activities in elementary and high school leads to higher rates of voting. In all of these cases, the claim connects conceptually distinct activities. Exercising is not itself health, but a means to it. When we make causal claims, then we are saying the world is a certain way and so we can do empirical research to find out if it is. If church goers die young at a greater rate than non-church goers, then, barring further explanation, the causal claim above is false.

Conceptual claims, on the other hand, don't assert a connection between two distinct things but assert that what may appear to be distinct things are

not in fact distinct. The evening star is the morning star. Reasoning is a form of conversation. Engagement with others is a response to democratic erosion.<sup>7</sup> Such claims are not so much about the world but about how to think about it, how to carve it up. They are illuminating not because they trace empirical connections, but because they reveal ways of thinking about the world that reveal possibilities. The claims I make here are conceptual. I am not saying that programs that are democratic in the sense I develop will increase voting rates or indices of political participation fashioned independently of this conception of democracy, but that they will themselves be instances of democratic civic engagement and involve practice in the civic virtues that excellent civic engagement requires. It may turn out that I am wrong about this claim in a number of different ways: It may turn out that the conceptual connections I draw do not hold up, that they rest on equivocations or bad arguments. It may also be the case that though the conceptual connections hold up, they rest on a misdiagnosis of the problems we face or the ones that advocates of civic engagement are worried about. What I characterize as democratic civic engagement might counter what I will call democratic erosion, but our problem may be merely one of passivity or political inequality or civic empowerment gaps and engagement is not necessarily the antidote to these problems. These are not errors that can be identified by empirical work and thus they cannot be avoided by a reliance on empirical data.

This does not mean that there is no relation between conceptual and empirical work or that conceptual work is not answerable to empirical

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<sup>7</sup> The latter two claims will figure heavily in what follows.

findings. Empirical work must itself be conceptually framed, and so one connection between the work I have done here and empirical work on civic engagement would be to help guide different questions for empirical research in part by carving up the conceptual terrain in which research questions are posed differently. That, in turn, might lead to changes in the conceptual framework proposed here. I will, for instance, argue that the political/social distinction that is central to much civic engagement research divides up the terrain in unhelpful ways. It may turn out that I do not fully identify the central features of engagement or of civics, and so among the variety of activities that count as engagement on the characterization I give are many that actually foster democratic erosion as I will characterize it. This is the kind of result that might be arrived at through reflection and the consideration of cases, but it can also turn up as the result of empirical findings. Conceptual ties, if properly drawn, should be neat, and so if the data they lead us to is messy that is a reason to think we haven't drawn our categories properly. What that means, I think, is that there is an important place for engagement between empirical and conceptual work, engagement that can both inform and be informed by what we learn from one another, but that is a different relationship than one where empirical results are cited straightforwardly to support or refute theoretical claims.

### **The problem(s) of democratic erosion**

One source of our lack of clear vision when it comes to thinking about civic engagement is that civic engagement is often touted as a response to a problem or set of problems, and the characterization of the problem we face

is not always the same across discussions. Moreover, the shift in how various advocates for forms of civic engagement conceive of the problem that civic engagement is meant to address often goes unacknowledged, making it hard to see that and how some forms of civic engagement, while addressing certain problems may exacerbate others. Note that the issue here is not that some forms of civic engagement are more successful than others, but that the successes of some forms of civic engagement in addressing one problem may also mean that the very same practice exacerbates a different problem, and that this dual effect goes unnoticed, because we have not seen clearly that there are two problems here, not one. I want to pull apart at least some of the problems that advocates for various forms of civic engagement aim to address. It turns out that there are indeed different problems here even though they are related to one another, in part by falling under the general heading of what I will call democratic erosion.

To see the general problem of erosion, we need to recognize that a democratic society is something separate and broader than a society with a democratic government.<sup>8</sup> A democratic society is more than a state with a popularly elected (i.e. democratic) government. It is also, crucially, a society whose members relate to one another and to their government as citizens. Citizens see one another as free and equal, and collectively constituting the authority to govern themselves. Many societies that fit this description also feature other familiar institutional and political structures

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<sup>8</sup> The idea of a “democratic society” figures heavily though often implicitly in John Rawls’s work on justice. See, John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, revised (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), Joshua Cohen, “For a Democratic Society,” in *Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, 86-138 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

like a written constitution, the rule of law, popularly elected representatives and some set of guaranteed basic rights. But these are outgrowths, not essential features, of democratic societies.

Democratic societies face the problem of erosion because they do not reproduce naturally over time. In order for a democratic society to continue from generation to generation, its members have to learn a set of practices and attitudes, and take part in a variety of activities and refrain from others. These attitudes and practices do not arise spontaneously with the process of physical maturation. They must be cultivated and encouraged, and the various attitudes and activities that subvert or interfere with these practices need to be pruned and discouraged. Democratic erosion or decay occurs when new citizens do not take up the reins from previous generations, or institutional structures develop which prohibit the development and effective implementation of the tools and attitudes of citizenship. The widespread interest in civic engagement among educators, policy makers and democratic theorists in recent decades is a response to a perception of democratic erosion.

Democratic erosion can take many forms, however. First, new generations of citizens can turn away from public matters, and attend only to their private affairs and those close to them. They can pursue purely personal projects. They can withdraw from any form of political activity, and fail to follow or try to understand the great and small policy and political debates of their times. Such attitudes can be encouraged or discouraged in young people and when they are encouraged, various familiar forms of democratic erosion take place: fewer people vote or



demonstrate knowledge or interest in politics. Fewer people take an active role in either political or social welfare providing organizations. More people bowl alone.<sup>9</sup>

But, second, new citizens can increasingly pursue narrow self-interest, even if they do not withdraw from politics. Politics and government can be used as a means to pursue one's interests. In this case, active citizens advocate only for the advancement of their particular interests or the well-being of their industry or family or firm. Politics becomes competitive lobbying.<sup>10</sup> When self-interested citizens contribute to charities or get involved with social institutions, it is only to promote themselves or those organizations that in various ways cater to those close to them: they volunteer or give money to their children's schools or local artistic institutions from which they also receive a direct and visible benefit. Such citizens are engaged in one sense of the term, but a society where this is the primary form engagement takes will suffer from democratic erosion nonetheless. Active citizens can erode democracy as effectively as inactive ones.

Third, even if all citizens are active and all pursue what they honestly perceive to be the common good, a democratic society can suffer erosion as a result of various sorts of inequality. If there is widespread economic and social inequality, and the political and social institutions of society are not

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<sup>9</sup> Many authors who worry about this form of erosion cite Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> That this counts as a form of democratic erosion and not merely what democracy is depends on conception of democracy that has roots in Rousseau. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "The Social Contract," in *The Social Contract and other later political writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

structured to overcome or neutralize this inequality, a society can develop what Meira Levinson calls “civic empowerment gaps.”<sup>11</sup> In such a society, some people’s voices and actions have much greater effect on the direction the society takes. Its institutions are designed to hear their voices more clearly and be more responsive to them, and they are taught more effectively how to be heard and responded to. In such a society, even if everyone is active and public-spirited, democracy will be eroded by the presence and persistence of such gaps. Most directly, certain concerns will go unheeded and unaddressed, because they are only clearly visible as problems to those whose voices are muted. But perhaps just as importantly, such inequality creates democratic erosion because it generates a dichotomy in attitudes among citizens about their relation to one another and their governing institutions. And the persistence in that split in attitudes will erode the very relationship members of the society need to bear to one another as citizens.

Finally, there is a more subtle form of democratic erosion that can arise not only as a result of various sorts of social and economic inequality, but also through various sorts of public-spirited and egalitarian-minded responses to inequality. This inequality involves a failure of citizens to regard all of their fellow citizens as fully equal co-authors of their society. This requires not only that we support laws against discrimination and policies that aim at a just distribution of social and economic goods, but also that we are responsive to others as fellow citizens, that we offer them reasons for our positions and are responsive to their rejection of those

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<sup>11</sup> *No Citizen Left Behind.*

reasons, that we enter our interactions with them open to being touched and moved by what they say and do, that we see them as people from whom we can learn. When some people in a society can only see some other people in that society in this light, then they are not regarding all the members of their society as equals, and thus not seeing them as fellow citizens, and the democratic character of their society is thereby eroded.<sup>12</sup>

Note that which of these four forms of democratic erosion—indifference and withdrawal, active egoism, empowerment gaps, or inegalitarian attitudes— are perceived as the threat to which civic engagement responds will determine what those advocating for civic engagement will end up advocating. If we fail to see that democratic erosion can take any of these forms (and more), it is all too easy for a response to one of these forms of democratic erosion to exacerbate the others. Getting citizens to be active will overcome indifference, but if what they do with their newfound skills and motivations is to lobby for their narrow interests, then addressing the first problem makes the second worse. The presence of civic empowerment gaps mean that children growing up in different parts of the society will encounter opportunities and encouragement to learn very different skills. Marginalized children may not learn how to assertively confront an authority figure and make an effective argument for a change in policy. Privileged children may not learn how to listen attentively to criticisms or notice how what they take for granted is a result of privileges

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<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, the essays in *to Serve a Larger Purpose*, and Matthew Hartley, “An engagement for Democracy” in *Civic Provocations*, ed. Donald Harward (Washington, DC: Bringing Theory to Practice, 2012), 51-55.

not all receive or have access to.<sup>13</sup> A program meant to encourage civic engagement that promotes the skills of assertive and effective communication will only help overcome some of these children's shortfalls, and the mere fact that the shortfalls it overcomes are those of marginalized children does not necessarily mean that it will promote equality or counter democratic erosion. It may, for instance, increase the range of people who effectively use politics to pursue their narrow self-interests, which might increase equality while nevertheless eroding public-spiritedness.

