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Julian Culp

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DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN DIGITIZED SOCIETIES: A HABERMASIAN

APPROACH

Julian Culp

Department of History and Politics

American University of Paris, France

ABSTRACT. In this article I offer a new conceptualization of democratic citizenship education in light of the transformations of contemporary Western societies to which the use of digital technologies has contributed. My conceptualization adopts a deliberative understanding of democracy that provides a systemic perspective on society-wide communicative arrangements and employs a non-ideal, critical methodology that concentrates on overcoming democratic deficits. Based on this systemic, deliberative conception of democracy I provide an analysis of the public sphere’s normative deficits and argue that current political communication may be systemically distorted. Drawing on this analysis, I suggest that practices of democratic citizenship education in digitized societies must not concentrate narrowly on the effective and responsible use of digital technologies. Instead, these practices should also focus on the economic and cultural conditions that are co-responsible for the structural problems of political communication as well as address the democratic deficits that are reflected in inadequate communicative arrangements.

KEY WORDS. digital citizenship; citizenship; democratic education; public sphere; digital technologies

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## INTRODUCTION

In this paper I outline a Habermasian approach to democratic citizenship education in digitized societies.<sup>1</sup> By democratic citizenship education I mean educational policies that governments and other public bodies implement to create citizens by way of shaping the political attitudes, knowledge, and skills of students within institutions of primary, secondary, and tertiary education.<sup>2</sup> These policies concern civic education courses, the design of national school systems, schools' language policies, and legal duties of minors to attend school. In this paper I pay special attention to the role that "technologies of the digital computer net" play in contemporary Western European and North American societies and to the ways in which this

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<sup>1</sup> For recent discussions of the relevance of Habermas's philosophy for educational theory, see Chris Martin, *Education in a Post-Metaphysical World: Rethinking Educational Policy and Practice through Jürgen Habermas' Discourse Morality* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012); Chris Martin, "Education, Justice, and Discursive Agency: Toward an Educationally Responsible Discourse Ethics," *Educational Theory* 66, no. 6 (2016): 735–753; Walter Okshevsky, "Discourse, Justification, and Education: Jürgen Habermas on Moral Epistemology and Dialogical Conditions of Moral Justification and Rightness," *Educational Theory* 66, no. 6 (2016): 691–718; Krassimir Stojanov, "Social Justice and Education as Discursive Initiation," *Educational Theory* 66, no. 6 (2016): 755–767; Harvey Siegel, "Justice and Justification," *Theory and Research in Education* 16, no. 3 (2018): 308–329; Julian Culp, *Democratic Education in a Globalized World: A Normative Theory* (London: Routledge, 2019); and Julian Culp, "Discourse Ethics, Epistemology and Educational Justice," *Theory and Research in Education* 18, no. 2 (2020): 151–173; as well as the other contributions to this symposium in *Educational Theory*. The Habermasian approach that I pursue in this paper differs from these discussions by focusing on the question of how to conceive democratic citizenship education in digitized societies. In addition, whereas the previous discussions of Habermas have focused on educational questions pertaining to Habermas's discourse ethics, my discussion in this paper concentrates on educational questions concerning Habermas's political and legal theory.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) Eamonn Callan, "Citizenship and Education," *Annual Review of Political Science* 7 (2004): 71–90; Harry Brighouse, "Moral and Political Aims of Education," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education*, ed. Harvey Siegel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 35–51; and Jack Crittenden and Peter Levine, "Civic Education," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/civic-education/>. I include tertiary education because education at the college-level in North America is comparable to the final years of study at institutions of secondary education in Western Europe.

34 role requires rethinking democratic citizenship education.<sup>3</sup> These technologies are  
35 computerization, digitization, and the Internet, which constitute the central elements of “the  
36 digital net,” for short. They consist of algorithm-executing data processors, the binary,  
37 discontinuous representation of media content, and the communicative networking of  
38 computers via a universal basic protocol (i.e., the Internet protocol suite), respectively.

39 My approach to democratic citizenship education in societies that have been “digitized”  
40 by these technologies is Habermasian in two distinct ways.<sup>4</sup> First, my understanding of  
41 democracy is informed by Habermas’s deliberative conception of democracy, according to  
42 which the laws and policies that representative political institutions generate are legitimate if  
43 they result from an appropriately arranged system of society-wide communication.<sup>5</sup> Second, I  
44 extend Habermas’s 2006 analysis of the political public sphere’s pathologies to determine  
45 whether the laws and policies of contemporary digitized societies have a cognitive dimension.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This terminology and the explanation of these technologies follows Andreas Reckwitz, *Society of Singularities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), 166–8.

<sup>4</sup> When I speak of “digitized” societies in the following, I mean societies that have been extensively **relying on said digital technologies**. As I clarify later in the main text, however, one must not think of these digital technologies as being solely exogenous to the societies that they have impacted. These technologies are also endogenous to these societies, because cultural, economic, and political conditions of the societies under consideration have favored the emergence, development, and spread of these technologies. **VERY GOOD EDIT.**

<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: A Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); and Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Have an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Research on Empirical Research,” *Communication Theory* 16, no. 4 (2006): 411–426. **For the unabridged German version of this text, see** Jürgen Habermas, “Hat die Demokratie noch eine epistemische Dimension? Empirische Forschung und normative Theorie” [**Does Democracy Still Have an Epistemic Dimension? Empirical Research and Normative Theory**], in *Philosophische Texte. Band 4. Politische Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009), 87–139. In the following I abbreviate political public sphere with

46 Based on this extension of Habermas's analysis, I then propose ends and processes of  
47 democratic citizenship education whose pursuit would help to overcome the pathologies of  
48 today's digitized public sphere.

49 A Habermasian approach lends itself particularly well to rethinking democratic  
50 citizenship education in digitized societies. To begin, a Habermasian approach analyzes  
51 political processes from the perspective of the society-wide system of *communication*. Such an  
52 approach is well suited to conceptualize the technology-induced changes of contemporary  
53 societies because some of the most profound effects of the digital net concern the practices of  
54 political communication. In fact, these effects have been so pervasive that they have engendered  
55 a digital transformation of the public sphere – and not always for the better.<sup>7</sup> Next, a  
56 Habermasian approach addresses the *society-wide system* of communication and pays attention  
57 to the various cultural, economic, legal, and technological factors shaping that system. It avoids  
58 a partial analysis of problems of democratic citizenship education that would focus narrowly on  
59 just one of these factors. Some educational scholars, for example, have made suggestions on  
60 how to deal with the problem of fake news in online news and social media by improving  
61 information literacy skills through citizenship education. These suggestions, while plausible, are  
62 incomplete because they do not address the economic and technological factors that generate  
63 such fake news, which should also be a central concern of democratically engaged citizens.<sup>8</sup>

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public sphere, while recognizing that nonpolitical public spheres (e.g., a literary public sphere)  
also exist. **VERY GOOD EDIT.**

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Robin Celikates, "Digital Publics, Digital Contestation: A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere?," in *Transformations of Democracy: Crisis, Protest, and Legitimation*, ed. Robin Celikates, Regina Kreide, and Tilo Wesche (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 159–176.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Johannes Drerup, "Demokratische Bildung in und für digitale Öffentlichkeiten. Zeitdiagnosen – Problemvorgaben – Herausforderungen" **[Democratic**

64 Finally, a Habermasian approach to democratic citizenship education is critical, or nonideal,  
65 because it is based on an empirically informed diagnosis of how digitized societies *fail* to satisfy  
66 the normative conditions of democratically legitimate processes of law- and policymaking.  
67 Hence, the proposals for democratic citizenship education that such an approach generates do  
68 not assume the existence of well-functioning democratic institutions that have democratically  
69 desirable socializing effects on citizens. Instead, these proposals recognize the inadequacies of  
70 contemporary political systems and ask how democratic citizenship education may nevertheless  
71 be able to motivate and support citizens to work toward the construction of more  
72 democratically structured processes of opinion- and will-formation.

73 My argument unfolds as follows. The next section explains Habermas's deliberative  
74 conception of democracy and elaborates on the society-wide, normative conditions that must be  
75 fulfilled so that the laws and policies such deliberation generates can be viewed as legitimate.  
76 These conditions consist of a system of basic rights in the legal domain and a public sphere that  
77 mediates communication between civil society and the formal political institutions in the  
78 political domain. According to Habermas's analysis from 2006, the public sphere suffers from  
79 two pathologies: the media's lack of independence from economic and political imperatives, as

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Education in and for Digital Public Spheres: Time Diagnoses, Problem Specifications, Challenges], in *Demokratieerziehung und die Bildung digitaler Öffentlichkeiten*, ed. Johannes Drerup and Ulrich Binder (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2020), 29–53. In this chapter, Drerup responds to the epistemic challenges that fake news poses to democratic citizenship education by arguing that many citizens criticize fake news and hence display an agential disposition that is committed to the ideal of truth. Thereby Drerup fails to pay sufficient attention to the ways in which the design of digital technologies and the economic structures within which news media companies are embedded systematically favor fake news. Accordingly, his isolated analysis also provides insufficient guidance for how to conceive democratic citizenship education in digitized societies. His educational proposals focus narrowly on how to affirm and support citizens' orientation toward truth via widespread general education, and hence fail to mention how citizens would also have to address the technological and economic factors that are responsible for fake news.

