

Understanding ‘Abnormal’ Public Discourses: Some Overlapping and Distinguishing Features of Dialogue and Deliberation

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Abstract

‘Dialogue’ and ‘deliberation’ are terms that have been invoked with increasing frequency during the emergence of the historically recent ‘participatory’ and ‘deliberative’ democratic movements. In this context, dialogue and deliberation constitute ‘abnormal’—i.e., non-traditional or atypical—kinds of talk. Unfortunately, in public meetings, community forums, and other ‘spaces’ in which democratic public discourse occurs (or is expected to occur), the meanings and applications of the terms are often conflated. This paper offers definitions that highlight where dialogue and deliberation overlap and where they differ. Our goal is to assist organisers, facilitators, and participants use the terms in ways that are clear, consistent, and productive.

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When people come together in public situations that are rife with cultural, moral, or practical problems and issues, the kinds of talk they engage in bear directly on both how the problem or issue is dealt with and on their relationships as members of a public. Unfortunately, it is common—indeed, we might even say ‘normal’—for participants to rely on ways of communicating such as ‘attempts to persuade, frustrated diatribe, and sometimes even violence’ (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 152).

Quintessentially ‘normal’ forms of political and civic talk such as public address, question-and-answer (as conducted in public hearings, for instance), and debate may seem necessary and innocuous by sheer virtue of their commonplaceness. Their normalcy is established and reinforced in both cultural and institutional ways. Although these modes of communication are often indispensable and fruitful, their monologic nature—i.e., speakers talk *at* or *to* each other rather than *with*—makes them unsuitable for some purposes and in some settings. In multi-ethnic contexts, for instance, in which various culturally-rooted reasoning styles encounter each other, conventional procedures for argumentation and debate may widen ideological and relational rifts rather than build consensus.

For this reason, scholars and practitioners of public participation in community-building and policymaking strive to foster what Richard Rorty terms ‘abnormal’ interaction. ‘Abnormal’ (communicative) interaction is ‘what happens when someone joins in the discourse who is ignorant of [the prevailing] conventions or [purposely] sets them aside’ (1979, p. 320). Seeking such interaction is not an activity aimed at simply eliminating or rejecting monologic genres of discourse like debate, since such forms do serve useful functions in certain contexts. Rather, it constitutes an effort to introduce into democratic public settings ways of talking that in fact complement ‘normal’ discourse but that traditionally have been minimised or even excluded. These ‘dialogic’ modes of communication enable participants to move beyond talking *at* or *to* each other in order to talk *with*—to speak integratively rather than competitively and divisively. The

application of 'abnormal' forms of talk thus allows participants to build trust and to explore problems and proposals in newfound collaborative ways.

In the broad theoretical and applied tradition of democratic thought and practice that includes 'participatory' (Barber, 1984) and 'deliberative' (Bessette, 1980) ideals, the two most celebrated and avidly-invoked kinds of abnormal discourse are 'dialogue' and 'deliberation.' These terms recur frequently in both the scholarly and non-scholarly literature pertaining to public participation—so much so that in recent years academics and practitioners have been compelled to lay out thick definitions in order to reduce or prevent unreflective usage, vagueness, obfuscation, and unintended consequences. (See, e.g., Stewart and Zediker, 2000, and Burkhalter, Gastil, & Kelshaw, 2002.) The result of such definitional labour is a working consensus—mostly terminological but also, to a degree, methodological—about what dialogue and deliberation are and how these discursive modes may be employed.

Nevertheless, participants in public meetings and other democratic gatherings often hear and experience 'dialogue' and 'deliberation' (or the verbs 'dialogue' [*sic*] and 'deliberate') uttered and applied by organisers and facilitators in ways that conflate the terms' meanings. The problem is that, although dialogue and deliberation have received considerable attention as distinct concepts and practices, the areas of overlap and difference have been insufficiently explored. In the present essay, I offer definitions that parse the terms as distinct but related (and valuable) modes of public discourse. In explicating their conceptual moorings and practical utilities, I treat dialogue and deliberation as special kinds of talk with specific characteristics and requisite attitudes, some of which overlap and some of which diverge. My purpose is to help organisers, facilitators, and participants of public meetings and other democratic activities to recognise not only *when* abnormal kinds of talk may be appropriately applied, but also *which* kinds.