Finally, if we don't notice the fourth kind of democratic erosion as a possibility, then we may address the inequalities that lead to the third type of erosion in ways that accentuate the fourth. So, for instance, programs that lead privileged citizens to support and contribute to a variety of institutions and services that help those in the society with fewer economic and social goods can help to overcome some of the inequalities that create civic empowerment gaps. But if they work by reinforcing the all-too-common attitudes of either pity or contempt for those who are socially and economically underprivileged, then it will redress one form of inequality while accentuating another.<sup>14</sup> This is a common pitfall of projects that deploy privileged students and academics armed with skills and technical expertise to solve the problems of marginalized communities in a way that does not treat the members of the marginalized community as fully equal

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<sup>13</sup> Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind* devotes a great deal of attention to these sorts of disparities. For a discussion of how these disparities grow out of and help to reinforce class differences in family dynamics, see Annette Lureau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, Rawls's discussion of the difference between "welfare state capitalism" and "property owning democracy" in John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

participants in the project, but only as mere clients or recipients. And even if we recognize a form of this fourth kind of democratic erosion but trace it entirely to fixed features of the institutional status quo, then we are likely to misdirect our responses to it, urging certain forms of oppositional and radical politics as the only truly democratic form of civic engagement.<sup>15</sup>

In the next section, I suggest that we can begin to see our way clear of this tangle of issues if we gain clarity about what we mean by engagement. Insofar as engagement is the remedy to democratic erosion, we need to understand what engagement is in a way that will yield insight into why it is a response to erosion.

Before trying to straighten out this tangle of problems, let me raise two further ones that run orthogonally to those I have been discussing and which will occupy later sections of the paper. Insofar as many attempts at fostering civic engagement, whatever that is thought to mean, take place in either public or otherwise explicitly non-partisan private educational institutions, a question arises about the appropriateness of involving students in political activity. Public schools and colleges can't devote resources or deploy their authority over their students to aid the efforts of the ruling party to maintain control of the government, or the opposition party to take control. But, at the same time, one can't address many of the problems of democratic erosion without encouraging and even directly participating in political matters and questions, including electoral campaigns. After all, one form that democratic erosion can take is a withdrawal of citizens from the political into narrower non-public, even if

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<sup>15</sup> This is the direction many of the essays in *To Serve A Larger Purpose* take.

social, realms. Programs meant to foster civic engagement that merely incentivize and enable contributions to private charities can avoid the whiff of partisanship, but not on their own stem the tide of democratic erosion.<sup>16</sup> So the problem facing those who advocate for programs designed to foster civic engagement is to find a path to political action that is not itself tied directly to electoral party politics. And that requires that, along the way, we gain some conceptual clarity about the realm of politics and distinctly political action. In section 4, I invoke a distinction that political philosopher James Tully draws between civil and civic citizenship, and suggest that the form of politics that civic engagement needs to engage with is civic, not civil.

Finally, because civic engagement is often thought of in educational terms, as a process, questions arise about the relation of means and ends. Thus, even if we gain clarity about the ends that programs designed to increase civic engagement adopt, we may be left unsure of what means will do that. There are two related issues here. First, what means are effective? Clearly the answer to this question depends on what ends we pursue. Requiring high school students to perform community service may foster a taste for charitable activity in the future, but not lead privileged students to treat marginalized members of their society as equals from whom they can learn. So whether this is an effective means of encouraging civic engagement depends on what we are pursuing. To some degree the

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<sup>16</sup> This is a common theme of the essays in *To Serve a Larger Purpose* with regard to programs that encourage or require community service.

question of effectiveness of means is transformed by my shift from focusing on causal connections to focusing on conceptual ones.

Second, there is a question about consistency between means and ends. As every parent and teacher who has seen a child or student break a rule while perfectly modeling the adult's behavior knows, it is very hard to teach something effectively if the method of teaching undermines the material taught. I can't teach my child not to hit by spanking him when he does hit, and I can't teach my students to listen to each other by lecturing them, even if I am lecturing them on the importance of listening and not lecturing. Similarly, an institution that tries to foster forms of civic engagement meant to counter democratic erosion will undermine its own efforts if those efforts are undemocratically imposed, run and implemented. In section 5, I suggest that a framework for addressing this problem can be found in certain forms of virtue ethics. In particular, I want to suggest that if we think of fostering civic engagement on the model of cultivating certain civic virtues, then approaches to civic engagement that rely on undemocratic means will prove less tempting.

### **Engagement: a social picture<sup>17</sup>**

In much of the literature on civic engagement, the term engagement has been used to suggest activity as opposed to mere book learning, practice rather than mere theory. Advocates of civic engagement want students and university researchers and ordinary citizens to get involved, leave their living rooms, classrooms, labs and studies and go forth into their

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<sup>17</sup> This section summarizes material developed at much greater length in Anthony Simon Laden, *Reasoning: A Social Picture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

communities, both narrow and wide, to do something. But this focus on activity misses a feature of the very idea of engagement that I want to take up in this section: engagement is not merely active, but interactive. When I take my foot off the clutch, the gears of the car's engine engage with the drive train. They were spinning all along, but it is their engagement with a different set of gears that puts the car in motion. We talk of people being engaged in conversation or engaged to be married. If I am talking at you or lecturing you or not letting you get a word in edgewise, then we are not engaged in conversation. And if I propose, we are not engaged until you accept, something you are less likely to do if my proposal presumes rather than invites your acceptance.<sup>18</sup>

I want, eventually, to suggest that civic engagement can respond to the varieties of forms of democratic erosion if it involves engagement in this interactive sense. But to do so clearly and helpfully, we need to take a bit of a detour. In particular, I want to introduce an idea I have developed more fully elsewhere: engaged reasoning. Doing so requires situating engaged reasoning within a wider picture of reasoning that aims to do the kind of conceptual re-framing I suggested philosophers can help us with. Hence the detour.

Start with the following basic contrast between two sorts of activity that we commonly call reasoning.<sup>19</sup> The first involves calculation, broadly conceived. Here, we reason in order to solve problems, figure things out,

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<sup>18</sup> A point on which the plots of many a novel turns. See, for instance, Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). I discuss these aspects of *pride and Prejudice* in *Reasoning*, particularly the Prologue.

<sup>19</sup> I draw the contrast this way in chapter 1 of *Reasoning*



and reach judgments. This form of reasoning is the one described by most academic work in philosophy and the social sciences about reason, and so will be familiar to most readers. Amongst its key features are that it pictures the activity of reasons as end-directed, episodic, fundamentally individual, and aspiring to decisiveness. We reason in this sense when we have a problem to solve or a decision to make. Reasoning is thus seen as a response to having an end in view. As a result, this activity of reasoning is basically episodic, marked by the formation of the initial end at the beginning and the arrival at or foregoing of the end at the close. I reason *in order to* something or other, and once I have arrived there, I stop reasoning, at least for the time being. Of course, not all pursuit of ends is reasoning, but I am not reasoning on this picture, even if my mind is following along various paths dictated by rational principles, unless it is in the service of some or other end.<sup>20</sup> We can, for instance, distinguish genuine episodes of reasoning in this sense from the idle play of thoughts that can accompany passing the time. Since this kind of reasoning is an activity directed at an end, it aspires to reach that end, which is to say that it aspires to finality or decisiveness. Reasoning is an activity I undertake to get to a point where I need not reason anymore (at least about whatever prompted the reasoning in the first place). If, for instance, I need to decide what to make for dinner tonight, I might reason about what I can make that my family will like with the time and ingredients I have on hand. Once I have arrived at a decision about what to make, it would be rather odd for me to continue reasoning

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<sup>20</sup> Candace Vogler takes this to be an essential feature of the activity of at least practical reasoning. Candace Vogler, *Reasonably Vicious* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

about what to make for dinner just for the sake of engaging in the activity itself for a little while longer.