80 well as citizens' failure to engage actively with ongoing political discourses. The following  
81 section extends Habermas's analysis by describing the role that computerization, digitization,  
82 and the Internet play in political discourses in order to reassess the two pathologies that  
83 Habermas identified, as well as to identify two new potential pathologies of the public sphere:  
84 the fragmentation of the public sphere and the increasingly arational, affective mode of political  
85 discourse. Based on my analysis of these potential pathologies of the public sphere in digitized  
86 societies, the following section argues that new practices of democratic citizenship education in  
87 digitized societies must not focus only on the effective and responsible uses of digital  
88 technologies; instead, they must adopt a wider, systemic approach that involves teaching and  
89 learning about the cultural and economic background conditions of political discourses, the  
90 democratic shortcomings of digitized democracies, and some of the moral justifications of  
91 democratic political systems.

#### 92 HABERMAS'S DELIBERATIVE CONCEPTION OF DEMOCRACY

93 Habermas's conception of deliberative democracy is part of the political and legal theory  
94 laid out in his monograph, *Between Facts and Norms: A Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*,  
95 and further refined in his collection *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*.<sup>9</sup> In these  
96 works, Habermas focuses on the question of what renders normatively legitimate the law that is  
97 coercively enforced within a modern democratic state. Habermas asks when citizens can  
98 reasonably suppose that the laws that have been generated by the political system are  
99 intersubjectively justifiable, so that this system can be said to possess a cognitive or "epistemic"  
100 dimension by virtue of having a "truth"-tracking function.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*; and Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*.

<sup>10</sup> Epistemic and truth are in quotation marks, however, because the law consists of practical norms that do not raise an assertoric validity claim as to what is the fact of the matter in the

101 According to Habermas, we can identify the criteria of normatively legitimate law by  
102 reconstructing the meaning of the law in modern societies from the internal perspective of  
103 citizens who are subject to a democratically constituted legal system. From that perspective,  
104 legal norms can claim to have democratic legitimacy, Habermas argues, when those who are the  
105 addressees of the law are able to understand themselves as the authors of the law. As supposed  
106 authors of the law, citizens demand that the law be justifiable to them for the law to count as  
107 legitimate. Thus, the normative condition for the legitimacy of the law is, as Habermas puts it,  
108 that “the democratic procedure of legislation” is set up in such a way that it “guarantee[s] the  
109 autonomy of all legal persons equally.”<sup>11</sup>

110 Following Habermas’s formulation of the discourse principle (D), the recognition of  
111 autonomy is central to the justification of *all practical norms*: “Only those norms can claim to be  
112 valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants  
113 in a practical discourse.”<sup>12</sup> What is distinct when it comes to the justification of legal norms,  
114 however, is that we must move beyond the imagination of face-to-face conversations about  
115 practical norms – an imagination that we may find useful for acknowledging which epistemic

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empirical world. Instead, the validity claim of a legal norm, as a practical norm that regulates human action, is that of intersubjective justifiability. Thus, the epistemic dimension of democratically legitimate law refers to what is right and, more specifically, *legitimate*, and it is in this sense that it has a truth-analogous epistemic dimension. See also my recent attempt to explain (to Harvey Siegel) the meaning of the term epistemic in Habermas’s discourse ethics: Culp, “Discourse Ethics, Epistemology and Educational Justice.”

<sup>11</sup> Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*, 254.

<sup>12</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 66. Any practical norm, whether it is a moral norm, a legal norm, or an ethical norm (referring to a certain conception of the good), enjoys validity only on the condition that those who are addressed by this norm *can or could* consent to it within an appropriately arranged discursive situation. See also Rainer Forst, *Contexts of Justice: Political Philosophy beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism*, trans. John M. Farrell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).  
**“SEE” IS FINE.**

116 conditions we presuppose within a moral discourse.<sup>13</sup> In the case of the justification of legal  
117 norms, the discursive conditions that society, viewed as a whole, instantiates are the relevant  
118 normative consideration; the justification of legal norms therefore depends on the existence of  
119 properly arranged communicative conditions throughout the entire society.<sup>14</sup>

120 This means that the epistemic dimension of a democratic legal system, that is, the  
121 rightness-tracking, cognitive function of such a system, depends on the ways in which its  
122 political discourses are structured. As Habermas further elaborates, this epistemic dimension of  
123 a democracy depends on the fulfillment of “the requirement that a civic practice of the public  
124 use of communicative freedom be legally institutionalized” through “elaborate communicative  
125 arrangements.”<sup>15</sup> The legal core of these arrangements consists of a “system of rights,” which  
126 Habermas refers to as a *principle of democracy*.<sup>16</sup> This principle of democracy instantiates the  
127 more general discourse principle (D) in the form of the law and it consists of five types of rights.  
128 Types 1 through 3 refer primarily to private autonomy; type 4 refers to political autonomy; and  
129 type 5 refers to the material preconditions of the rights specified in types 1 through 4:

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<sup>13</sup> In the case of moral claims, the central epistemic condition is expressed by Habermas’s principle (U), which says: “A norm is valid when the foreseeable consequences and side effects of its general observance for the interests and value-orientations of each individual could be jointly accepted by all concerned without coercion” (Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*, 42).

<sup>14</sup> Habermas puts this point as follows: “I assume ... that a regulation may claim legitimacy only if all those possibly affected by it could consent to it after participating in rational discourses. The presumption of reasonability, which the democratic procedure is supposed to ground, ultimately rests on an *elaborate communicative arrangement*: the presumption depends on the conditions under which one can legally institutionalize the *forms of communication* necessary for legitimate lawmaking” (ibid., 259, emphasis added).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> See Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, chap. 3, sect. 3.

- 130 1. Basic rights that result from the politically autonomous determination of the law and  
131 allow the greatest possible extent of subjective freedoms.
- 132 2. Basic rights that result from the politically autonomous determination of the law and  
133 enable the status as a member of a free legal and political association.
- 134 3. Basic rights that result from the justiciability of the law as well as from the politically  
135 autonomous determinations of individual protection by the law.
- 136 4. Basic rights to the equal opportunity of participating in processes of opinion- and  
137 will-formation through which citizens express their political autonomy and install  
138 legitimate law.
- 139 5. Basic rights to the guarantee of those social, technical, and ecological living  
140 conditions that are necessary for equal access to the enjoyment of the civic and  
141 political rights listed in 1 through 4.

142 Habermas further specifies the meaning of 4, that is, “the equal opportunity of  
143 participating in processes of opinion- and will-formation,” by way of explaining the processes  
144 of public opinion- and will-formation through which citizens exercise their political autonomy  
145 and further determine the basic rights enlisted under 1, 2, and 3. These processes are situated at  
146 three distinct but intertwined levels: first, the level of formal, institutionalized political  
147 discourses within the *center of the political system*, which consist of discourses within  
148 parliaments, court hearings, governmental commissions, etc.; second, the informal level of  
149 everyday political discourse involved in organized or spontaneous exchanges within civil  
150 society and through civil society actors like unions, religious associations, or political  
151 foundations *at the periphery of the political system*; third, media-based mass communication  
152 through which public opinion is formed in a unidirectional communication of political content  
153 from active experts to a relatively passive audience of readers, listeners, and viewers. This

154 media-based mass communication stream transports political content, arguments, and ideas  
155 from the center to the periphery and shapes citizens' lifeworld, which implies that elites from  
156 the institutional center can initiate society-wide changes. Likewise, communicative power can  
157 flow from the periphery to the center and can eventually be transformed into administrative  
158 power through law.

159         According to Habermas, media-based mass communication represents a central element  
160 of the public sphere, which consists of a network for communicating, bundling theme-specific,  
161 as well as filtering and synthesizing opinions. One of the public sphere's central tasks in  
162 generating legitimacy is to identify relevant political questions and positions that are of general  
163 interest, as well as providing adequate information and arguments for and against these  
164 positions.<sup>17</sup> The public sphere is neither an institution nor an organization and thus it does not  
165 exhibit a clear division of roles and competencies. It is a structure of communication with open  
166 horizons that lacks specialization of the kind that is characteristic of systems of knowledge and  
167 action such as science, religion, art, or the family. Instead, it must reproduce itself through  
168 everyday practices and discourses within citizens' lifeworlds, and thus it must display the  
169 characteristic of general intelligibility and be closely related to debates within civil society. In  
170 addition, elites from the core of the political system, including members of parliament, judges,  
171 and politicians in executive government positions, also participate in the generation of the  
172 public sphere by presenting their views in newspapers, television, radio, and other forms of  
173 mass media. Likewise, elites from functional systems like the economy also contribute to the  
174 public sphere; they may be lobbyists, intellectuals with an interest in public affairs, or advocates  
175 speaking on behalf of marginalized groups. Using mass media, these experts can communicate

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<sup>17</sup> Habermas, "Hat die Demokratie noch eine epistemische Dimension?," 115.