Dialogue Defined

Conceptually and practically, *dialogue* has significant etymological moorings. Marrying the Greek 'dia' and 'logos' yields a preliminary definition of 'meaning through'. That is, dialogue is a mode of discourse in which shared understandings emerge *through* a process of participants engaging in a particular sort of communicative interaction (Bohm, 1996, p. 6). The achievement of genuinely *shared* understanding requires what Gadamer (1995) calls a 'fusion of horizons' (p.

306)—an encounter in which participants’ experiences and perspectives generate the potential for synthesis. As Anderson, Cissna, and Arnett (1994) remark, ‘Dialogue implies more than a simple back-and-forthness of messages in interaction; it points to a particular process and quality of communication in which the participants “meet,” which allows for changing and being changed’ (p. 10). Central to this conception is the point that dialogic speech events are not occasions for mere expression, but for collaboratively forging new ways of speaking, understanding, and acting. In a word, dialogue is potentially ‘transcendent’ (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 8)—it is capable not merely of bridging, but of synthesising diverse cultural and ideological matters.

Anderson et al.’s (1994) description of dialogue as tied to a ‘particular process’ (p. 10) should not be mistaken to mean that it is guided by any strict methodology. There are numerous models of dialogue that span various contexts, and even these models are fluid (Phelps, 1996). Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) attest to the ambiguous and contextual nature of dialogue-in-process when they describe their experiences with events organized by the Public Dialogue Consortium: ‘The PDC is eclectic and creative. It borrows established techniques from other programs, adapts these, and creates new synthetic forms’ (p. 199). As Anderson et al. (1994) explain,

Human dialogue does not just happen, as if sunshine suddenly replaces a thunderstorm. But neither can dialogue be planned, pronounced, or willed. Where we find dialogue, we find people who are open to it, people who do not renounce it cynically, but no expert technicians can merchandise or guarantee this relational quality (p. xxi).

Although dialogue admits of no specific methodology, it does possess certain attributes that are essential to its definition (Anderson et al., 1994). Dialogue emphasises several specific discursive qualities and requires its participants to maintain a number of specific attitudes. Together, these qualities and attitudes mark out dialogue as a speech genre unique among kinds of democratic talk.

Characteristics of Dialogue

Dialogue may be described as a particular kind of conversation. According to Chasin et al. (1996), participants in such a conversation

speak openly and listen respectfully and attentively. Dialogue excludes attack and defense and avoids derogatory attributions based on assumptions about the motives, meanings, or character of others. In dialogue, questions are sincere, stimulated by curiosity and interest. Answers often disclose what previously has been unspoken. (p. 325)

This description identifies some dialogic behaviours—such as inquiry and reflection—that are tied to dialogue's character. Dialogue involves many qualities, but here I want to address four 'core' features: inter-subjectivity, openness, relinquishing of control, and destabilisation.

Inter-subjectivity. Dialogue is an 'inter-subjective' enterprise. Buber's (1965) distinction between 'I/Thou' and 'I/It' forms of relating lies at the heart of the idea of inter-subjectivity.* In dialogue, participants relate to each other as subjects rather than objects, and possess abilities to not only affect but to be affected by the other. Dialogue is fundamentally relational and bi- or multilateral, not causal and unilateral (as when a subject acts upon an object). Hence the meanings produced through dialogue are shared and 'public'; they do not 'belong' to the individuals in whose heads talk originates (Craig, 1998). Instead, meaning exists 'in between' the parties to the dialogue, who have joint roles in its manufacture (Gadamer, 1995).

It is important to understand that dialogue in the context of public problems and issues is *not* an essentially intimate form of conversation. In public dialogue, participants' inter-subjective relationships differ from those between, say, friends or family members. Even though participants in public dialogue may forge new, more subtle understandings of each other, their talk features aspects of themselves that pertain more to culture bases and social roles than to 'personal' qualities. Nor is public dialogue similar to therapeutic talk between a psychologist and client. In therapy, there is mutuality in terms of contact, trust, and shared concern for the client's well-being, and this mutuality amounts to what some have called a kind of dialogue that produces collaboratively emergent meanings (Cissna & Anderson, 1998). But in the therapeutic setting there are inflexible norm-governed role and status differences that prohibit the kind of mutuality possible in some other relational settings. Although the psychologist must achieve

* Buber (1965) understands communication as occurring along a dialectical continuum. Therefore, 'I/It' and 'I/Thou' forms of relating should not be misconceived as binary categories, but rather as opposed poles on a continuous scale.

empathy (not sympathy, which is participation in emotion) with her client and must ‘mirror’ the world from the client’s perspective, the reverse is not true (Friedman, 1985).