Moreover, even if some of the ends that I pursue by reasoning are ends I share with others, and even if the process of reasoning to reach these ends is one I do with others, these are not fundamental features of reasoning. Whether I reason with others or reason alone, and whether my ends are truly shared with others or merely neatly fit alongside theirs, the activity of reasoning itself, so conceived, is not really all that different. Whatever our theory of individual reasoning tells us about reasoning will apply *modulo* some small but not terribly fundamental adjustments, to reasoning with other people.

I trust that most readers will find the foregoing characterizations familiar, even if they have not devoted time themselves to thinking about the nature of reasoning, or would not have listed these as fundamental characteristics of reasoning. I mention them here to have a basis for the contrast I want to draw between this well-theorized activity we call reasoning and another kind of activity that we also call reasoning, but which, I argue, has a very different structure. To bring this other activity in to view, think about the difference between the interaction of two people when, on the one hand, they are reasoning with one another, and, on the other hand, when one of them is commanding or manipulating or ignoring the other. By describing one of these interactions as reasoning, we mean to claim that it has certain distinctive features. But it turns out that the best way to get at those distinctive features may not be by describing this interaction as a form of reasoning in the first sense laid out above. If,

instead, we try to describe its features on their own terms, the first thing to note is that what marks this kind of reasoning as reasoning and not its contrastive activities has to do with the nature of the responsiveness each participant shows to the other. The difference between reasoning and commanding, for instance, is analogous to the difference between a conversation and a lecture. Although I can't command or lecture effectively if I do not pay attention to how what I say is received, commanding or lecturing attentively leaves me far short of reasoning with another or conversing with her.

If we want to capture this social form of reasoning clearly, and on its own terms, we find that none of the features of reasoning of the first sort listed above are necessary or fundamental to reasoning in this second sense. Reasoning in this second sense turns out to be a species of conversation, and like conversation, to be shaped by norms that do not specify its end. What determines whether we are conversing or I am lecturing you is not the end we have in talking or listening to one another but in the nature of our responsiveness to each other. Similarly, what, on this picture of reasoning, determines whether we are reasoning with one another is the nature of our responsiveness to each other. Whereas reasoning of the first sort is fundamentally something each of us can do alone, even if sometimes we do it alongside one another, reasoning in this second sense is something that we fundamentally do together. It is a social activity, a form of *interaction*.

Moreover, reasoning on this picture, like conversation, is not in principle episodic, but is rather ongoing. Since conversations are not taken up in order to do something in particular, they do not have natural stopping

points determined by those ends. It isn't that conversations go on forever, but that they are not structured by particular goals. Similarly, when we reason together, we need not be aiming at making a decision or reaching a conclusion, and so what structures our interaction and makes it reasoning as opposed to commanding or some other form of interaction is not determined by a set of goals. Finally, since reasoning together need not be end-directed or episodic, it also need not aspire to finality. In reasoning with you, I need not be searching for the formulation of my position that will convert or silence you or otherwise get you to accept my position once and for all. In fact, the search for such decisive formulations is much more characteristic of commanding than reasoning.

If we attend to these characteristics of this second, interactive form of reasoning, we can develop a rather different picture of the activity of reasoning with one another, one that does not merely adapt the familiar accounts of the first kind of reasoning to a social case. Instead, we are left with a description of the activity of reasoning as embedded within the wider activity of conversation and characterizable as the offering of invitations to others to take what we say as speaking for them as well. The idea of invitation here is meant to capture what is an essential feature of reasoning: to be reasoning with another, I need to take what I say to be always open to rejection and criticism, and I need my conversation partners to take it that way as well. Invitations can be turned down, and they do not lose their character as invitations when they are so turned down. Note that inviting someone to something involves treating them as free and equal, and as a full co-author in the joint activity you propose. It leaves them free

to say no, with equal authority to determine whether the invitation is successful, and thus an equal partner in shaping what you do together. Thinking about reasoning as a form of interaction that involves the issuing of invitations thus suggests that reasoning can be a central form of democratic activity.<sup>21</sup>

With this picture of reasoning in place, we can then distinguish at least three forms of interaction in terms of the level of responsiveness they demand. The loosest form of interaction is casual conversation.<sup>22</sup> When we are conversing, we need to be open in a variety of ways to what the other says, and that has to shape the future direction of the conversation, but it need not push it in the direction of finding common ground or agreement. In fact, neither of us has to be concerned to find things to say that we sincerely believe the other might accept as speaking for her as well. That requires a different level of responsiveness, one that shapes both how we go on and what we say initially. When we are interacting in this more fully responsive way, we are reasoning.<sup>23</sup> Here, we issue invitations and we take what we say to be both open to criticism and something we can sincerely offer others to say as well. It involves making the positions we take publicly presentable, and being responsive to others who point out why what we say is not so presentable. But we can reason in this way without really caring whether those with whom we reason come to agreement with

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<sup>21</sup> This basic insight is at the heart of much work in deliberative democracy. In the particular form it takes here, it is one I have deployed in "Learning to be Equal," "Reasonable deliberation, constructive power and the struggle for recognition," in *Recognition and Power*, ed. Bert van den Brink and David Owen, 270-289 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), as well as several more recent papers.

<sup>22</sup> I discuss the norms governing casual conversation in chapter 4 of *Reasoning*.

<sup>23</sup> I discuss the norms governing this kind of interaction in chapter 5 of *Reasoning*.

us. I may be content to reach a point where I am satisfied that you understand my position and why it is publicly presentable, even though it is not and never will be, yours. We can, as they say, agree to disagree.

Sometimes, however, we want more out of our interactions. Sometimes we have a task at hand that requires we come to agreement or find common ground. Sometimes the matter at hand is of sufficient importance to one or both of us that we are not satisfied with a polite acknowledgement of difference. Sometimes we care about the other's approval enough to be disconcerted by their failure to accept our invitation. Think here of the difference between inviting a friend to your wedding and proposing marriage to someone. I might be disappointed that my friend can't make my wedding, but not enough to change my plans. But if I am proposing to you and you turn me down, then, if I truly love you, I will not go on as before.<sup>24</sup>

As the example of proposing marriage suggests, it is when we are responsive to one another at this third level that I will say that we are engaged with one another.<sup>25</sup> Engagement is a particularly responsive form of interaction that occurs when the people interacting are concerned to find positions they all accept.<sup>26</sup> This leads them to shape their interaction in particular ways, and their success at engaging with one another can be measured not by what they agree to or even whether they arrive at an

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<sup>24</sup> Again, *Pride and Prejudice* offers a nice example in the contrast between Mr. Collins, who responds to Elizabeth's refusal by making the same pitch to her friend Charlotte, and Mr. Darcy, who responds to her refusal by transforming himself.

<sup>25</sup> I discuss engaged reasoning more fully in chapter 6 of *Reasoning*.

<sup>26</sup> Note: not that they "can" accept. On the importance of this point, see James Bohman and Henry Ricahrdson, "Liberalism, Deliberative Democracy and "Reasons that All Can Accept," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 17, no. 3 (2009): 253-274.

agreement, but by whether their interaction obeys certain norms. For our purposes in developing a conceptual frame for thinking about civic engagement, the following five points are most important:

1) Engaging with you means offering you reasons I sincerely believe you will accept. Put in the language of the social picture of reasoning laid out above, this means trying to work out what I think you will also think we can say, that is, something that is a reason for us. To do this, I can't merely think about what proposal would satisfy my ends and interests and then throw it out to see what you think about it. Rather, I have to try to think of us as partners, as constituting a "we" who might have reasons jointly.

Doing so involves thinking about who we are, what makes us a "we" in this context, and how we relate through our joint constitution of that "we." We might be bound by a place, as residents of a neighborhood or city. We might be bound by common interests or problems, as when we band together to get funding for a park, or promote marriage equality. We might be bound together by common beliefs or ideology or a common history, and this will mean that certain kinds of considerations have weight with us that may not have similar weight for others. In any event, if we are to engage with one another, the first thing we must be doing is sincerely searching for what I will call "we"-reasons to offer one another. "We"-reasons are just those things that we, whoever we are in the context, can accept as speaking for us. As this definition suggests, what counts as a "we"-reason for a given group is not something that can be theoretically worked out ahead of time. The character of a group and the reasons it accepts as its own are mutually constitutive. I might offer a new "we"-reason for us that does not find

footing in our accepted sense of who we are, and yet which meets with uptake from the rest of us. In such a case, our reasoning may have led us to change something about who we are, the shape of the “we” we constitute. Nevertheless, for this to be an honest move within an engagement, I have to be making a good faith effort to articulate something I take to be true of us, even if at the moment it is only something like an ideal I am inviting us to live up to.