176 among each other in front of the public of citizens that represents a relatively passive audience  
177 in this context.

178         The public sphere facilitates the formation of public opinions based on two sources:  
179 publicized opinion on the one hand, and public opinion polls on the other hand. Public  
180 opinions result from building an intuitive bridge between these two sources. These public  
181 opinions, in turn, have an impact upon the formation of citizens' consciousness, regardless of  
182 whether these citizens participate in the core or the periphery of the political system. This is  
183 because the formation of citizens' consciousness occurs *reflexively*, which means that citizens can  
184 position themselves positively or negatively relative to what they perceive and recognize as  
185 potential public opinions. Due to this reflexive character of the formation of public opinions  
186 Habermas believes that neither the *abstract* nor the *asymmetric* character of mass media-based  
187 communication in Western societies poses a problem for its epistemic dimension. The abstract  
188 character of this communication consists in the fact that communication does not occur face-to-  
189 face but in a mediated fashion where the sender and the receiver of the information are distant  
190 from each other and do not know from each other. The asymmetric character of this  
191 communication, by contrast, means that there is a relatively small number of experts who  
192 actively participate in the political discourses and contribute ideas, arguments, and claims that  
193 will eventually form part of the public sphere, whereas a relatively large number of citizens  
194 occupy the more passive role of readers, listeners, and viewers. Yet Habermas argues that  
195 citizens must reflectively consent to the potentially public opinions that have been formed  
196 through the abstract and asymmetric communication infrastructure of the public sphere. Only

197 these reflected public opinions constitute “the spectrum of possible policies that are regarded as  
198 legitimate.”<sup>18</sup>

199         The more serious obstacles for the epistemic dimension of the political systems of  
200 Western societies whose communicative arrangements are based on mass media, according to  
201 Habermas, are the (1) power structures within the public sphere, as well as (2) citizens’ capacity  
202 to react appropriately to mass media-based communication.<sup>19</sup> The power structures within the  
203 public sphere are determined by various factors: the administrative power stemming from the  
204 center of the political system; the social power to persuade and to influence which actors from  
205 functional systems like the economy possess, for example, through lobbyists; the  
206 communicative power that civil society actors can generate; and the power of the media, which  
207 arises from its capacity to decide what to publish, whereby it can set agendas and frame issues.  
208 The extent of this “fourth power” depends on the degree to which the media is independent  
209 from the functional systems of the economy and the core of the political system. The less  
210 economically and politically independent the media is, the easier it is for elites from other  
211 systems – politicians and lobbyists, for example – to influence the media and thus the  
212 formation of the public sphere. That said, the power that elites like journalists, politicians,  
213 lobbyists, and other civil society actors can exercise also depends on how engaged citizens are  
214 and how actively they respond to the communication flows that arise from the public sphere.  
215 That is, the better educated, the better informed, and the better politically motivated citizens  
216 are, the more difficult it will be for elites acting within the public sphere to shape *reflected* public  
217 opinions. Hence the general level of education and political motivation that obtains among

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., sect. 5.

218 citizens is relevant for the public sphere's capacity to identify legitimate law. By implication, it  
219 is a problem for the communicative arrangements of the public sphere if citizens have a  
220 consumerist-mindset in their reception of news and systematically prefer "infotainment" over  
221 critical and informed expert discussions of political issues.

222         Following this analytic scheme, Habermas views pathologies of political communication  
223 as imminent whenever the media is insufficiently independent and there is not the right kind of  
224 feedback between civil society and mass media-based communication. He gives as examples the  
225 case of Silvio Berlusconi's political dominance over mass media in Italy and mentions that the  
226 **US** media has failed to reveal the George Bush administration's misinformation regarding Iraq's  
227 alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction. In his concluding reflection that follows  
228 these and other cases, Habermas states soberly that "publics are a demanding and thus unlikely  
229 evolutionary achievement of modern Western societies. Even within their contexts of origins we  
230 cannot be sure that they will remain in place."<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, in his 2006 analysis Habermas  
231 claims that the political systems of Western societies nevertheless possess an epistemic  
232 dimension.

#### 233                                 THE PATHOLOGIES OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN DIGITIZED SOCIETIES

234         Since Habermas's publication of his 2006 article, "Political Communication in Media  
235 Society," the communicative arrangements within Western societies have profoundly shifted.  
236 Therefore, when adopting a Habermasian approach to rethinking democratic citizenship  
237 education, it is first necessary to develop a more up-to-date understanding of the presently  
238 existing communicative arrangements. After all, as John Dewey put it, philosophy of education

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 135 (my translation). Habermas makes the same point elsewhere: "The fragility of a political order that is based on the free floating of reasons is no riddle." See Jürgen Habermas, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie. Band 2* [This Too a History of Philosophy, volume 2] (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019), 766 (my translation).

239 consists of “an explicit formulation of the problems of the formation of right mental and moral  
240 habitudes in respect to the difficulties of *contemporary social life*.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, a conception of  
241 democratic citizenship education must be based on an adequate understanding of  
242 contemporary democratic challenges. These challenges concern, at least from the Habermasian  
243 perspective adopted in this paper, shifts in the society-wide communicative arrangements that  
244 have been so profound that some are speaking today of a digital transformation of the public  
245 sphere.<sup>22</sup> Aspects of this digital transformation include the following:

- 246 • The change from one-to-many communication to many-to-many communication.<sup>23</sup>
- 247 • The formation of echo chambers and a polarization of political discourse.<sup>24</sup>
- 248 • The personalization of content via algorithms.<sup>25</sup>
- 249 • The fragmentation and “tribalization” of political discourse.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916), in John Dewey, *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, vol. 9, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 341 (emphasis added).

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Celikates, “Digital Publics, Digital Contestation.”

<sup>23</sup> Stefan Münker, *Emergenz digitaler Öffentlichkeiten. Die Sozialen Medien im Web 2.0* [Emergence of Digital Publics: Social Media in Web 2.0] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009); and Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>24</sup> Cass Sunstein, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Heath, *Enlightenment 2.0: Restoring Sanity to Our Politics, Our Economy, and Our Lives* (New York: Harper Collins, 2014); Caja Thimm, “Digitale Öffentlichkeit zwischen Fragmentierung und Mini-Publics” [Digital Public Sphere between Fragmentation and Mini-Publics], in *Der neue Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Reflexionen in pädagogischer Perspektive*, ed. Ulrich Binder and Jürgen Oelkers (Weinheim: Beltz, 2017), 49–60; and Sunstein, *#Republic*.

- 250 • The apparent ubiquity of fake news and the establishment of a post-truth regime of  
251 communication in which orientations toward truth and authenticity have been given up  
252 by some actors in the public sphere.<sup>27</sup>
- 253 • The development of an attention economy within which companies compete for  
254 consumers' digital attention to sell the data traces that consumers leave behind  
255 whenever they use the companies' services.<sup>28</sup>
- 256 • The formation of surveillance capitalism that consists of tracking – as well as predicting  
257 and manipulating – users' behavior.<sup>29</sup>
- 258 • The lack of transparency concerning the modalities of communication.
- 259 • The anonymization and mechanization of political discourse via fake or nonidentifiable  
260 digital personalities and bots, which is widely regarded as contributing to a decivilizing  
261 form of political discourse.<sup>30</sup>
- 262 • The increasing inability to control global media companies.
- 263 • The expressive rather than cognitive use of digital communication tools that  
264 corresponds to an increased use of audiovisual as opposed to text-based material.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Jayson Harsin, "Post-Truth and Critical Communication Studies," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, ed. Jon F. Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.757>.

<sup>28</sup> William E. Scheuerman, "Whistleblowing as Civil Disobedience: The Case of Edward Snowden," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 40, no. 7 (2014): 609–628.

<sup>29</sup> Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (London: Profile Books, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> Jan A. G. M. van Dijk and Kenneth L. Hacker, *Internet and Democracy in the Network Society* (London: Routledge, 2018); and Mike S. Schäfer, "Digital Public Sphere," in *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, ed. Gianpietro Mazzoleni et al. (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 322–328.

265           When contemplating the shifts identified in this nonexhaustive list, it is important to  
266 keep in mind that the technologies of the digital net have affected different media in distinct  
267 ways. For example, while social media – that is, Web 2.0-based interactive media that facilitate  
268 content production and content sharing among users – would not even exist except for these  
269 technologies, traditional media such as newspaper, radio, and television, which now also exist  
270 in online formats, still exist in analog versions. Hence, we must not assume that the digital net  
271 has resulted in the exclusive use of one sort of media or affected similarly the different kinds of  
272 media – social media, digital media like blogs, traditional media, digital versions of traditional  
273 media, etc. Furthermore, one must also pay attention to the dynamics of the interpenetrations  
274 between these different sorts of media instead of assuming that any one kind of media is  
275 necessarily dominant *vis-à-vis* the others.