In contrast, the structural roles and communicative norms in public meetings—including those related to race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and so on—are more historically and socio-politically malleable. As participants encounter each other dialogically in the context of a shared (albeit differently perceived) public problem, they may experience a shift in their respective understandings of that problem itself and of who they are for each other. Such shifts result from participants’ developing inter-subjectivity as their disparate perceptions and meanings are highlighted, reflected upon, and reconciled through dialogic talk.

Openness. Dialogue’s second fundamental quality is openness. Openness here has two applications: First, it applies to how participants both disclose and listen to each other’s information, value judgements, and ideas. Second, openness applies to the process of meaning-making, which by its nature is continuous, never finished, ‘open-ended’.

When partners in communication engage in dialogue, they mutually employ what Stewart, Zediker, and Witteborn (2005) label ‘open sensitive response options’ (pp. 110-113). This means they disclose themselves and perceive the others as unique individuals, not as interchangeable or substitutable representatives of a given type. They regard each other as the locus of non-measurable quality, rather than as a ‘read-out’ of various quantitative indicators. They are responsive to one another, not merely reactive each other’s surface presentation. They are reflectively aware of the communicative choices they make. They treat each other as addressable rather than as an abstraction that cannot be addressed (Shotter, 1993; Stewart et al., 2005). In short, they open themselves to the possibility of being affected by one another.

Dialogue is open as well in the sense that meanings are always emergent and never complete. It is a ‘ceaseless interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies’ (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 3). Agreements that arise in the course of dialogue cannot be mistaken for fixed products, but instead should be viewed as temporary moments of ‘touching down’ in an ongoing ‘polyphony of dialectical voices [that] struggle against [and with] one another to be heard, and in that struggle . . . set the stage for future struggles’ (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 4). In this sense, dialogue is always mutable, always unbounded.

Relinquishing of control. Dialogue’s third essential attribute is participants’ relinquishing of control. The giving up of control has two consequences: meanings are jointly constructed and

provisional rather than authoritatively established; there is always a possibility of surprise. When participants speak and listen dialogically, it is as if they (in Stewart et al.'s metaphor, 2005, pp. 176-177) are gathered around a spinning potter's wheel. Each throws clay onto the spinning formation and contributes to its shaping, but no one person has control over the shape that emerges. As participants' experiential understandings 'fuse', meanings are co-constructed (Gadamer, 1995). The participation by many and the absence of control by any multiply the number of potential outcomes and reduce the predictability of all. Hence there is the possibility of surprise. Because participants are spontaneous and responsive to one another, they cannot know what they will say and do, either individually or collectively.

Some readers may react to the metaphor of the potter's wheel metaphor with a sense that it depicts a process that is disorderly and an outcome that is problematic, perhaps even undesirable. Such a reaction is not unreasonable. Compared to some other kinds of public talk, dialogue is 'messy'. Its procedures may emerge instead of being prescribed, may change instead of remaining fixed. Its outcomes often are not 'outcomes' at all in the sense of being actionable or even readily described. If the chief benefit is the formation or strengthening of public relationships, there is apt to be little in the way of concrete, immediate evidence of improvement in what is in any case an intangible.

The metaphor can be questioned as well from the standpoint of the distribution of influence. Culturally and institutionally enabled currencies of power seldom are enjoyed in equal measure, even in putative democracies. Won't there be a potter with the 'upper hand' on the clay? With stronger fingers or a larger supply of clay? If so, it only makes the point that dialogue cannot be imposed or maintained from outside. Participants must come to the project with a mutual willingness to exercise restraint in the use of their own assets or resources, and to build up those of their fellows who begin with less.

Destabilisation. Dialogue is also destabilising. Destabilisation should not be confused with insurgence, which may involve subversion, agitation, or overt rebellion. At all times, dialogue's implied inclusiveness must be maintained in a way that honours all participants, including defenders of the status quo. If confused with sedition, the notion of destabilisation could pit, say, community activists against public officials, thereby reducing prospects for dialogic contact and transcendence. Instead, destabilisation must be understood as participants' continuous reflective questioning of extant norms and rules, which embody often-unrecognised ideological biases and

consequences. Yet the fact that participants in dialogue negotiate the terms of their interaction and the meanings that emerge out of it does not entail that exogenous norms and rules are not real or valuable; indeed, without cultural traditions and institutional rules there would be ‘nowhere to stand’, no ground upon which anyone could build. As participants reflectively negotiate their relationships, interactions, and meanings, new norms and rules emerge that are contextually indigenous. In this way, dialogue constructively and productively destabilises—if only temporarily or instrumentally—conventions and expectations that participants bring with them to the encounter, freeing participants to discover and create new ways of relating and addressing shared problems and needs.