2) Since what will count as a “we” reason for a given group is not something that is fixed ahead of time, the flip side of offering only what I take to be “we” reasons in good faith is being responsive to their rejection. This does not mean that any time I invite others to accept a reason and they refuse, I must abandon it as a possible reason for us. Sometimes their refusal of my invitation is a sign that they are obtuse or stubborn or not engaging with me as I am trying to engage with them. But, even if their rejection is not well-founded, if I am to engage with them, then that rejection must affect where and how our interaction proceeds. I have to manifest some kind of recognition that my proposal has met with rejection. I can’t, for instance, just keep reiterating it or looking around for those who are willing to accept it. I may have to change it altogether, or support it in new ways or alter its substance or its presentation. One important effect of this requirement of responsiveness is that I also have to be open to being changed by the interaction. Insofar as the invitations I offer are ones I take to speak for me, say where I stand, and thus in part, who I am, if I am to be open to revising them or altering them in light of what happens when I make them to others, that, in essence means that I have to be open to being



changed by my interaction with others, to move where I stand and who I am in light of their responses. So I can't engage with you if I remain rooted to a particular position, and merely change the form of what I say in response to your rejection without being open to being further affected by what you say.

3) Note that this means that engaging with others requires accepting being vulnerable to them, and so shapes with whom we can genuinely be engaged. In particular, we cannot engage with one another in this sense if we do not trust one another. If I do not trust you, then I have no reason to accept being vulnerable to you. In some cases, I have very good reasons to remain rooted to certain spots and not engage with those who might shift me off of it. Nevertheless, one way that a democratic society can erode is if too many of its members find that they are unwilling to accept the vulnerability at the hands of their fellow citizens that engagement requires. This is one of the main reasons that civic empowerment gaps and other forms of inequality can erode the democratic quality of a society.<sup>27</sup>

A corollary of this need for vulnerability is the importance of trust. One way to characterize those with whom I can genuinely engage is that they are the people I trust. And so if we want to foster the conditions of engagement with one another, we need to foster the conditions under which we can trust one another, which may require that we do the work necessary to earn each others trust. Interestingly, one way to earn the trust of another is to engage with them, to manifest your willingness to be vulnerable to their influence, rather than to come into a situation with all of your

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<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Levinson, *No Child Left Behind*, 37-39.

cognitive and social armor well deployed. Note also that trusting someone is a precondition of letting them teach you, and so goes hand in hand with regarding someone as a person from whom you can learn.

4) One of the things that signals that an interaction is an engagement is how the participants listen to one another. Engagement, then, is not merely a matter of being active, of deploying the rhetorical and cognitive skills necessary to make your case and press your point. To engage with others requires that we hear what they have to say, that we make space in our interaction for them to respond fully and genuinely, and that we are fully responsive to their responses and proposals. Once again, we foster trust by not only speaking sympathetically and demonstrating concern, but also by listening attentively. And so teaching people how to engage with one another requires that we teach them and give them the opportunity to practice and improve their abilities to listen as well as to argue and mobilize and present their points.

5) Finally, in order for engagement to be not only interactive and fully responsive but a form of reasoning, it must leave room for anyone to question any aspect of the proposals mentioned. Although this openness to criticism is implicit in the features of engagement discussed above, it is worth highlighting here because it brings out the importance of critical questioning to processes of engagement. Engagement can degenerate when assumptions and conclusions go unchallenged and unquestioned, either because one person or group wields political or social or intellectual authority and so others defer to her, or if the group as a whole accepts uncritically some or all of the proposals they all accept. Engagement, like

all forms of reasoning, is never final and requires for its maintenance and sustenance that it be always open to and subjected to criticism.

Unquestioned pieties and verities, just as much as imbalances in authority and power, can lead to democratic erosion.

What I hope comes into view with these five features of engagement is that engagement describes not a particular agenda or end, nor a set of activities, but a way of interacting with others, one that is at the heart of what it is to relate to one another democratically, as citizens who regard each other as free and equal co-authors of our common lives. With this all too brief sketch of a social picture of engagement in hand, let me return to the four forms of democratic erosion catalogued in the previous section. I think we can see that what is democratically troubling about each form of erosion will be countered by responses that aim to foster engagement in the sense described here. Moreover, those that respond to one form of erosion while exacerbating others turn out not to count as engagements.

Apathetic and withdrawn citizens do not engage with one another in a very basic fashion. They don't interact at all, or only to minimal degree necessary to get through life. But interacting with others does not guarantee that we are engaging with them. I interact with you when I try to command or manipulate you, or lecture you or lay out my position without any interest in finding common ground with you. So if we respond to the kind of democratic erosion characterized by apathy and withdrawal in ways that promote activity but not engagement, then we are in danger of increasing activity while eroding our democracy in other ways. If, however, the form of activity we foster is engaged in the sense I have given that term

here, then it will not run into the problems of narrow egoism. Furthermore, it turns out that it is quite difficult to engage with others across certain forms of inequality.<sup>28</sup> First, if there is an asymmetry of skills or authority or power, then even if I try to engage with you in good faith, you may not be in a position to challenge or criticize or resist what I propose, without that being a sign that what I propose can survive such challenges. One of the ways that civic empowerment gaps manifest themselves is that some but not all citizens have the tools and means to make themselves heard on public matters while others don't. So even if those who can be heard are trying to engage with those who aren't heard, they may fail to fully heed their fellow citizens. Such problems may require finding ways to give a more effective voice to those who have been marginalized, but it also may require teaching those who are privileged to hear unfamiliar forms of complaint and criticism as reasonable, as worthy of being taken seriously. Second, even if we have the tools to overcome such gaps, our interaction may fail to count as engaged if we don't fully regard each other as having something to contribute to our joint enterprise. I can't impose the conditions of an engagement on you, but only invite you to engage with me in a joint project. But I will only be moved to invite you thus if I think you have something to contribute to our enterprise.

Let me close this section, then, by suggesting that we can distinguish among the various programs and practices advocated under the banner of civic engagement by asking whether they involve genuine engagement in the sense I have given that term here. Programs that foster true civic

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<sup>28</sup> See *Reasoning*, 117-132, 157-65.

*engagement* will potentially provide responses to democratic erosion. Those that merely promote civic activity will be in danger of exacerbating some forms of democratic erosion even as they respond to others. Note that this way of distinguishing among civic engagement programs does not turn on their explicit politics or the kinds of activities they encourage. Programs that encourage participants to radically challenge the ideological underpinnings of the status quo can fail to foster engagement if they encourage their participants to dogmatically adopt a particular oppositional ideology or bring it to bear on other people's lives without learning from them what they need and want and already know. Programs that work within the framework of a ruling ideology, but open themselves to questioning and criticism can foster engagement. Programs that encourage community service, but do so in a way that leads those doing the service to truly engage with those they serve can foster engagement, while programs of action civics that train students in the mechanics of pressing government institutions for changes that affect them can erode democracy if they do not also teach them to engage with their fellow citizens through such processes.

This final contrast points towards a further point I explore in the next section. Much of the debate about the democratic nature of civic engagement has relied on a distinction between the political and social realms that divides activities that connect with or appeal to the institutions of electoral politics, government and law from those that interact with and form non-governmental voluntary associations and private charities.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, Levine, *The Future of Democracy*, Saltmarsh and Hartley, eds., *To Serve a Larger Purpose*. Though for views that see the divide as possibly less clear cut, see Scott

Those who advocate the democratic potential and importance of civic engagement generally argue that only the former sorts of activities can be truly democracy enhancing. To the extent that they also favor more charitable and social work, it is because of studies that claim that it is a kind of gateway to more explicitly political involvement later in life (that, for instance, participation in community service or non-sports extra-curricular activities in school is correlated with higher voting rates in adulthood).<sup>30</sup> Although this way of dividing the political from the non-political is common not only in discussions of civic engagement and much mainstream political theory, it is not the only nor, I will argue, the best way to divide up this conceptual terrain. Shifting the conceptual terrain in which we conceive of politics and citizenship leads to a different way of conceiving the civic in civic engagement as well.