276           In addition, the digitally induced changes of communication have not dissolved the  
277 political institutions at the core of the political system of Western societies.<sup>32</sup> That is, the  
278 articulation, implementation, and guarantee of the law by the legislative, executive, and  
279 judiciary branches of the government continue to function as central mechanisms for regulating  
280 social and political conflict. Despite some early enthusiasm about digital possibilities of doing  
281 politics in the form of bypassing the government through (Wikipedia-style) online  
282 collaboration,<sup>33</sup> the fact remains that due to motivational and free-rider problems, lack of

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<sup>31</sup> Norbert Kersting, “Jugend und politische Partizipation: Online oder Offline Beteiligung?” **[Youth and Political Participation: Online or Offline Participation?]**, in *Politische Beteiligung junger Menschen*, ed. Jörg Tremmel and Markus Rutsche (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016), 253–270; and Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten*, chap. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Archon Fung, Hollie Russon Gilman, and Jennifer Shkabatur, “Six Models for the Internet and Politics,” *International Studies Review* 15, no. 1 (2013): 30–47.

<sup>33</sup> Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

283 material resources, and coordination problems, collective action still requires reliance on the  
284 coercive powers of the state.<sup>34</sup> The law is still the central medium for addressing political  
285 conflicts, which is in line with Habermas’s understanding of the importance of legal practices  
286 for late modern societies.

287 Finally, the transformation of the public sphere would not have been possible unless  
288 profound cultural, economic, and technological dynamics had already been underway for many  
289 decades.<sup>35</sup> More specifically, liberalizing economic policies, a tendency to self-optimize and  
290 curate one’s personal life in line with an ethics of authenticity, and automatization and  
291 mechanization in private households and the economy have all facilitated the success of the  
292 digital net.<sup>36</sup> This suggests that a new understanding of the public sphere must rely on social-  
293 theoretic explanations and interpretations of social change, and the ways in which this change  
294 has altered the relation between the public sphere, civil society, and the formal institutions of  
295 the government.

296 Based on these considerations of how the public sphere has transformed in recent  
297 decades, the remainder of this section reassesses two pathologies of the public sphere that  
298 Habermas previously identified in his work. In addition, it analyzes two potentially new  
299 pathologies that Habermas has not yet addressed.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Fung, Gilman, and Shkabatur, “Six Models for the Internet and Politics”; and Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013). **YES, that’s the correct source.**

<sup>35</sup> Armin Nassehi, *Muster: Theorie der digitalen Gesellschaft* [Pattern: Theory of Digital Society] (Munich: Beck, 2019).

<sup>36</sup> Reckwitz, *The Society of Singularities*; and Andreas Reckwitz, *The End of Illusions: The End of Illusions: Politics, Economy, and Culture in Late Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2021).

<sup>37</sup> A third possible new pathology that I do not address here is the erosion of private autonomy due both to the de-differentiation between private and public communication and identities and

300 THE LACK OF INDEPENDENCE OF THE MASS MEDIA

301 The media represents a “fourth power,” given the influence it can exert in the public  
302 sphere. To legitimate this power, according to Habermas, the media needs to be independent,  
303 which means that it must not be driven by systemic market or political imperatives of  
304 increasing profits or bureaucratic power, respectively. In the postwar period this independence  
305 was achieved through forms of self-regulation by the media system.<sup>38</sup> However, this self-  
306 regulation can be undermined through the bureaucratic power of the state or the economic  
307 power of private agents. Besides the Italian government’s dominance over television stations,  
308 another example includes Rupert Murdoch’s global influence over newspapers and television  
309 channels.<sup>39</sup>

310 What has fundamentally changed due to the digital net, however, is that, in the case of  
311 social media, media elites no longer have the virtually exclusive power to decide which news  
312 items to publish, which issues to put on the agenda, and how to frame issues. The image of  
313 media elites – journalists, editors, and owners of newspapers – who decide whom they may  
314 allow to enter the public stage and scene is no longer adequate due to the shift from one-to-  
315 many to many-to-many communication on social media. It is many-to-many communication

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to the far-reaching behavior-manipulating capacities of media companies. See Sandra Seubert and Peter Niesen, *Grenzen des Privaten [Limits of the Private]* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2020). The de-differentiation between scientific, political, and everyday discourse may be yet another pathology that I do not address. On this point, see Jean-François Kervegan, “Is the Grand Narrative of Rights at Its End?,” in *Perspectives on the Self: Reflexivity in the Humanities*, ed. Vojtěch Kolman and Tereza Matějčková (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 99–116. **Yes, correct.**

<sup>38</sup>John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 258ff.

<sup>39</sup>Notably, though, different national media systems express varying degrees of independence, and the varying degrees depend on how the independence is measured. See Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

316 that characterizes social networks such as Facebook or Instagram, as well as video-based  
317 streaming services like YouTube that also rely on the interactive Web 2.0. As Yascha Mounk  
318 argues, “in empowering outsiders, digital technology destabilizes governing elites all over the  
319 world and speeds up the pace of change. The effects are likely to stay with us for a very long  
320 time.”<sup>40</sup> Due to many-to-many communication it is no longer simply the elites talking among  
321 each other and presenting their arguments to the wider public. Instead, everyone can engage  
322 with everyone else and elite status is not necessary to enter the debate.<sup>41</sup> This enlarged and  
323 diversified discourse seems to be leading to the de-differentiation between different kinds of  
324 political, economic, scientific, and everyday discourses.<sup>42</sup>

325         That said, we must not overlook that social media companies like Facebook and Twitter  
326 nevertheless do possess a considerable amount of gatekeeping power, as Jan van Dijk and  
327 Kenneth Hacker explain: “The big digital and social media platforms are the new  
328 intermediaries, agenda-setting makers and gatekeepers of the network society. In the  
329 perspective of the audience, online content is more concentrated than print and broadcasting  
330 content.”<sup>43</sup> The gate-keeping power of social media can be witnessed, for example, when social  
331 media companies block users and their profiles – the closure of Trump’s Twitter account is a  
332 well-known case in point. In addition, through algorithms that determine what content is

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<sup>40</sup> Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy*, 149. See also Münker, *Emergenz digitaler Öffentlichkeiten*.

<sup>41</sup> Still, one must not overlook that when it comes to influencing political discourses, the elites’ resources are arguably much greater than those of most citizens, as the case of Cambridge Analytica has shown.

<sup>42</sup> Keruegan, “Is the Grand Narrative of Rights at Its End?”

<sup>43</sup> van Dijk and Hacker, *Internet and Democracy in the Network Society*, 104.

333 shown to which users, the social media companies also have the power to shape the discourses  
334 and exchanges among those who are inside the discursive arenas of social media.<sup>44</sup>

335 Furthermore, the role of “influencers” clearly demonstrates the power asymmetries that  
336 exist within social-media facilitated communication and remind us of the fact that elite status  
337 within political communication has not disappeared. Accordingly, we need to examine how  
338 independent these new elites are.<sup>45</sup> What is more, while many-to-many communication is  
339 characteristic of social media, traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television  
340 stations continue to practice one-to-many communication, even when they are using the  
341 technologies of the digital net. Thus, the independence of the traditional media outlets, which  
342 continue to play an important role in the overall media landscape of the public sphere, is still  
343 relevant for assessing the public sphere.<sup>46</sup>

344 If we focus on “big digital and social media platforms” and leave the traditional print  
345 news media and the online news media to the side, the question then becomes, how should we  
346 assess their independence and self-regulation? First, many of these companies possess  
347 monopolies in their respective communication markets, because the long-term existence of  
348 these platforms depends on their ability to attract very large audiences. Once the monopoly is  
349 established, however (as in the case of Facebook, for example), it seems nearly impossible for  
350 new competitors to enter the market – as can occur in other markets of the platform economy

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<sup>44</sup> However, studies of agenda-setting show that the power is rather equal between politicians or government, old news media, and social media; and some studies even suggest that old news media and politicians **still exert greater influence in setting the discursive agenda. Yes, correct.**

<sup>45</sup> Consider, for example, the allegations that the United Arab Emirates is paying foreign influencers to move to and work in Dubai.

<sup>46</sup> In this context, consider the influence that television stations such as Fox News, or publishers of online and print newspapers such as Springer (*Bild Zeitung* and bild.de), still have.

351 such as food delivery, private transportation, or room rentals. Consequently, the power of these  
352 platforms is large, and it becomes important that they adopt effective measures of self-  
353 regulation so that they contribute to an open, transparent, and inclusive presentation of views  
354 within the public sphere for which they have become so central.

355         However, despite rhetorical insinuations to the contrary, the basic practices of digital  
356 and social media platforms do not follow any such pattern of self-regulation. Instead, the basic  
357 function of these platforms is to generate revenue within what is often called “the attention  
358 economy”.<sup>47</sup> The business model of the attention economy is to captivate users’ attention in  
359 order to generate user data that can then be sold to marketing companies, market analysts, and  
360 others. The adoption of this business model finds its expression in algorithms that determine  
361 the degree to which users interface with these platforms so as to maximize the data generated  
362 by users.<sup>48</sup> Hence, these digital and social media platforms seek to maximize profit in ways that  
363 do not amount to effective self-regulation.

