Comment

Value pluralism in urban planning

Cameron McAuliffe
Western Sydney University, Australia

Dallas Rogers
University of Sydney, Australia

In response to Yamamoto's comment on our paper, we briefly discuss three points that further clarify our appeal to the plural values that animate and motivate thought and action, not just as a politics, but as an engagement with the social in an attempt to engage, as Andrew Sayer (2011) notes, with 'what matters to people'.

The first has to do with the definition of value pluralism we employ and the claim Mouffe has, '[a]lready appreciated insights from value pluralism in her agonistic pluralist theorising' (Yamamoto, 2020: 4). Yamamoto provides an excellent *précis* of Mouffe's argument for a democratic ethos, including a lucid heuristic representation. However, our conceptualisation of value pluralism, drawn from a more-than-political provenance, differs from Mouffe's. We draw our value pluralism from an interdisciplinary engagement with anthropology, moral philosophy and social theory in order to present a value pluralism that privileges the individual and the social rather than the political. We expand Mouffe's engagement with ethico-political democratic values to consider ethical and normative values beyond those tied to political conceptions of liberty and equality. Our aim is to gain greater insight into the working of agonistic pluralism in planning praxis.

The second is Yamamoto's desire for more clarity regarding the ontological claims in our argument. Yamamoto's request is reasonable, particularly given his own concerns with the ontological status of Mouffe's antagonism as presented in this journal (Yamamoto, 2017). We do not disguise that our paper is primarily concerned with planning praxis rather than ontological claims. We seek to develop a theoretically informed applied approach to the practice of planning and the wider politics of urban development.

Third, then, we respond to Yamamoto's call for clarity by briefly discussing the ontological framing of our conceptions of value pluralism, agonism and antagonism, and how this supports our modalities of antagonism.

Corresponding author:
Cameron McAuliffe, Western Sydney University, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith, Sydney, NSW 2751, Australia.
Email: c.mcauliffe@westernsydney.edu.au

On Mouffe, the good city and planning praxis

The agonistic pluralism of Mouffe finds its origins in Carl Schmitt's notion of the 'enemy'; based on the persistent antagonisms between the self and its constitutive outside, and Mouffe's moderation of this to produce the figure of the adversary, the friendly enemy, tied in agonistic engagement. The adversary occupies the realm of politics as a shared symbolic sphere of action, where her pluralism is drawn from the differing interpretations of the ethico-political principles of liberty and equality. In her agonistic pluralism, conflict remains, but the shared commitment to liberty and equality ensures that adversaries, while contesting differing interpretations of liberty and equality, nevertheless respect the right of others to hold these different interpretations (Mouffe, 2000: 102; 2013: 7).

In differentiating her focus on conflict in the form of persistent antagonism from the work of theorists of consensus politics, and specifically the communicative rationality of Habermas, Mouffe points to the central role of power. Its hegemonic articulation through discourse settles to produce a 'conflictual consensus', which nevertheless remains contingent. Following Gramsci, Mouffe's contingent hegemony persists only until there is a disarticulation of the nascent relations of power, through the action of persistent and ineradicable antagonism (counter-hegemonic practices), which leads to new (but never final) hegemonies (Mouffe, 2013: 17).

We draw on Mouffe's agonistic pluralism in our work as we find it a compelling argument, one that provides insights into rising disaffection with processes of communicative planning. However, there are 'sectoral issues' to consider in the application of Mouffe's political philosophy to the realm of planning (and urban studies more generally). As a discipline tied to the praxis of city building – and not merely the maintenance of democratic politics – urban planning has difficulties in the straightforward application of Mouffe's ideas. Purcell (2009) notes that under the conditions of neoliberalism that form the context for contemporary urban planning and development, the hegemonic relations of power resist easy disarticulation. Under these conditions, the application of Mouffe's agonistic pluralism to urban planning threatens to weaken institutional power and cement inequality in undemocratic processes. Pløger (2017) calls for a more practice focused engagement with these ideas as Mouffe and Gramsci's war of position does not belong to the sphere of civil society, but that of politics and political institutions. Bond (2011) notes that empirical work demonstrates that neither communicative rationality nor agonistic pluralism 'achieve their theoretical ideal' (p. 162). She proposes instead that these contrary theoretical positions be hybridised in order to better account for the empirical reality faced in planning and 'urban democracy'.

Mouffe has been critiqued for not paying enough attention to the normative claims of her agonistic pluralism. The focus on antagonism and hegemony in Mouffe's work emphasises the agonistic aspects of political life; too easily discarding or downplaying questions about the common good (Karagiannis and Wagner, 2008: 323). Yamamoto points to her ethico-political foundations in liberty and equality as sufficient for the realisation of a plural democratic ethos that guides what ought to happen. Yamamoto shows the relationship between the political and the ethical for Mouffe derives from the incomplete understanding of the grounded democratic principles of liberty and equality. But he

also alludes to the way her value pluralism does more than this, engaging with the passions and values that drive our adherence to particular subject positions. We accept this encapsulates Mouffe's engagement with the moral framing of politics. However, we feel that Mouffe's value pluralism fails to adequately account for what it is that persuades people to act democratically and adhere to an agonistic engagement guided by mutual respect (Jones, 2014: 14). Our broader engagement with value pluralism challenges the sufficiency of Mouffe's engagement with values.