Dialogic Attitudes

For dialogic qualities to manifest themselves in a public speech event, participants must maintain specific attitudes. From their review of a wide range of literature on dialogic communication, Stewart and Logan (1998) derive three general attitudes that help dialogue to occur: ‘availability’, ‘flexibility’, and ‘commitment to the conversation’ (pp. 262-266).

Availability. Availability means ‘bringing some relevant aspects of yourself to the conversation’ (Stewart & Logan, 1998, p. 262) while at the same time being ‘mindful’ of what other participants bring (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992, p. 240). In part, this is what Rogers (1980) means by ‘empathy’. While not dismissing his or her own subjectivity and commitments, an empathic participant is ‘sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person’ (Rogers, 1980, p. 142). Such sensitivity involves an imaginative effort to perceive ‘the other’s internal frame of reference accurately, understanding another life from the other’s perspective, while not relinquishing one’s own identity’ (Cissna & Anderson, 1998, p. 92). The resulting attitude allows for the legitimation of alien perspectives, information, and ways of speaking, and thus makes possible the establishment of common ground where there was none before.

Flexibility. Flexibility has to do with accommodation—aligning participants’ different ways of speaking so that a climate of defensiveness does not arise (Gibb, 1961). Specifically, in order to be flexible participants must use descriptive rather than evaluative language, and emphasise spontaneity instead of strategy in their talk. Descriptions enable participants to refrain from making judgements of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ and to focus on relatively neutral observations. This

allows them 'to remain more flexible in responding to the changes in [their] own feelings and attitudes' (Stewart & Logan, 1998, p. 263). Spontaneous talk situates participants in the 'here and now' of their conversation, and allows them to be direct as well as sensitive and responsive. In his observations of business meetings, Gibb (1961) noticed that defensive climates were fueled by what listeners perceived as 'strategic' talk, i.e., as prepared (rather than immediately responsive) and manipulative utterances that implied hidden agendas. If speakers are honest *and* responsive to what others say—in both content and tone—listeners are likely to be less defensive, and a climate for dialogue is better established.

Commitment to the conversation. The third attitude dialogic participants must maintain is commitment to the conversation: 'the willingness to focus on what's going on between [oneself] and the other [participants], the disposition to be present to [them] for the time being' (Stewart & Logan, 1998, p. 265). This 'being in the moment' allows one to remain committed to one's own perspective while being provisional in how one speaks and listens. A key to maintaining commitment to the conversation is to display an attitude of equality instead of superiority (Gibb, 1961). This diminishes the urge to demand others' coherence with one's perspective and cultural way of speaking (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 19). An attitude of equality is crucial because dialogic environments are marked by efforts to work toward egalitarianism—socially, ideologically, and procedurally. Adopting an attitude of equality does not mean that equality can be actualised in practice, because power relations are ubiquitous and are always forming even in dialogic encounters such as collaboratively managed conflicts (Wilmot & Hocker, 2007). An attitude of equality, though, helps participants stay aware of how power dynamics affect their communication, thereby enabling them to strive toward integrative rather than distributive power management.

The value of dialogic attitudes. When participants do not maintain one or more of the foregoing attitudes, the effort to achieve dialogue is hindered. Consider this example from a newspaper report (Thorbourne, 2002): 'It was billed as a "Community Dialogue Session". It came across more like a verbal wrestling match between skeptical neighborhood residents and [university] professors who seemed caught off guard by impertinent questions from an uncooperative student body'. (p. A4). The stated purpose of this 'Community Dialogue Session', which was funded in part by a federal grant, was to help residents of impoverished neighborhoods organise pending revitalisation work. Paid facilitators (all white university

faculty) and community members (mostly black) were unable to align their cultural ways of speaking. Community members, angry about the fact that the white professors were being paid for their participation, charged that the professors ‘seemed to assume that they were dealing primarily with poor, uneducated people’ (p. A4). One community member asked the facilitators if they ‘had ever had an “a ha!” moment in which they realised that most persons in the community didn’t need the workshops that were being offered’ (p. A4). In response, a facilitator praised the ‘good points’ and invited community members to participate on the advisory committee. This was perceived as ‘patronizing’ (p. A4).