364 THE FAILURE OF CITIZENS WITHIN CIVIL SOCIETY TO REACT APPROPRIATELY TO THE INFORMATION  
365 THAT THEY RECEIVE FROM THE PUBLIC SPHERE

366         The second pathology that Habermas has mentioned is inadequate feedback from civil  
367 society in response to the discourses within the public sphere. Habermas’s major concerns have

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas Davenport and John Beck, *The Attention Economy: Understanding the New Currency of Business* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2003); and James Williams, *Don’t Stand in Our Light: Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>48</sup> Sunstein, *#Republic*. See also Tim Wu, who suggests that social media companies lead to a manipulative reduction of complexity that aims at rendering our experiences more convenient (Tim Wu, *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016]). Wu also speaks of a tyranny of convenience: “the first convenience revolution promised to make life and work easier for you, the second promised to make it easier to be you” (Tim Wu, “The Tyranny of Convenience,” *New York Times*, February 16, 2018).

368 been with “a peculiar paralysis of civil society,” “civic privatism,” and “a mood of antipolitics,”  
369 which would supposedly arise from the use of electronic media as well as from the  
370 “colonization of the public sphere by market imperatives.”<sup>49</sup> By the latter, Habermas means the  
371 sort of dynamics that I described at the end of the last section:

372 Under the pressure of shareholders who thirst for higher revenues, it is the  
373 intrusion of the functional imperatives of the market economy in the “internal  
374 logic” of the production and presentation of messages that leads to the covert  
375 displacement of one category of communication by another: Issues of political  
376 discourse become assimilated into and absorbed by the modes and contents of  
377 entertainment.<sup>50</sup>

378 While these functional imperatives have an impact on the public sphere, their effects  
379 seem to have been different from what Habermas has anticipated. After all, a repoliticization of  
380 civil society has occurred over the course of the last decade, which has resulted in high voter  
381 turnout in elections such as the 2020 U.S. presidential election as well as in online and hybrid  
382 political mobilization in a wide range of social movements, including Black Lives Matter (BLM)

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<sup>49</sup> Habermas, “Political Communication in Media Society,” 422. For (evidence regarding) the “videomalaise” hypothesis – which posits that people who use electronic media and recognize this form of media as relevant become more cynical and less willing to participate in politics over time – see Michael X. Delli Carpini, “Mediating Democratic Engagement: The Impact of Communications on Citizens’ Involvement in Political and Civic Life,” in *Handbook of Political Communication Research*, ed. Lee Kaid (London: LEA, 2004), 395–434; Tien-Tsung Lee, “Media Effects on Political Disengagement Revisited,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (2005): 421, <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900508200211>; and Carl Boggs, “The Great Retreat: Decline of the Public Sphere in Late Twentieth-Century America,” *Theory and Society* 26 (1997): 741–780. Andreas Schuck questions this hypothesis, as media in many cases also mobilizes citizens; see Andreas R. T. Schuck, “Media Malaise and Political Cynicism,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects*, ed. Patrick Rössler, Cynthia A. Hoffner, and Liesbet van Zoonen (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2017).

<sup>50</sup> Habermas, “Political Communication in Media Society,” 422.

383 and #MeToo.<sup>51</sup> It is possible, of course, that there are multiple causal relationships at stake and  
384 that the repoliticization has occurred for other reasons even though the functional imperatives  
385 have worked toward a depoliticization and paralysis of civil society. For example, one could  
386 argue that overall increases in living standards and greater access to education, coupled with  
387 heightened interpersonal and intergroup economic inequalities within many advanced  
388 economies (especially in the United States), have given rise to political mobilization even as the  
389 market-driven nature of political communication has worked against such forms of political  
390 mobilization.<sup>52</sup>

391 In the case of the Arab Spring as well as Black Lives Matter, social media has played a  
392 crucial role in galvanizing (national and transnational) solidarity and political activism.<sup>53</sup> Robin  
393 Celikates explains social media's potential for increasing political participation as follows: "Low  
394 entry and participation costs have an egalitarian effect and increase the openness and  
395 inclusivity of the virtual public sphere, enabling, at least in principle, those who are  
396 geographically dispersed, socially marginalized, or politically disenfranchised to participate."<sup>54</sup>  
397 Likewise, Paulo Gerbaudo emphasizes that social media have become central for  
398 "choreographing" collective action and also for the "symbolic construction of public space

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<sup>51</sup> On online contestation, see Celikates, "Digital Publics, Digital Contestation." On Snowden's civil disobedience, see Scheurman, "Whistleblowing as Civil Disobedience."

<sup>52</sup> See Oliver Hidalgo, *Antinomien der Demokratie* [Antinomies of Democracy] (Frankfurt: CampusVerlag, 2014) for a critique of post-democratic analyses of current politics.

<sup>53</sup> Irem Eren-Erdogmus and Sinem Ergun, *The Impact of Social Media on Social Movements: The Case of Anti-Consumption* (IGI-Global, 2017); and Marcia Mundt, Karen Ross, and Charla M. Burnett, "Scaling Social Movements through Social Media: The Case of Black Lives Matter," *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 4 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118807911>.

<sup>54</sup> Celikates, "Digital Publics, Digital Contestation," 159–176, 170. [QUERY: Please specify the page # for this quotation.] JC: DONE.

399 which facilitates and guides the physical assembling of a highly dispersed and individualized  
400 constituency.”<sup>55</sup> Hence, whereas the marketization of traditional media such as newspapers,  
401 television, and radio may have had a depoliticizing effect among citizens, this effect may have  
402 been counteracted, at least to a certain extent, by the political cooperation-enabling features of  
403 social media.<sup>56</sup> Hence, if we were to analyze solely the level of political activity when  
404 diagnosing this second pathology of political communication, then there presently may not  
405 exist any such pathology to the degree Habermas fears.

406 THE FAILURE TO GENERATE — THROUGH FILTERING AND SYNTHESIZING — REFLECTED PUBLIC  
407 OPINIONS DUE TO THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

408 Cass Sunstein and Caja Thimm have argued that digital communication leads to a  
409 fragmentation of political discourses due to these factors: the algorithmically induced  
410 personalization of media contents; the sheer ubiquity and immense amount of information that  
411 digital technology allows people to generate and disseminate with great ease; and the absence  
412 of editorial roles that limit the extent of what is published and prevent low-quality information  
413 from being diffused.<sup>57</sup>

414 Indeed, the personalization of media contents and the spread of low-quality information  
415 is even more problematic for social media and digital media such as blogs or electronic

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<sup>55</sup> Paolo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 5.

<sup>56</sup> Victoria Carty, “The Internet and Social Movements,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, ed. David A. Snow and Donatella della Porta et al. (Oxford: Blackwell Reference Online, 2013).

<sup>57</sup> See Sunstein, *#Republic*; Thimm, “Digitale Öffentlichkeit zwischen Fragmentierung und Mini-Publics”; and also Manuel Castells, *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Darin Barney, *The Network Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

416 newsletters than it is for traditional media like newspapers, television, and radio stations. In the  
417 case of traditional media, the personalization of contents has not yet been systematically  
418 pursued and editors are still able to exclude low-quality information (however imperfectly they  
419 might actually do so). Still, due to the sheer ubiquity of information and the multiplicity of  
420 political discourses, the public sphere – viewed as a whole and comprising social media,  
421 digital media, and traditional media – seems to be increasingly subject to fragmentation.

422         Habermas recognizes the tendency of the digital net to fragment political discussion:  
423 “the rise of millions of fragmented chat rooms across the world tend instead to lead to the  
424 fragmentation of large but politically focused mass audiences into a huge number of isolated  
425 issue publics.”<sup>58</sup> Whereas in the English version of this text he only mentions this point in a  
426 footnote, in the unabridged German version, Habermas adds that the digitized public sphere  
427 lacks the functional equivalencies of the public sphere “to receive, select and synthesize” the  
428 contents that are discussed digitally.<sup>59</sup> Despite this sobering analysis, however, Habermas does  
429 not elaborate on this point and does not address this fragmentation as a potential pathology of  
430 the digitized public sphere. However, it seems obvious that echo chambers and fragmented  
431 political discourses fail to fulfill what Habermas regards as the central epistemic contribution of  
432 the public sphere, namely “to mobilize and pool relevant issues and required information, and  
433 to specify interpretations,” which involves (as he clarifies in the German version of the text)  
434 identifying relevant arguments for and against such issues.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Habermas, “Political Communication in Media Society,” 423.

<sup>59</sup> Habermas, “Hat die Demokratie noch eine epistemische Dimension?,” 111 (my translation).