### **On the difference between civic and civil citizens**

The problem of democratic erosion is a problem that faces a democratic society, not merely a democratic government. A democratic society is one whose members are citizens. We can characterize the relations that citizens bear to one another qua citizens without direct recourse to their place within the standard institutions of democratic governments. That is, we can citizenship without making claims like the following: citizens are those who have the right to vote for government officials, citizens are the bearers of certain inalienable rights, including the right to stand for office and petition

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Keeter, Molly Andolina Cliff Zukin, *New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life and the Changing American Citizen* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 2006), and Edward Zlotkowski, "Civic Engagement on the Ropes?" in *To Serve*.

<sup>30</sup> This is a widely cited finding. See, for instance, Levine *The Future of Democracy*.

the government and law for redress. To do so, I make use of a contrast philosopher James Tully draws between modern and what he calls “diverse” conceptions of citizenship. It is the modern conception of citizenship that draws us to the kinds of claims above that I suggest we need to avoid.

Tully argues that each conception of citizenship also gives rise to a different account of citizens: Within modern conceptions of citizenship, one finds “civil citizens,” while within diverse conceptions of citizenship, one finds “civic citizens.” Tully’s contrast is complex and multi-faceted, but its key elements for our purposes can be summarized briefly. First, civil citizenship is a matter of status: civil citizens are precisely defined in terms of their place within an order of institutions of democratic government. Tully points out an important feature of the way this status operates in modern democracies: one of the essential features of modern democracies is their protection of individual or private liberties. This means that in establishing a democratic regime of law, modern democratic states also create space for a great deal of non-political activity to take place within a society under the protection but not the control of the government and the law. Rights governing the disposal of private property, assembly and conscience, for instance, secure a civil citizen in much of her day-to-day behavior, but in doing so, leave that behavior outside of the political realm. Thus, the structure of modern states as these are understood within the modern conception of citizenship, is founded on a distinction between the private and the public, or the social and the political. This is a distinction between realms. Activities that involve the specific political rights of

citizenship and interaction with the institutions of law and government are political on this conception, while activities that involve voluntary associations and non-governmental organizations are merely social. So the familiar picture of distinct realms and thus a fundamental distinction between activities that operate in one realm and those that operate in another which is commonplace in debates about the democratic qualities of various kinds of civic engagement turns out to follow from a conception of citizens as the bearers of a certain status within a set of modern democratic institutions. This way of framing the issue is evident, for example, in arguments for a more robustly political form of engagement that decry the limitations of civic engagement to community service, and push for programs that encourage and equip students to interact with the institutions of law and government.<sup>31</sup>

Tully, however, introduces us to the idea of civil citizens in order to look past them to a different conception of citizenship. On this, diverse, conception, citizenship is not viewed as a status we have in relation to a set of institutions of law and government, but a set of practices or activities we engage in with one another. Very roughly, civic citizens constitute themselves as citizens through engagement with one another, by working together to shape their common lives, question its form and find new and different ways of acting.<sup>32</sup> Like the activity of reasoning I introduced in the previous section, the activity that constitutes people as civic citizens is ongoing, rather than aimed at the end of establishing certain legal or

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<sup>31</sup> Again, for examples, see the essays in *To Serve a Larger Purpose*.

<sup>32</sup> James Tully, "On local and global citizenship: an apprentice manual," in *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, Vol. II: 243-309 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 270.



governmental institutions. What makes it civic and the activity by which citizens become citizens is precisely that it is always open to contestation and questioning. The practices one learns in learning how to be a citizen then are not practices of obeying the law or taking up a set of specific responsibilities like voting, but rather the much wider array of practices of questioning and listening to the questions of others, of, in a word, engagement. One thus becomes a civic citizen not by being born into a certain regime or swearing an oath upon naturalization, but by learning the rules of the various games of common life, whether local or global or in between, and, crucially, learning that these rules are not fixed in stone, but always subject to question, challenge and reformulation. Thus, learning to be a citizen is a matter of learning not only to challenge and question, but to recognize and take seriously the questions and challenges of one's fellow citizens.

One consequence of this civic conception of citizenship is that there is not a bright line between the political and non-political realms. The political comes into being in and through civic activity and it is sustained and kept vibrant by ongoing civic activity. What makes a space a civic space and an organization or gathering or interaction political, then, is not which institutions it falls under or which ones it interacts with, but whether or not those involved act as citizens:

A non-violent activity by the governed that brings the relationships they bear into the open space of questions and negotiations is an instance of the civic activity of citizens, no matter where it takes place, whether in the official public or private spheres. A civic public sphere, in contrast to the civil public sphere, comes into being whenever and wherever those who are subject to a closed governance relationship take it out of

the darkness of the “private sphere” of being unquestioned, either in the sense of being taken for granted and coordinating our interaction behind our backs or of being explicitly placed off limits.<sup>33</sup>

In fact, civic citizens constitute themselves together and make their activity political without even interacting with those who claim to govern over them. They do this by associating together in cooperative relationships, literally working together to organize their lives or solve problems.<sup>34</sup> This is because what is essential to civic activity as Tully describes it is not the presence of governors or government or the relation of governing but merely the openness to challenge and question and the recognition of one’s fellow citizens as having that right and voice as well. Thus, the civic public sphere comes into being not only when the governed bring governing relations out into the open but when they work together to build engaged relations with one another, whether to manage commons or to build cooperative organizations.<sup>35</sup> And here the civic public sphere is not a realm established by law prior to any activity, but is just the place where a certain kind of activity, civic engagement, is taking place.

Because the civic is brought into being by a certain kind of engaged activity, it raises important questions about sustainability. Established institutional structures have a sort of inertia of their own that shapes the problem of democratic erosion. So even if we think, as most advocates of civic engagement do, that democracy requires renewal to survive and thrive, that renewal can merely involve initiating new generations into the

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<sup>33</sup> Tully, “On local and global citizenship” 284.

<sup>34</sup> Tully, *op. cit.*, 290f.

<sup>35</sup> Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

skills and habits of interacting with existing institutional structures. Learning how to demand justice from an established legal system is a very different skill than learning how to establish or re-establish the rule of law. If, however, we frame issues of civic engagement within the picture I am developing here, issues of sustainability take on a new and central urgency. Human action is of necessity fleeting and impermanent. So although civic engagement that brings a civic sphere into being can create a form of civic power and constitute and re-constitute us as civic citizens, it must be constantly re-enacted if it is to last. Thus, civic engagement cannot, if it is to be successful in responding to democratic erosion, be a one-off or short-term activity. And civic citizens need to think not only about how to engage, but how to build and re-build structures that allow for the sustenance of what political theorist Patchen Markell calls “after power.”<sup>36</sup>

Note, then, what happens to our conceptual frame if we shift, not only from a picture of civic engagement as civil action to one where it is both civic and engagement. On the initial picture, the range of processes and practices that fall under the heading of civic engagement can be divided by two orthogonal distinctions: actions can be selfish or altruistic, and they can participate in political or social spheres. On this rubric, there are important considerations brought to bear in favor of each of the four kinds of action. Those who think most often about how to motivate and train students from privileged backgrounds advocate for programs that encourage altruistic

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<sup>36</sup> Patchen Markell, “After-Power” MS. Markell is here offering an interpretation of Hannah Arendt’s treatment of power as that which develops through humans speaking and acting together. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

behavior, whether community service or advocating for political justice. Those who think most often about what civic engagement can do to overcome empowerment gaps tend to be more sympathetic to encouraging less altruistic behavior. Students at an urban high school dealing with high levels of poverty and marginalization don't need to be encouraged to work in soup kitchens, but taught how to influence the levers of institutional power to attend to their needs.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, neither the altruism of community service nor the egoism of advocating for one's community's neglected needs are necessarily democracy enhancing, and may teach attitudes and skills that erode as much as they enhance democratic features of a society.

A similar problem arises with the political/social distinction. Restricting programs of civic engagement to the social realm leaves them potentially disempowered and thus ultimately ineffective in responding to democratic erosion. Using schools to direct students into political action risks giving schools an unnecessarily and perhaps inappropriate partisan role. And yet, much democratic good can come of work on both sides of the social/political split.

If we make the conceptual shifts I have been arguing for in this and the last section, however, our framework is rather different. The key features to attend to are whether a program fosters engagement, and whether the engagement it fosters is civic. But unlike with the features in the first picture, these turn out to line up. What makes an activity civic is in large

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<sup>37</sup> See Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind* 220-224 for a criticism of service learning that includes but goes beyond this point.

part that it takes the form of an engagement, and activities that are genuinely civic engagements are, by this fact alone, democracy enhancing, because the mark of a democratic society is just that it is made up of civic citizens, which is to say, members who engage with one another in the course of living out their lives together. Civic engagement in this sense, then, can happen in the process of advocating for greater recognition and in the process of granting that recognition and it can happen in our interaction with the coercive institutions of law and government, and in our cooperative relations with our fellow citizens. What makes these actions and these realms places where democracy erodes or is enhanced depends on how we interact within them, not directly where we interact or what ends we have in doing so.

