

‘Not Talking but Thinking: Democratic Deliberation in Ancient Greece’

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Biographical Information:

Daniela Cammack holds a BA in Modern History and English (Oxford 2002), an M.Phil. in Intellectual History and Political Thought (Cambridge 2005), and a Ph.D. in Political Theory (Harvard 2013). She is now a Junior Fellow in Harvard’s Society of Fellows. Her dissertation, Rethinking Athenian Democracy, was awarded Harvard’s Robert Noxon Toppan Prize for best dissertation in Political Science 2013. Her article ‘Aristotle on the Virtue of the Multitude,’ which challenges the epistemic interpretation of Aristotle’s defence of the political role of the multitude, recently appeared in Political Theory, and a second work of Aristotelian reinterpretation, ‘Aristotle’s Denial of Deliberation about Ends,’ will shortly be out in Polis. Her first book will be a study of Athenian democracy entitled Dikastic Democracy: How the Demos Ruled Classical Athens.

Paper Abstract:

Classical Athenian democracy is often described as “deliberative,” suggesting that political decisions were reached following group discussion. Yet of the three Greek verbs associated with “deliberation” in English, only two, “*dēmēgoreō*” and “*symbolouō*,” actually indicate speaking. The third, “*bouleō*,” could suggest speaking when used in the active voice, but was most commonly used in the middle voice (“*bouleoumai*”) to signify internal reflection. This is the voice invariably used to describe the activity of the Athenian assembly, and careful examination suggests that it also indicated internal reflection in this context. This has profound implications for our conception of classical Athenian politics. Athenian assemblygoers did not speak *with* each other:

rather, they were spoken *to* by a small number of self-selected *rhētores*, “politicians” or “advisors,” who by the very act of speaking marked their distinctness from ordinary citizens, whose tasks were to listen, judge and vote.

Author’s Note:

This paper is lifted from my dissertation and has not yet been revised. The revised version will be restructured to incorporate a good deal more material on contemporary deliberative democratic theory and will address more thoroughly both the philosophical and institutional implications of my argument. I’ll discuss this new material in my presentation.