<sup>60</sup> Habermas, “Political Communication in Media Society,” 416. Recent research by Richard Fletcher et al. and Laura Slechten et al. suggests, however, that echo chambers may not be caused by online forms of communication because people may be self-selecting into polarized news and discursive enclaves. See Richard Fletcher, Craig T. Robertson, and Rasmus Kleis

435           Indeed, one could object to this supposed new pathology of the public sphere that a  
436 fragmented political discourse can still be useful for generating information and raising  
437 awareness for relevant political issues. Movements like BLM or #MeToo, among others, have  
438 certainly contributed to a widespread concern about issues of racial and gender injustices, a  
439 concern that had been lacking prior to the diffusion and discussion of these issues via social and  
440 other digital media. What is more, as Nancy Fraser has argued, counterpublics are often the  
441 more fertile and productive sites for discussing and creating awareness of certain issues that the  
442 mainstream public neglects.<sup>61</sup> Counterpublics in the form of nested or semi-isolated online  
443 communities may be the ideal location for political groups and movements to develop their  
444 political identity and motivational strength.<sup>62</sup> Finally, one may also argue that *any* public sphere  
445 is by nature a *fragmented* public sphere. James Tully seems to make this point when he says that  
446 “the public, in its most familiar sense, is a composite public sphere of the historical  
447 conglomeration of this ever-changing kaleidoscope of diverse public spheres.”<sup>63</sup>

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Nielsen, “How Many People Live in Politically Partisan Online News Echo Chambers in Different Countries?,” *Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media* 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.51685/jqd.2021.020>; and Laura Slechten, Cédric Courtois, Lennert Coenen, and Bieke Zaman, “Adapting the Selective Exposure Perspective to Algorithmically Governed Platforms: The Case of Google Search,” *Communication Research* 49, no. 8 (2021): 1039–1065, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00936502211012154>. While the research is not conclusive across all countries, it seems as if algorithms themselves are not proven to cause communicative isolation and separation.

<sup>61</sup> Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>62</sup> See Michael Merry, “Segregation and Civic Virtue,” *Educational Theory* 62, no. 4 (2012): 465–486. Merry opposes social integration due to the importance of voluntary spatial segregation for the development of solidarity and a civic spirit among socially marginalized groups.

<sup>63</sup> James Tully, “On the Global Multiplicity of Public Spheres: The Democratic Transformation of the Public Sphere?,” in *Beyond Habermas: Democracy, Power, and the Public Sphere*, ed. Christian J. Emden and David Midgley (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 169–204, 170.

448           These are important considerations. However, *excessive* fragmentation may indeed  
449 prevent “the formation of a plurality of considered public opinions.” As explained above,  
450 public opinions are meant to arise from an intuitive judgment that “bridges” the information of  
451 publicized political contents, on the one hand, and opinion polls, on the other. *Considered* public  
452 opinions are meant to reflect only those filtered public opinions that the citizens have approved  
453 through conscious “yes statements.” It is hard to imagine how such intuitive judgments and  
454 conscious “yes statements” could be reasonably made given the sheer amount of publicized  
455 information that exists due to the shift from one-to-many to many-to-many communication.  
456 What is more, precisely because of the fragmented nature of the public sphere, it seems  
457 similarly daunting to judge as to which public opinions should be viewed as considered public  
458 opinions. If we take again the examples of BLM and #MeToo, it seems unclear whether there is  
459 a *considered* public opinion that approves of their political and social initiatives, despite the  
460 attention that these movements have been able to garner through social and digital media. It is  
461 all too easy to find sharp criticisms and rejections of these movements within the digitized  
462 discourse, but not in a form that could lead to a reasoned debate. Thus, it seems as if the  
463 fragmented nature of political communication in the digital net is unable to generate the kind of  
464 give-and-take of reasons that would be necessary for distilling the most reasonable position and  
465 for filtering out those positions that do not withstand the critical scrutiny of reasonable  
466 argumentation.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Therefore, it also comes as no surprise that Danielle Allen has suggested giving up the *spatial* metaphor of the public sphere as a delineated space of public reasoning; instead, she adopts the metaphor of *flows* of public communication. Due to the fragmented nature of the digitized public sphere, the substitution of this metaphor seems empirically well founded. However, from the democratic perspective that is of interest here, it seems to imply that the digitally transformed public sphere may be unable to form considered public opinions through synthesizing and filtering politically relevant issues. Flows of communication may, but need not, cross one another. See Danielle Allen, “Reconceiving Public Spheres,” in *From Voice to*

467 THE ARATIONAL, AFFECTIVE MODE OF DIGITAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATION THAT FINDS ITS MOST  
468 PROBLEMATIC CRYSTALLIZATION IN POST-TRUTH COMMUNICATION REGIMES

469 A second new kind of pathology concerns the problem of fake news and, more  
470 specifically, the wider post-truth communication regime of which it is part. If the concern was  
471 only fake news, then it would be inadequate to speak of a “new” pathology.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, it is  
472 often possible to identify false information, especially if practices of democratic citizenship  
473 education include appropriate forms of information literacy instruction, that is, forms that  
474 promote students’ development of effective epistemic and communicative skills for detecting  
475 false information.<sup>66</sup>

476 Yet if we recognize that fake news is part of a wider regime of post-truth communication  
477 within the attention economy, then we can appreciate why it may indeed count as a new  
478 pathology of the public sphere that affects not only social media and digital media but also  
479 traditional media.<sup>67</sup> Shoshana Zuboff has coined the term “surveillance capitalism” to capture  
480 how digital media companies make a business out of prompting consumers to act, decide, and

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*Influence: Understanding Citizenship in a Digital Age*, ed. Danielle Allen and Jennifer S. Light (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 178–207.

<sup>65</sup> Karla Neef, “Fake News überall?” [Fake News Everywhere?], in *Digitale Ethik: Leben in vernetzten Welten*, ed. Petra Grimm, Tobias O. Keber, and Oliver Zöllner (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2019), 106–120.

<sup>66</sup> Miriam J. Metzger, Andrew J. Flanagin, Alex Markov, Rebekah Grossmann, and Monica Bulger, “Believing the Unbelievable: Understanding Young People’s Information Literacy Beliefs and Practices in the United States,” *Journal of Children and Media* 9, no. 3 (2015): 325–348, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2015.1056817>; and Drerup, “Demokratische Bildung in und für digitale Öffentlichkeiten,” 29–53.

<sup>67</sup> In addition, the post-truth regime is also part of a wider social context of distrust, low-quality public education systems (especially in the United States), and a cynical professional political communication culture that sees citizens as objects to be known or constructed and then managed to strategic ends.

481 express themselves within social media and digital media contexts in which these companies  
482 are able to track users' behavior and harvest the corresponding data.<sup>68</sup> To prompt and stimulate  
483 the users to do that, the digital and social media platforms, including digital versions of  
484 traditional media, offer their services "for free," but implement algorithms created for the  
485 purpose of maximizing the traces of data that users leave on these platforms.<sup>69</sup> Social media,  
486 digital media, and digital versions of traditional media also profit from advertisements whose  
487 profitability depends on the number of views, clicks, or likes of media content. As Jayson  
488 Harsin analyzes, "political communication in PT [post-truth] is thus inevitably parasitic on and  
489 structured by attentional capitalism."<sup>70</sup>

490 What is more, the digital and social media platforms have little to no incentive to stop a  
491 reproduction of fake news, as fake news tends to spread more quickly on social media than  
492 accurate information and hence generates more data-producing user activity than accurate  
493 information.<sup>71</sup> This suggests strongly that the underlying functional logic of these platforms is  
494 not about facilitating reasonable discussion – quite the contrary. Accordingly, there are few  
495 (self-) regulative mechanisms in place that would ask, force, or incentivize the users of these  
496 platforms to display an orientation toward truth or sincerity. Yet such orientations toward truth

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<sup>68</sup> Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.

<sup>69</sup> This has been documented prominently by *The Social Dilemma*, a documentary directed by Jeff Orlowski that examines how social media employs techniques designed to maximize user engagement and manipulate behavior (Netflix, 2020). **Yes, correct.**

<sup>70</sup> Jayson Harsin, "Post-Truth and Critical Communication Studies," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, ed. Jon F. Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.757>.

<sup>71</sup> Craig Silverman, "This Analysis Shows How Viral Fake Election News Stories Outperformed Real News on Facebook," BuzzFeed News, November 16, 2016, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/viral-fake-election-news-outperformed-real-news-on-facebook>.

497 and sincerity are prerequisites for a reasonable discussion that is supposed to be based on  
498 accurate and relevant information.<sup>72</sup>

499 Another relevant aspect of the post-truth communication regime is the affect-based and  
500 expressive, rather than cognitive, mode of communication that is characteristic of digitized  
501 political discourses.<sup>73</sup> This affect-laden aspect of communication is also characteristic of the  
502 Internet, when viewed as a whole, as Andreas Reckwitz explains,

503 To a considerable extent, the Internet is an affect machine. Its circulating  
504 elements excite, entertain, cheer up, relax, arouse, and generally affect people. In  
505 light of all the arguments about our supposed knowledge society, it can be easy  
506 to overlook the fact that, in large part, the digital objects that captivate recipients  
507 and producers are not cognitive in nature but rather possess a narrative,  
508 aesthetic, design, or ludic character. This is true of images, films, texts, sounds,  
509 and games.<sup>74</sup>

510 Accordingly, the digital net in general, and social media in particular, places special emphasis  
511 on pictures and videos, and even texts within social media often have the character of “phatic”  
512 communication.<sup>75</sup> The point of such communication is to perform and to express one’s singular

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<sup>72</sup> To clarify, the problem is not only one of too many false statements but also concerns the creation of ambiguity in order to sow doubt or mislead. That is, even if statements like “Obama is a Muslim” are patently false, the reasoning behind them can be misleading and effective in sowing doubt, which in turn affects the quality and content of public discourse.