This framework then provides an alternative way of thinking about what looks like a retreat from the political realm among young people according to the standard frame. The mere fact that young people engage with others outside of the standardly conceived political realm does not yet tell us anything about whether the activity they do engage in together is civic or not. And so rather than measuring and decrying their lack of interaction with traditional politics, we need to ask if their increased social activity plays a civic and civicizing role or not. Their withdrawal from political realms may be a retreat, but it may also be a recognition of the broader avenues through which one can constitute oneself as a civic citizen.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See Edward Zlotkowski, "Civic Engagement on the Ropes?" and Cliff Zukin et al., *A New Engagement?*

To say that, in contrast with the political realm, civic activity can be everywhere does not imply that all activity, even all engaged activity, is civic. Within this alternative conceptual framework, we can still make a distinction between fully civic engagements and what Tully calls “proto-civic” activities. Here the distinction is not one of spheres but something more developmental. The idea is that the various skills and attitudes that are necessary for fully civic engagement are developed and practiced in activities that are not themselves civic engagements. These more “everyday practices of negotiation of the fields of possibilities in the relationships in which we find our feet and learn to walk”<sup>39</sup> nurture and prepare us as civic citizens. We might think, for instance, of various practices where we engage with others and in doing so, learn to articulate “we” reasons and respond to the claims and questions of others: conversations, games that involve turn-taking and rules that need interpreting, various model and mock political interactions, like model UN or mock trials, and even very circumscribed and local exercises of civic power, like school or class councils.<sup>40</sup> What makes these and other activities proto-civics is that they do not display all of the features of civic interaction, but their connection to the full blown civic activity that constitutes us as citizens is deeper and more straightforward than the connections that advocates of civic engagement often draw between social activities and political activities. Rather than merely drawing correlations between activities in different realms, what

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<sup>39</sup> Tully, “On local and global citizenship” 279.

<sup>40</sup> For a detailed description of a middle school class with its own student run legal system and its educational value, see Bernie Schein, *If Holden Caulfield Were in my Classroom: Inspiring Love, Creativity and Intelligence in Middle School Kids* (Sentient Publications, 2008).

supports the connection between proto-civic and fully civic engagement is that one is a practice ground of the other: it is a way to learn the skills and develop the character-traits that civic engagement requires. And that, as I argue in the next section, points to a final conceptual shift I want to suggest: in the way we conceive of the educational work of civic engagement.

### **Civic engagement and civic virtue**

Although questions about civic engagement are of importance to any account of a functioning democracy, the term itself has become associated with discussions in education and among educational institutions. That means that any discussion about civic engagement also needs to attend to the question of how to foster or encourage civic engagement. How we think about fostering civic engagement depends on how we think about just what it is that we are trying to foster. If the difference between the civically engaged and the disengaged citizen is a matter of the greater knowledge of the one compared to the other, then fostering civil engagement may be a matter of better and broader transmission of the relevant knowledge: more and better civics classes. If the difference involves a different set of skills, then we need to figure out how to develop those skills, whether they involve articulate advocacy, presenting oneself according to the norms of dominant culture, knowing how to read a government document or who to call if one wants a response to one's problem. In this section, I suggest a final conceptual shift in our thinking about civic engagement that follows from the shifts I have outlined above: that the activity of civic engagement is the kind of activity that admits of virtues, and thus, fostering and encouraging civic engagement is a matter of cultivating civic virtue.

To say that civic engagement is an activity that admits of virtue is to categorize civic engagement as a particular kind of activity. A virtue, in the original Greek sense, is an excellence, but it is an excellence that is in a manner that needs unpacking, internal to the activity itself.<sup>41</sup> To see the difference, think about the difference between an excellent method of achieving some end and excellence at an activity like playing the piano or conversing. A method is a set of activities aimed at a particular end. What makes a method for doing something a *method* for doing it is that it is a reliable means of producing that thing. There are many methods for baking cakes or getting to the airport or cleaning your house, but what makes each of these a method for that thing is that it reliably yields a cake or your presence at the airport or a clean house. We can then ask what makes a particular method for, say, baking a cake an excellent one. Our answer might make reference to the qualities of the cake it produces or various other desiderata we have in baking the cake: it is efficient or cost-effective or quick or easy. The point I want to stress, however, is that if we are conceiving of the activity of baking as a method for producing a cake, then our standards of judgment of that method will be external to the activity itself: tied to the end it produces or other characteristics (efficiency, ease, etc) that are not intrinsic to the activity itself. This means that though there can be better and worse methods for baking cakes and thus even excellent

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<sup>41</sup> My thinking in this section owes much to a number of authors' work on virtue, most significantly, G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (January 1958): 1-20, Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 1970). John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *Monist* 62, no. 3 (July 1979): 331-350. Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 2nd (London: Routledge, 2004). Talbot Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).



methods, we will not speak of someone who used such a method as displaying the virtue of cake making, or even as a virtuoso cake maker.

In contrast, with activities that are not characterized by their end, the norms of excellence of the activity will be internal to the activity itself. What makes someone an excellent piano player is how she plays the piano, and while we can describe that in terms of her production of excellent or beautiful music, this mischaracterizes the relation between her playing and the music. It isn't that her playing is a method that produces the music as a separate product. Her playing the piano just is the creation of the music. The qualities we thus look for in an excellent pianist are tied to our sense of what piano playing involves rather than to external desiderata. Activities that admit of this kind of internal excellence admit of virtues, and as we have seen, one important feature of such activities is that they are not end-defined. (This doesn't mean that they do not aim at ends, nor that some activities that can be performed as methods can also be performed in ways that admit of virtues— baking might be an example.)

So my first claim is that civic engagement as I have characterized it in the last two sections admits of virtues: it aims at nothing beyond itself and its standards of excellence are internal to the type of activity it is. This is not to deny that in the course of civic engagement we may be trying to achieve certain things beyond the engagement itself. We may be trying to solve a problem or get some government agency to respond to our concerns. We may be trying to clean up a park or get a stop sign placed at an intersection, and insofar as we are trying to accomplish something, one clear standard of success will be whether we achieve that aim. But it is important to note the

success of these projects we adopt as we civically engage will not on their own tell us anything about whether the civic engagement itself was well or poorly done. If I manage to get the park cleaned up by bribing an official or using a brutal police force to coerce residents to do my bidding, I succeed at cleaning up the park, but not at engaging civically with my fellow citizens. And I can interact civically and responsively with my fellow citizens in the pursuit of a given public end I think worth pursuing and find, at the end of the day, that there is not support for my projects, and for good reason. Though I fail to get a stop sign put up, I don't fail to civically engage, or even fail to do so well. What, then, marks virtuous civic engagement is the nature of the activity itself: how responsive are those who engage with one another, how open to questioning and criticism.

Once we recognize that civic engagement is the kind of activity that admits of virtue, certain further points follow. First, such activities are most clearly and fully characterized by describing their most virtuous forms. So we can see most clearly what civic engagement is by understanding what it, as it were, aspires to be, what it looks like when it is done excellently. Because of this, exemplars of civic virtue are not only necessary as inspiration, but as instruction.<sup>42</sup> (Levinson on heroes?)

Second, as Aristotle remarks, "We become just by doing just actions."<sup>43</sup> In other words, acquiring a virtue is a matter of practicing the activities that the virtue would lead one to perform. I develop courage by acting

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<sup>42</sup> Levinson has a particularly good discussion of the place of heroes in civic education. *No Citizen Left Behind*.

<sup>43</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), 34 (Bk II, ch. 2, 1103b1).

courageously. I develop generosity by acting generously, and I develop justice by acting justly. This suggests that moving from learning what a virtue requires to acting as a result of the virtue is not a matter of mastering a theory and then going out to apply it. Rather, one has to go out in the world and act in it, perhaps beginning by following simple models of the activity in question or, as I will argue shortly, by engaging in activities that prepare us for civic activity—what Tully called proto-civic activities. It is through such practice, especially when done reflectively, that one learns what excellence at that activity entails.<sup>44</sup> Note again, that this is just another way of saying that one learns through doing what it is that the activity one is engaged in is. The only way to become an excellent musician is to practice, but practice of this sort does not merely mean repeating the same exercises over and over. As one practices, one comes to see more clearly what improvement would look like, and even if one does not have a fully formed vision of what perfect performance would be, one sees, step by step, what improvement would sound like.<sup>45</sup> Something similar can happen with civic engagement. And, as with learning an instrument, it may be that developing into an excellent civic citizen involves spending time on easier or otherwise preparatory exercises along the way.