On value pluralisms

The challenge we set ourselves in our paper was to extend the engagement with Mouffe in planning theory through a more-than-political conceptualisation of value pluralism in the hopes that this would better account for the plural ethical and normative values that are encountered in the politics of planning and urban development in praxis.

It is fair to say there is little consensus on what is meant by value pluralism in contemporary political theory. Value pluralism in political theory is generally limited to 'questions of what sort of restrictions government's can put on people's freedom to act according to their values' (Mason, 2018). As classically formulated by Isaiah Berlin, value pluralism is a plurality of radically distinct values or goods that often come into conflict, giving rise to hard choices (Crowder, 2014: 126). Berlin (2002) shies away from a succinct definition of value pluralism, but points to the foundational role of liberalism; a position more recently supported by Crowder (2014, 2015), who makes the case that value pluralism finds its best footing in political liberalism. In contrast, Crowder (2015: 549) argues that John Kekes and John Grey have sought to sever value pluralism from liberalism. Mouffe's value pluralism derives from the differing interpretations of the 'ethico-political' principles of liberty and equality, which Yamamoto reminds us form the relatively uncontested basis of liberal democratic thought. His heuristic representation in Figure 1 clearly shows the plural values derived from liberty and equality, which make up Mouffe's 'democratic ethos' (Bond, 2011; Mouffe, 2005). Yamamoto puts forward the position that Mouffe 'has already appreciated the insights' from value pluralism. In Mouffe's ethico-political value pluralism, the democratic ethos is the locus of ethical value, and liberty and equality form the normative values that motivate individual action. Her value pluralism is derived from the different interpretations of the political values of liberty and equality, with the pluralism deriving from her post-structuralist understanding of identity and discourse.

However, as we state at the outset of our paper, and reiterate here, we begin from a different understanding of value pluralism; one that engages with 'what matters to people' (Sayer, 2011) while recognising that values differ between different people (Graeber, 2013) and within the individual (Berlin, 2002). Mason notes the meaning of value pluralism differs across the disciplines of moral and political philosophy, and that there are difficulties reconciling these meanings. This renders interpretations of value pluralism through political theory as more focused on higher level political questions than on the empirical, lived experiences of value pluralism. Crowder makes a distinction between political, social and individual understandings of value pluralism (Crowder, 2014, 2015); noting that his own interpretation of value pluralism lends itself to the political realm. In

contrast, our value pluralism, derived as it is from approaches developed in moral philosophy and anthropology, alongside a critical social scientific approach to normativity and ethics in the social sciences, is more interested in the working through of incommensurable values at the individual and social levels; and what this might tell us about our engagement with the political. This is a broader engagement with values than we find in Mouffe's democratic ethos and deals more directly with the roiling passions of the social.

Our understanding of value pluralism finds its initial footing in moral philosophy, including a feminist ethics of care (Held, 2006), but finds its home in the conceptualisations of anthropologists and other critical social scientists who view value pluralism more broadly, as a way of understanding the plural and incommensurable 'regimes of value' (Appadurai, 1986) or 'spheres of value' (Graeber, 2001, 2013) that reflect an engagement with the world. This is less about the foundation of these values than about the way people organise their understanding of the world around them. We disagree with Yamamoto that regimes of value thus derived are merely the product of discourse, to be understood as empty signifiers. We instead subscribe to a more tactical humanism (Appadurai, 2004: 6), where 'universals are asymptotically approached goals, subject to endless negotiation, not based on prior axioms'. The axioms themselves, the groundings of our post-foundational engagement, are less our concern as they remain difficult to discern and play out through context. These groundings are more broadly conceived at the level of the individual and social, as products of practical reasoning, which guide ethical engagement (Sayer, 2011). The central feature of our value pluralism is not, then, the friend–enemy distinction in Mouffe, but the principle of the respect for plurality that defines the realisation of agonistic pluralism (Bond, 2011; Crowder, 2014, 2015).

A value pluralism built on practical reason and the respect for plurality can help us to better envisage how what Mouffe calls 'passion' drives social engagement and the formation of collective subjectivities. For Mouffe, these passions are held in check by democratic institutions. In the absence of a democratic outlet, 'the ground is laid for various forms of politics articulated around essentialist identities of a nationalist, religious or ethnic type, and for the multiplicities of confrontations over non-negotiable moral values' (Mouffe, 2013: 8). For us, this slippage from passions to moral essentialism in the absence of democratic institutions paints too stark a picture.[1] In the first instance, it relies on respect for plurality only being guaranteed through democratic institutions, and not being a possibility of relational sociality. It also denies the ontological plurality *within* individuals that moderates the strongest versions of essentialist moral relativism. Finally, it fails to articulate just how passions are manifest as non-negotiable moral values when cast free of the checks and balances of democratic institutions. It is in these lacunae that we feel a more-than-political engagement with the ethical and normative values underpinning value pluralism, and the social framing of the respect for plurality provides an opportunity to expand on Mouffe's work.