<sup>73</sup> Kersting, “Jugend und politische Partizipation.”

<sup>74</sup> Reckwitz, *The Society of Singularities*, 170.

<sup>75</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999); Vincent Miller, *Understanding Digital Culture* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2011), 203ff; and Reckwitz, *The Society of Singularities*, 170.

513 identity and to seek recognition of that identity by the other members of the online community.  
514 Hence, there is a tendency on social media to emphasize emotional over informational content  
515 in texts. Even if it is less pronounced, this orientation toward the generation of affect is also  
516 increasingly characteristic of the online journalism of traditional news media (stories about lost  
517 puppies returned to their owners, rather than explanations of how the economy works, for  
518 example). This explains why we need to understand fake news as part of a wider regime of  
519 post-truth, which has its economic roots in the attention economy and its cultural roots in an  
520 expressive and affect-oriented form of communication.

521         In sum, the analyses of these four pathologies – two that Habermas emphasizes, and  
522 two more that relate to his concerns – highlight how the digital net has had pervasive effects  
523 on society-wide communicative arrangements. They provide us with good reasons to doubt  
524 that these arrangements, when viewed as a system of discursive political self-determination  
525 through the medium of the law, can justify the reasonable presumption that the laws generated  
526 in such a system are intersubjectively justifiable. In other words, digitized Western societies  
527 may lack a key epistemic dimension of democracy. Due to the political communication-  
528 distorting features of the public sphere discussed here, the society-wide communicative  
529 arrangements do not warrant the claim that the laws that formally democratic political systems  
530 generate are legitimate.

#### 531                                   DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN DIGITIZED SOCIETIES

532         Given the far-reaching shifts in political communication, several educational scholars  
533 and theorists have recently tackled the question of how to reconceive democratic citizenship  
534 education within primary, secondary, and tertiary education contexts.<sup>76</sup> The proposals of these

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<sup>76</sup> Joseph Kahne, Erica Hodgins, and Elyse Eidman-Aadahl, "Redesigning Civic Education for the Digital Age: Participatory Politics and the Pursuit of Democratic Engagement," *Theory &*

535 scholars have focused on effective and responsible uses of information and communication  
536 technologies, as well as on the epistemic competences of how to identify and contribute to the  
537 creation of factually accurate information. Joseph Kahne, Erica Hodgins, and Elyse Eidman-  
538 Aadahl have elaborated how “core practices of participatory politics” (investigation and  
539 research, mobilizing for change, dialogue and feedback, production and circulation of  
540 information) should be adapted to the new digital and social media landscape. For example,  
541 they have emphasized the importance of “expressing one’s perspective persuasively in a digital  
542 format,” “tapping social networks to forage for information,” or learning “how to craft  
543 persuasive messages that will reach a targeted audience.”<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Sigal Ben-Porath and  
544 Gideon Dishon have encouraged teaching and learning responsible uses of asynchronous,  
545 collaborative learning platforms to convey the capacity for fair and inclusive communication  
546 with peers.<sup>78</sup> This capacity is of special importance, they have maintained, because digital  
547 communication contexts, e.g., on social media, often lack a moderator or a hierarchically  
548 imposed accountability structure. Hence students should learn to rely on horizontal forms of  
549 accountability that those who participate in digital communication generate themselves. Harry  
550 Brighouse has argued that the ubiquity of information requires digital and information literacy

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*Research in Social Education* 44, no. 1 (2016): 1–35,  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2015.1132646>; Sigal R. Ben-Porath and Gideon Dishon,  
“Digital Civics after Trump,” *On Education: Journal for Research and Debate* 1, no. 1 (2018),  
[https://doi.org/10.17899/on\\_ed.2018.1.6](https://doi.org/10.17899/on_ed.2018.1.6); Harry Brighouse, “Civic Education in the Age of  
Trump,” *On Education: Journal for Research and Debate* 1, no. 1 (2018):  
[https://doi.org/10.17899/on\\_ed.2018.1.2](https://doi.org/10.17899/on_ed.2018.1.2); Rupert Wegerif, “New Technology and the Apparent  
Failure of Democracy: An Educational Response,” *On Education: Journal for Research and Debate*  
1, no. 1 (2018), [https://doi.org/10.17899/on\\_ed.2018.1.7](https://doi.org/10.17899/on_ed.2018.1.7); and Drerup, “Demokratische Bildung  
in und für digitale Öffentlichkeiten.”

<sup>77</sup> Kahne, Hodgins, and Eidman-Aadahl, “Redesigning Civic Education for the Digital Age,” 11.

<sup>78</sup> Ben-Porath and Dishon, “Digital Civics after Trump.”

551 skills that enable citizens to differentiate clearly between relevant and irrelevant information, as  
552 well as between trustworthy and untrustworthy sources of information.<sup>79</sup> Rupert Wegerif has  
553 focused on the shift from one-to-many to many-to-many communication and the ways in which  
554 this shift has created a greater need to actively fact-check and question the empirical validity or  
555 adequacy of claims. He has argued that “creating and delivering news effectively via the  
556 Internet requires a shift in readers from being passive recipients of other people’s version of  
557 truth to active criticism and participatory co-construction of their own truth.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, Wegerif  
558 has suggested that participation in political discourses has become even more important for  
559 ensuring the epistemic validity of information in the new digital and social media landscape.  
560 Finally, Drerup has pointed out that providing high-quality general education is the best way of  
561 ensuring that citizens can detect fake news and immunize themselves against the manipulation  
562 that the spread of false information facilitates.<sup>81</sup> Often this approach is termed “digital  
563 citizenship.”

564 In sum, these scholars have suggested cultivating “digital virtues” that would improve  
565 students’ and citizens’ interaction within the digital net. While these suggestions are plausible  
566 and compelling, they are nevertheless insufficient to deal adequately with the pathologies of the  
567 digitized public sphere that I have examined above. First, these proposals pay insufficient  
568 attention to the ways in which digitized political communication is shaped by changes in the  
569 economic and cultural background conditions of political communication. Second, they neglect  
570 the democratic shortcomings that the pathologies of the digitized public sphere reveal and the

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<sup>79</sup> Brighouse, “Civic Education in the Age of Trump.”

<sup>80</sup> Wegerif, “New Technology and the Apparent Failure of Democracy,” n.p.

<sup>81</sup> Drerup, “Demokratische Bildung in und für digitale Öffentlichkeiten.”

571 ways in which an understanding of these shortcomings should inform practices of democratic  
572 citizenship education.

573 TEACHING AND LEARNING THE ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS OF THE DIGITIZED PUBLIC  
574 SPHERE

575         Adopting a systemic, Habermasian perspective on these contemporary democratic  
576 challenges, democratic citizenship education should thematize the economic and cultural  
577 conditions within which the digitized public sphere is situated. After all, these conditions are  
578 causally co-responsible for the pathologies analyzed above. Regarding the economic  
579 background conditions, students must learn to understand and recognize the ways in which the  
580 social media platforms and the digital news media often fail to facilitate society-wide  
581 deliberation. As I have analyzed above, the lack of independence from systemic, economic  
582 imperatives for the social media platforms and the digital news media is a central reason for the  
583 systemic distortion of communicative arrangements. The attention economy structures  
584 communication so that users of social media and digital media spend more time and leave more  
585 data on the social media platforms and digital news media.

586         Accordingly, it is insufficient if democratic citizenship education aims at creating  
587 virtuous “digital citizens” who participate actively and responsibly in communications on the  
588 digital net. To the extent that the communicative infrastructure within which these  
589 communications occur is systematically biased toward promoting and facilitating those kinds of  
590 interactions that are best from an economic point of view, citizens must not only act responsibly  
591 *within* the digital net but must also start building resistance *against* the communication-  
592 distorting aspects of the digital net. This means, among other things, that students should learn  
593 about regulatory possibilities at the national, international, and supranational levels that would  
594 render the social media and digital news media platforms more conducive to inclusive and

595 reasonable deliberation. Hence, it is important that practices of democratic citizenship  
596 education within digitized societies are informed by a critical analysis of the economic  
597 conditions of the digital net and the ways in which they systematically distort communication.