Third, and connected to this point about the need for practice, is that activities that admit of virtues are not reducible to a set of rules or principles

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<sup>44</sup> See McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," and Myles Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to be Good," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie Rorty, 69-92 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980).

<sup>45</sup> Talbot Brewer calls activities of this type "dialectic" and argues that such activities not only admit of virtue, but defy analysis with the standard tools of moral psychology in *The Retrieval of Ethics*, esp. ch. 2-3.

that can just be followed like an instruction manual.<sup>46</sup> One important consequence of the fact that the knowledge involved in virtue is not codifiable is that there is no neutral evaluation point independent of the virtue for assessing what the virtue requires. That is, if you want to know what courage requires here and now, the only way to find out is to ask a courageous person. If you want to know whether a situation in which civic virtue is called for calls for this action or that, you need to ask someone who is a good citizen. This means that not just anyone can be a teacher of virtue or the activities that admit of virtue. Just as I can't teach you to play an instrument if I do not know how to play it, and my ability to be your teacher will be in important ways limited by my own musical abilities, someone who is not, to a certain extent, possessed of the civic virtues can not cultivate the virtues in others, for there is no other way for someone to know what counts as an excellent instance of civic activity. This means not only that we need models and exemplars of civic virtue to help guide people trying to acquire civic virtue, but that we need teachers and others who hope to involve others in civically engaged activities to themselves possess a certain measure of civic virtue.

Moreover, if only those who possess civic virtue can fully evaluate activities as possessing civic virtue or not, we also need to think differently about how we evaluate and judge the success of programs designed to foster civic engagement. Ideally, such evaluations can only be provided by the judgment of those who are sufficiently virtuous to judge the excellences of others well. The important point here is not that only some civic elite can

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<sup>46</sup> This is a central theme of McDowell's work on Aristotle.

render judgment about the quality of the civic engagement being fostered by various programs, but that what is needed is a *judgment* of quality. The contrast to be drawn here is between evaluative judgments and evaluative measures.<sup>47</sup> Measures, like voting rates or rates of membership in various kinds of organizations, that are common in the social scientific literature about civic engagement are at best proxies for the nuanced judgment of those in a position to appreciate and thus evaluate civic virtue. Sometimes, there is reason to rely on proxies in reaching evaluative conclusions, but it is important in such cases that one is aware that this is what is going on, and that one's measurements are not actually capturing the phenomenon under scrutiny.<sup>48</sup>

Fourth, one of the most striking features of activities that admit of virtue is that, as the philosopher Raimond Gaita puts it, they “admit of an understanding that may deepen without limit.”<sup>49</sup> That our understanding of an activity may deepen without limit is another way of explaining why there can be no complete instruction manual of such an activity. Virtues are excellences, but not in the sense of perfect complete achievements. This means that even those models and exemplars whom we think of possessing high degrees of civic virtue can continue to deepen their understanding of what they are doing and thus improve its quality. This is one reason that

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<sup>47</sup> For a helpful discussion of judgment and why it cannot be well reduced to other kinds of measures, see Samuel Fleischacker, *A Third Concept of Liberty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>48</sup> On the importance of distinguishing direct measures and proxies in the field of education, see Helen Ladd and Susannah Loeb, “The Challenges of Measuring School Quality: Implications for Educational Equity,” in *Education, Justice and Democracy*, ed. Danielle Allen and Rob Reich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming).

<sup>49</sup> Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 86. This is also a feature of what Brewer calls dialectical goods.

such people are often humble about their achievements and their virtues: part of their excellence consists in a deeper appreciation of what is possible or what fuller or greater excellence will involve. The virtuoso musician hears faults in her expression and style that the rest of us miss; she can picture ever better performances towards which she can strive. If we conceive of the work of citizenship as admitting of civic virtue, then it is also an activity the understanding of which can deepen without limit. That civic engagement is such an activity then has at least two consequences for how we should think about placing it within educational institutions. Many educational institutions are not designed to cultivate virtue, but to transmit knowledge. They work with a model of expertise, which assumes that those at the front of the classroom know something that they need to pass on to those sitting in front of them. On this model, teachers may have things to learn from their students about whether their teaching is effective, but not about the subject matter itself.

But if activities that admit of virtues also admit of understandings that may deepen without limit, then no one engaged in their pursuit is beyond learning from others how to do so more fully or excellently or deeply. This need not deny that some are more fully possessing of certain virtues, whether intellectual or civic than others, or that in addition to such virtues, there are different forms of knowledge that do admit of expertise, and that are needed in order to undertake all sorts of civic activities. My point is merely that if we reframe our understanding of the guidance of civic engagement in terms of the cultivation of civic virtue, then this process can be one that allows for learning and deepening of virtues to happen on all

sides: from teachers and professors to students to those engaged with them who are not formally studying or teaching anything. One way in which our understanding of an activity can deepen without limit is that we can be brought to see it in a new light, from a new perspective. Encounters with people who have not been trained in the particular skills and contexts in which we have been trained can thus provide for learning experiences for even those who have mastered a set of skills and contexts for deploying them.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, learning to see an activity as capable of such an ever-deepening understanding changes one's relation to it and to what the process of learning amounts to. There is a point in learning the times-tables when one is finished. One trains one's brain to do a set of calculations quickly and effortlessly and then, besides routine practice to keep in shape, there is nothing more to do. Mastery of the times tables has been achieved. The skills of civic engagement are not like that, and so one lesson programs that aim to foster civic engagement need to teach is that the deepening of civic virtue is a life-long project, not one that is mastered in the learning of a set of techniques. I don't mean to imply here that only those who will have the time to devote to such a life-long project need begin to learn how to do so. Some activities that admit of virtue are optional: one can live a perfectly good, even excellent human life without ever engaging in them and certainly without cultivating their excellence. But other activities are not like that. We inevitably engage in them in some form or other no matter how we live, and so the question is how well we do them, and whether we

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<sup>50</sup> One of the great strengths of Meira Levinson's *No Citizen Left Behind* is that it manifests this feature of civic engagement by showing clearly what she learned from her students about not only their lives, but about the society we live in.

are brought to an appreciation of the possibility of doing them in ways that may deepen without limit. What I am suggesting is that civic engagement is of this second form. We need not engage in electoral politics or volunteer with particular kinds of non-profit organizations. But we do need to live together: we do so whether we want to or not, whether we do it well or not. And as I am conceiving of it here, civic engagement just is part and parcel of the activities of living together, which means that it is not so much a choice of whether or not to civically engage, but whether to do it well or not, and even whether we learn that it admits of a certain kind of excellence.

The final point I want to bring out of this shift in conceptualization has to do with the activities that turn out to serve as proto-civic in Tully's phrase. It turns out that these are not limited to the traditional range of socially and politically involved activities that programs of civic engagement tend to focus on. What makes an activity proto-civic, what makes it a training ground of civic virtue, is that it serves to develop some of the skills, insights and habits that civic virtue calls on and civic engagement calls forth.<sup>51</sup> But, as I have been describing them, these skills and insights are not specifically related to political or social questions as these are commonly described. Even if the particular forms of engagement that involve interaction with the institutions of government and law require specific forms of knowledge and specific techniques that one must learn in doing them, there are skills of engagement that one needs to develop that are more general, and which involve certain forms of responsiveness,

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<sup>51</sup> On the important place of our habits of citizenship for a flourishing democracy, see Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).



openness to questioning and the consideration of new possibilities. They also include, as do all activities that admit of virtue, a certain capacity to move beyond one's own self, to not see the world entirely through one's own particular perspectives and hang-ups and psychic defense mechanisms.

This means that certain kinds of everyday activities, whether of conversation and turn-taking, asking and answering questions and challenges, working with people who have different skills and limits and knowledge sets than you do to achieve a shared end or solve a common problem can all serve to cultivate civic virtues, and there is a role in thinking about programs aimed at fostering civic engagement for programs that help to develop these skills. Moreover, in our society, people growing up in different contexts, whether as a result of class or location or race or religion will, as a matter of course, receive informal training in some of these skills and fail to receive training (or even receive what might be thought of as anti-training) in others. So one question those designing educational programs aimed at fostering these sorts of proto-civic skills need to ask is how this fits in with what their students are learning elsewhere.<sup>52</sup> (Lureau, *me on learning to be equal*).