Rather than view social collectives as wholly constituted through relations of power, we see a role for an engagement with the ethical and normative beyond a democratic ethos that need not be at odds with Mouffe's core argument. This has similarities to William Connolly's 'agonistic respect', which provides for an ethos of pluralism (Connolly, 1995, 2005 see also Howarth, 2008). Mouffe claims that Connolly's respect for plurality does not deal with the limits of pluralism – the moment of decision that is

the product of relations of power and manifests as hegemony. It is the production of hegemony out of the plural contest over different interpretations of liberty and equality that provides the moment of closure that is constitutive of the political. In this case, Mouffe positions Connolly's agonistic respect as unable to conceive of this closure. Yet reciprocity built on mutual respect across difference is significant to Mouffe's agonistic pluralism (Bond, 2011: 170). We now turn to the final point, concerning reciprocity and praxis and the ontological claims in our own argument.

On praxis and ontology

In thinking through the ontological, we follow Bond (2011) in privileging Mouffe's ontology, based as it is on the political as a domain of persistent and ineradicable antagonism, as distinct to the ontic domain of politics with its radical contingency and potential for antagonism. Bond (2011: 170–171) makes the point that Mouffe's post-structural polemic against Habermas' 'high-modern' communicative rationality, hides the shared commitment to a contingent form of consensus at the core of both agonistic pluralism and the project of deliberative democrats. For Bond, this opens the opportunity to combine Mouffe's ontology with elements of Habermas' approach to rational argumentation, as played out through the work of Selya Benhabib and theorists of communicative planning (Bond, 2011: 170). It is worth dwelling momentarily on Bond's argument, published in this journal, in order to clarify how it influences our own work.

Bond points to the way a normative ethos might provide the basis for a democratic planning praxis built on the ontological basis of Mouffe. Mouffe's post-structuralist approach provides a broader ontological scope than the Kantian rationalism that underpins Habermas, allowing opportunity to engage with 'the already existing'. However, Bond and others point to the 'normative deficit' of Mouffe's agonistic pluralism, which tends towards relativism (see Bond, 2011: 172; also Barnett, 2004; Critchley, 2004; Karagiannis and Wagner, 2008). The democratic ethos of Mouffe rests on the contestable norms of reciprocity, equality and liberty, providing, as Yamamoto reminds us, an ethico-political basis for her agonistic pluralism. Bond points to this normative framework as being similar in form to Benhabib's non-foundational model of contestable meta-norms. For Bond, the 'degree of fixity' that form the groundings, or 'general meanings', in the working through of agonistic pluralism, can be supplied by the non-foundational deliberative democracy of Benhabib. This brings together the ontology of Mouffe's agonistic pluralism with the ontic engagement of more communicative approaches to planning. Where Mouffe fails to provide a 'procedural guide' (Bond, 2011: 173) to the realisation of her agonistic politics, Benhabib's model provides practical insights into how to achieve a contingent consensus.

In a similar vein, we build on Mouffe's ontology, privileging the ontological reciprocity present in both Mouffe and Benhabib, as a respect for pluralism. Where it is present it lays the ground for agonistic pluralism. The absence of a respect for pluralism *makes real* the potential for antagonism. In our case, working with resident action groups, this occurs in the ontic contestations over urban development. The principle of egalitarian reciprocity is one of the two 'moral rights' at the core of Benhabib's non-foundational deliberative approach, under which 'each individual has the same symmetrical rights to

various speech acts, to initiate new topics, to ask for reflection about the presuppositions of the conversations, and so on' (Benhabib, 1996: 78–79, in Bond, 2011: 173). For Bond, this egalitarian reciprocity, along with Benhabib's moral right of universal moral respect, provides the participatory ethos that augments Mouffe's ontology, providing a procedural path for planning.

As Bond (2011) notes, 'for agonistic pluralism to ever feature strongly in planning theory, at least some specificity as to how it is to be achieved is essential' (p. 175). We do not claim to have provided this 'specificity', but our project engages with the different modalities of antagonism bound to the ontic realm of politics to provide some insights into the operation of agonistic pluralism in urban development praxis. We differ from Benhabib (and Mouffe) in that we do not limit our value pluralism to a democratic ethos. We do this in order to remain open to a relational ethic of care and the possibilities derived from an 'ethnographic value pluralism' (Graeber, 2001, 2013) built on practical reasoning (Sayer, 2011, 2017). This may not provide a clear procedural approach to an agonistic politics as, say, Bond finds in Benhabib. But it does first and foremost engage with the value pluralism experienced by those involved and impacted by the processes of urban development; the understanding of which forms a necessary precursor to a democratic ethos.

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Note

1. Derrida's critique of Schmitt challenges the slippage from the enemy as an abstract notion to the enemy as a concrete human subject. Fritsch (2008) extends this discussion to include Mouffe's subsequent interpretation of the constitutive outside, softening the ontological separation of self and other through reference to Derrida's *différance*. For Fritsch, the antagonistic enemy as an idea does not lead to the social formation of antagonistic enemies as concrete human subjects. As such, he calls for greater focus on the empirical.

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