598         A similar point applies to the cultural background conditions of the digital net. As we  
599 have seen above, communication on the digital net is often affect-driven and not necessarily  
600 oriented toward what Habermas calls “the unforced force of the better argument.”<sup>82</sup> As  
601 explained above, the pervasiveness of an affective mode of communication is a key element of  
602 the systemic distortion of communicative arrangements. It leads individuals and groups to  
603 communicate in ways that seek affirmation of their particularistic identities, so that individuals  
604 and groups do not always strive toward identifying publicly shareable positions or  
605 perspectives. Consequently, a considerable portion of the information shared and exchanged on  
606 the digital net may be factually inaccurate or excessively one-sided. Thus, Brighthouse is right to  
607 emphasize the continuing importance of teaching information literacy so that students learn  
608 how to fact-check and identify trustworthy sources of information. However, it seems equally  
609 important that democratic citizenship education aims at directly addressing the cultural  
610 conditions of contemporary political discourse and the ways in which these conditions are  
611 further intensified by communication that takes place on the digital net. For example,  
612 democratic citizenship education must highlight the ways in which social media is biased  
613 toward affect-driven modes of communication such as hate speech, given that this form of  
614 communication spreads more quickly and thus generates more attention. Or, to provide another  
615 example, students must learn how long-term cultural changes have facilitated the increasing  
616 relevance of the digital net in the first place. As already mentioned above, the affect-oriented  
617 style of communication within the digital net has become influential because late modern

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<sup>82</sup> Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 306.

618 societies have been increasingly valuing an ethics of authenticity and have been experiencing  
619 high degrees of social and cultural pluralization.<sup>83</sup> Learning about these cultural conditions and  
620 how they shape communication on the digital net may enable students and citizens to better  
621 maintain a critical distance vis-à-vis the discussions that trend on social media and other digital  
622 media venues. In addition, such learning may also help students and citizens to find creative  
623 solutions for how to counter the prevalence of the affective mode of communication and  
624 contribute to more inclusive and generalizing cultural practices that are socially integrating.<sup>84</sup>

#### 625 TEACHING AND LEARNING THE SHORTCOMINGS AND MORAL JUSTIFICATIONS OF DEMOCRACIES

626         The preceding analysis argued that digitized democracies may be lacking an epistemic  
627 dimension. Given the Habermasian premises of this paper, this lack implies that the laws and  
628 policies that are justified through society-wide communicative arrangements may lack  
629 democratic legitimacy because the communication that led to them was distorted. This  
630 normative deficit of formally democratic societies is relevant from an educational perspective  
631 and should inform practices of democratic citizenship education in the following two ways.  
632 First, students should learn through democratic citizenship education about challenges to the  
633 legitimacy of their political systems so that they understand that social and political changes are  
634 necessary for creating the conditions under which laws and policies would count as legitimate.  
635 In other words, democratic citizenship education should not lead students to think that they  
636 simply need to learn the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that are necessary for socially

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<sup>83</sup> See Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); and Reckwitz, *The Society of Singularities*. **Yes, correct.**

<sup>84</sup> Here, again, I follow Reckwitz, *The End of Illusions*, 163-9. JC: This is the section in which Reckwitz makes this argument.

637 reproducing a supposedly well-functioning democratic system. Instead, they must be prepared  
638 to transform the existing political system by working toward the improvement of the society-  
639 wide communicative arrangements that determine the legitimacy of collectively binding laws  
640 and policies. This reflects a critical or nonideal-theoretical rather than an ideal-theoretical  
641 approach to democratic citizenship education.

642         To illustrate the distinctiveness of this nonideal-theoretical approach, consider that John  
643 Rawls determines the ends and processes of citizenship education by identifying the  
644 characteristics that citizens would have to possess to effectively *maintain* ideally just political  
645 arrangements and by showing the ways in which citizens living under such arrangements  
646 would come to adopt those characteristics.<sup>85</sup> In this way a certain understanding of an ideal  
647 citizen, and of how an ideal citizen comes to develop his or her defining characteristics as a  
648 participant within ideally just social institutions, is the joint that connects Rawls's political  
649 philosophy to a particular conception of citizenship education. Different from Rawls, I suggest  
650 determining the ends and processes of citizenship education that are appropriate for conditions  
651 in which laws and policies are illegitimate. Thus, rather than attempting to identify those ends  
652 and processes of citizenship education that are useful for *maintaining* normatively ideal political  
653 arrangements once such arrangements have been put in place, I suggest concentrating on those  
654 ends and processes that would render political arrangements more democratic and more  
655 legitimate under nonideal circumstances.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 56, 147–148.

<sup>86</sup> For similar theoretical strategies, see Victoria Costa, *Rawls, Citizenship, and Education* (London: Routledge, 2011), 57–59; and Meira Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), chap. 1. **Yes, correct.**

656           Keeping in mind and recognizing the nonideal circumstances of contemporary  
657 democratic politics is relevant, because under such circumstances the socializing effects of  
658 political arrangements will not be conducive to developing those individual characteristics of  
659 citizens that would be effective in bringing about more democratic and more legitimate laws  
660 and policies. In a fully democratic political system, the socializing effects of political  
661 arrangements may potentially suffice to instill in individuals the attitudes, knowledge, and  
662 skills necessary for maintaining such a system over time. But within a political system that may  
663 not be able to generate legitimate laws and policies, by contrast, citizenship education must  
664 counter the potentially problematic socializing effects of such normatively defective institutions.  
665 For example, children and youth living under undemocratic conditions might simply be  
666 incapable of believing that they themselves and their peers could eventually maintain  
667 democratic institutions, given that the citizens whom they know from their day-to-day  
668 experience do not display the virtues that democratic institutions require. Therefore, processes  
669 of citizenship education that presented children and youth only with the individual  
670 characteristics that citizens possess under an ideal political arrangement could be pointless,  
671 simply because they may seem naïve and idealistic.

672           What is more, under undemocratic conditions citizenship education courses that are  
673 based on an ideal conception of a democratic political system might also work to consolidate  
674 and reproduce undemocratic aspects of the actual, malfunctioning political system. This may be  
675 the case, for example, if democratic citizenship education courses cover up, or hide, illegitimate  
676 laws and policies by suggesting that the existing political and social institutions already serve  
677 democracy when this is not the case. Thus “talk” within civic education courses of (ideal)  
678 democracy and the way in which citizens are effectively capable of acting as free and equal  
679 participants in democratic institutions might be *ideological*, in the sense that it falsely depicts an

680 idealized reality, which in turn may benefit those who are currently profiting from the  
681 undemocratic character of the status quo. The upshot of this is that under nonideal  
682 circumstances a conception of citizenship education should be theoretically nonideal and  
683 should pay attention to the danger of reproducing a normatively defective status quo by  
684 disseminating an idealistic account of the supposedly democratic political system and of  
685 citizens' alleged agency within democratic politics. Therefore, whatever else a nonideal  
686 theoretical conception of democratic citizenship may require, it seems clear that it must include  
687 a frank recognition of the normative deficits of the existing democratic arrangements.

688         Second, within society-wide communicative arrangements that fail to guarantee the  
689 legitimacy of the laws and policies that the political system generates, it is also essential that  
690 students learn about the *moral* justifications of democracy. This is because students must be able  
691 to understand and recognize the reasons as to why they should be educated in ways that enable  
692 them to exercise political agency so as to democratically improve the political system. To gain  
693 such an understanding and to grasp such reasons requires learning about the moral (and  
694 epistemic) justifications of democracy as they can be found in the tradition of political thought.

695         To elaborate, such learning is an important part of democratic citizenship education  
696 because under nonideal circumstances educators cannot compellingly claim that the democratic  
697 system has authorized democratic citizenship education itself through appropriate forms of  
698 political communication and that the democratic citizenship education that they carry out  
699 would therefore enjoy political legitimacy. Thus, to respond to such a deficit of contemporary  
700 political arrangements and, correspondingly, to the legitimation deficit of current practices of  
701 democratic citizenship education, teachers and educators should lay out moral justifications of  
702 why democratic political arrangements are morally important. In the absence of such moral

703 justifications, students may justifiably wonder whether the normative grounds for the  
704 educational practices to which they are being subjected are in fact justified.

#### 705 CONCLUSION

706 Democratic citizenship education is an ongoing political task and needs to change in  
707 accordance with cultural, economic, and political developments. Thus, as other political and  
708 educational theorists have also done over the past few years, I attempt in this paper to answer  
709 the question of how to rethink democratic citizenship education given the transformations of  
710 contemporary Western societies that have been brought about by using the technologies of the  
711 digital net. My approach to answering this question was distinctively Habermasian in adopting  
712 a deliberative understanding of democracy, a systemic perspective on society-wide  
713 communicative arrangements, and a critical or nonideal focus on societal pathologies. Based on  
714 this approach I extended Habermas's analysis of the public sphere's pathologies and argued  
715 that current political communication is systemically distorted. This distortion, I argued, is due  
716 to the economic imperatives that structure many aspects of the digitally transformed public  
717 sphere, the fragmentation of this public sphere, and the predominantly affective nature that is  
718 characteristic of a substantial part of contemporary political discourse. Drawing on this  
719 extended analysis, I maintained that practices of democratic citizenship education in digitized  
720 societies must not concentrate narrowly on the effective and responsible use of digital  
721 technologies (often under the title "digital citizenship"). Instead, I urged that these practices  
722 should also focus on the economic and cultural conditions that share responsibility for the  
723 structural problems of political communication and should address the democratic failures that  
724 inadequate communicative arrangements lead to.

725

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