There is, however, an often overlooked form of training in proto-civic activities, one that is especially downplayed by advocates of civic engagement, and that is a training in the traditional liberal arts and sciences. Much of the rhetoric surrounding the need for civic engagement, especially

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<sup>52</sup> On the differences in what children learn from their family environment, see Lureau *Unequal Childhoods*. On the need to respond to this by teaching different skills and habits to different children, see my "Learning to be Equal" and Levinson, *No Citizen*.

at the University level, draws a contrast between the research university aimed at knowledge for knowledge sake, and the civic mission of the University.<sup>53</sup> If, however, we see civic engagement as an activity that admits of virtue, and virtue as an excellence that is developed through practicing both the activity in question but also a set of proto-forms of that activity, it turns out that this contrast overlooks an important feature of scholarship and research, even when it is pursued “for its own sake.” Scholarship in the liberal arts requires and develops a set of intellectual virtues that are not, or at least need not be, wholly separate from civic and even moral virtues. This is a point that goes back to at least Plato, who thought that training in the moral and civic virtues required a long engagement in the study of music, mathematics and philosophy. It is easiest to see if we recall the role that a certain kind of responsiveness plays in engagement, and think about what a skilled reader or gatherer of data or scientist does. All of them must respond to things in the world that are external to them, whether texts or data sets or experimental results, and this involves not only taking them in but interrogating them, challenging them and understanding the responses they give. Not to put too fine a point on it, but the various subjects of the liberal arts all, in various ways, teach and pursue the excellence of various forms of engaged conversation, of asking questions and responding to answers. It is this feature of scholarship for its own sake that leads it to contribute to the cultivation of even civic virtue. The point is beautifully brought out in the following passage from

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<sup>53</sup> This is another common theme in the essays in *To Serve a Larger Purpose*.

philosopher Iris Murdoch, though her ultimate aim, like Plato's, is not merely civic but also moral virtue and a vision of the Good:

If I am learning, for instance, Russian, I am confronted by an authoritative structure that commands my respect. The task is difficult and the goal is distant and perhaps never entirely attainable. My work is a progressive revelation of something which exists independently of me. Attention is rewarded by a knowledge of reality. Love of Russian leads me away from myself towards something alien to me, something which my consciousness cannot take over, swallow up, deny or make unreal. The honesty and humility required of the student—not to pretend to know what one does not know—is the preparation for the honesty and humility of the scholar who does not even feel tempted to suppress the fact which damns his theory. ... studying is normally an exercise of virtue as well as of talent, and shows us a fundamental way in which virtue is related to the real world.... Developing a *Sprachgefühl* is developing a judicious respectful sensibility to something which is very like another organism.<sup>54</sup>

Of course, both scholarship and teaching in the liberal arts can fail to take up this model of what it is doing, and end up failing to foster various virtues of engagement. But there is an important way in which liberal arts education, precisely in fostering a love of knowledge for its own sake (or, better, engagement with depth and truth and beauty for their own sake), may very well turn out to be more fully and importantly a preparation for excellent civic engagement than a professionalized education in the techniques of electoral politics or public management and administration that transmits a set of techniques and knowledge bases that are instrumental to certain kinds of ends, and which see education as the transmission of the knowledge of methods rather than an initiation into a set of activities that are worthwhile for their own sakes.

### **Democratic civic engagement programs: some evaluative questions**

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<sup>54</sup> Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 89-90.

Over the course of this somewhat lengthy paper, I have proposed three related conceptual shifts in our approach to thinking about what civic engagement is and how to foster it. It has been my contention that these shifts will help us to identify the features of various programs aimed at fostering civic engagement are most likely to respond to democratic erosion in a manner that does not cause further erosion elsewhere. In this section, I try to bring these shifts together to motivate a set of suggested questions that those involved in developing, supporting and evaluating programs aimed at fostering civic engagement might ask about the programs in question. This is not by any means an exhaustive list and it may be that some questions are easier to ask and operationalize than others. The work needed to go beyond this list extends beyond my own areas of competence, and so I offer it here as an invitation for others to take up and run with.

I have argued that we should understand the activity of civic engagement as the activity by which civic citizens engage with one another in the course of organizing and living out their lives together. I offered a picture of what engagement involves that places engagement within a series of responsive forms of interaction that include conversation and reasoning more generally. One feature of engagement, so understood, is that people who engage with one another offer “we” reasons to each other and allow the rejection of such reasons to alter the course of their engagement. Characterizing engagement this way also allows us to specify its characteristic features independently of whatever ends those who engage with one another pursue. These features are then accentuated by understanding “civic” as Tully does: as describing sets of activities that

people engage in together whereby the rules of their engagement are always open to challenge and re-fashioning, where all are free and equal co-authors of their interaction. This shifts the places we expect to find civic engagement, leaving behind a distinction between official institutions like government and the law and merely social or private forms of organization and action, like clubs and charities. Engagement becomes civic not because of where it takes place but how it proceeds and what it brings about: a form of power that requires ongoing sustaining to persist. Finally, I suggested that so understood, civic engagement is an activity that admits of virtue, and so we should think of programs that aim to foster civic engagement as cultivating a set of civic virtues.

So understood, civic engagement is not distinct from its normal alternatives: research for its own sake, classroom learning, or community service. Rather, what distinguishes civic engagement from its nearest kin are the following: it involves engaged reasoning from beginning to end; it is civic, not merely civil, and it cultivates civic virtues, which means that it provides initiation and practice in an ongoing process of learning and development in which all participants have something to learn, and ways to deepen their capacities and vision. In order, then, to bring out whether a given program fits within this framework, we might ask some or all of the following questions:<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> To get at the contribution the foregoing reflection brings to discussions of civic engagement, it might help to compare these questions with the somewhat similar principles for public engagement that a group of organizations committed to dialogue and engagement developed in 2009: 1) Careful Planning and Preparation, 2) Inclusion and Demographic Diversity, 3) Collaboration and Shared Purpose, 4) Openness and Learning, 5) transparency and Trust, 6) Impact and Action, 7) Sustained Engagement and Participatory Culture. National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, International

- 1) *Who designed this program and who has a voice in its development going forward?* This question is meant to distinguish programs that are conceived by and run by experts in a more or less unilateral fashion from those which are the outgrowth of and under the constant supervision of the engagement of those involved and concerned with it.
- 2) *Who is trusted with what?* In order to engage with others, we need to trust them. Programs that both foster trust and allow for it are ones that distribute trust widely and treat those involved as trustworthy while also teaching them how to earn the trust of others.
- 3) *What knowledge does each involved party or group of parties bring?* One way that engagements are reciprocal and all parties demonstrate humility is by recognizing that they each have something to learn and something to teach. A program that understands itself as facilitating the one way transmission of knowledge or expertise or service will not foster engagement.
- 4) *What is the "we" for which reasons are offered?* Engagement involves all parties offering "we" reasons. One way that such a practice can fail to fully and democratically engage our fellow participants is if the implicit "we" to whom reasons appeal is not that of the group that is engaged with one another. Asking this question can help

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Association for Public Participation, the Co-Intelligence Institute, "Core Principles for Public Engagement," May 1, 2009, <http://www.ncdd.org/pep/> (accessed May 1, 2012).

clarify more clearly whether a group is working together or some are working for others.

5) *What is the mechanism by which rejection and criticism is heard and taken up?* One of the ways that differentials in power and status and expertise can manifest itself is in different levels of comfort with and skill at raising concerns, criticisms and objections. In the absence of explicit and worked out mechanisms by which criticisms from all parties get a serious hearing, the mere claim of openness to criticism will not ensure that the interaction between people, especially across various divides of status and power, will involve true engagement.

6) *What are the models of excellence of the kind of activity being undertaken?* A clear understanding of what is being done needs to involve an understanding of what doing it excellently would involve rather than what end we are aiming at. Programs that think of civic engagement instrumentally will spend time articulating their ends. Those that think of civic engagement as an activity admitting of virtue will need to articulate its virtuous form, or at least gesture in that direction.

7) *What is being brought into being through this action and how will it be sustained?* Programs that aim at ends or transmit knowledge or skills will answer these questions by pointing to goals accomplished, skills learned or habits acquired and then maybe about the longevity of the latter. But if a program aims to foster civic engagement in the democratic sense I have been proposing,

then it will conceive of civic engagement as an exercise in something like the development of power: what will come into being is something collective but also possibly evanescent: the intangible sense of possibility that a movement sparks, for instance. And since this kind of power must be continually brought into being, it will require thinking about how to sustain it once it has been created.

All of these questions can be asked at all levels of generality: they are questions that can guide participants in a particular activity, or administrators deciding which sorts of programs to fund or support to instigate. And they can be applied at all levels. They are not, I think, exactly the questions that those involved in civic engagement work have always been moved to ask, but they will begin, I think, to help us pull apart those forms of social and political activity that constitute a thoroughgoing response to democratic erosion and those that do not.