Regardless of who bore responsibility for this dialogic failure, it is evident that speaking styles and attitudes were not aligned, as dialogue requires. Attitudes of inequality, the perception of hidden agendas, and the inability to listen empathically prevented dialogue from taking place. The result was defensiveness on both sides, and mutual anger that generated opposition (Natale, Brook, & Kelshaw, 2007).

Deliberation Defined

The term ‘deliberation’, or ‘public deliberation’, is closely associated with the idea of democracy itself. This association owes in part to the centrality of deliberation in many significant yet diverse writings on democracy, ranging ideologically from Hobbes (1994) to Mill (1972) to Habermas (1979) to Gutmann and Thompson (1996). It owes as well to its conceptual tie to rationality, which often is invoked to give legitimacy to democracy’s processes and outcomes (Cohen, 1997).^{*} Some writers even presume that deliberation is an inherently democratic kind of discourse because it embodies such core democratic values as egalitarianism, inclusion, and participation (Mathews, 1994; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997).

In recent years, deliberation has become an increasingly central concern of communication scholars (Burkhalter et al., 2002; Gastil & Levine, 2005; McLeod et al., 1999; Osborn & Osborn, 1991; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997), public opinion researchers (Page, 1996; Yankelovich, 1999), and political philosophers (Bohman, 1996; Cohen, 1997; Guttmann & Thompson, 1996) who wonder about its use and potential in contemporary American life. In discussing deliberation as

^{*} In Western culture, logic historically (with the exception of the early 18-century Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment and intermittent intervals since that time) has trumped emotion and other forms of reason in legitimating public policy. Aristotle (1991), for one, distinguished between three bases of persuasion in civic space—ethos (appeals to authority), pathos (appeals to emotion), and logos (appeals to reason)—and deemed logos to be the most effective and sound.

part and parcel of democracy, deliberation-minded scholars and practitioners have fostered, perhaps, a faulty sense that it is *the* democratic kind of talk and that it is performed regularly and competently. It is more likely, though, that deliberation in American life is 'the exception rather than the rule' (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 8). In this sense, it may be considered what Rorty (1979) calls an 'abnormal' mode of public talk.

'Deliberation' serves specialised terminological purposes in disciplines ranging from robotics to law to healthcare (Gastil & Kelshaw, 2002). Even within the related fields of political communication, political science, communication, public administration, and policy studies, defining the term succinctly is hindered by its application in a wide range of contexts and processes and by the term's somewhat casual use. Despite a basic—and well-grounded—understanding that deliberation consists of 'reasoning on the merits' (Besette, 1994, p. 46) and 'considering different points of view and coming to a reasoned decision' (Abelson et al., 2003, p. 241), the concept is potentially 'a moving target that many seek but none can hit' (Burkhalter et al., 2002, p. 4).

Fortunately, though, work conducted over many years by deliberation scholars and practitioners (such as associates of the Kettering Foundation; see e.g. London, 2004) yields a sense of deliberation's defining features. These features distinguish deliberation as a specific type of political discourse that 'is a public consideration about how problems are to be defined and understood, what the range of possible solutions might be, and who should have the responsibility for solving them' (Roberts, 1997). Immediately, however, defining 'deliberation' using these features leads to some confusion because they resemble and overlap with deliberation's discursive cousin, dialogue. For this reason I will now consider what deliberation shares with dialogue as well what makes it distinctive among modes of public talk.

Dialogic Features of Deliberation

Before addressing what distinguishes deliberation from other kinds of political talk it is useful to recognise what it shares with dialogue. Burkhalter et al. (2002) explain that deliberation has so much in common with dialogue that it is fundamentally dialogic (p. 17). The dialogic qualities and attitudes described above apply equally to deliberation, and overlap with some of the same democratic values.

Cohen (1997) identifies four aspects of the ‘ideal deliberative procedure’ in civic contexts (pp. 22-23). These four aspects are congruent with the qualities and attitudes of dialogue found in deliberation. They also invoke core democratic values that reinforce the assumed connection between democracy and deliberation. These four aspects are: (a) participants’ freedom from constraints imposed by authority; (b) participants’ offering of reasons in advocating and criticising policies; (c) equality of participants; and (d) group effort toward building consensus.

Participants’ freedom from authority. Cohen’s (1997) first element of deliberation is the freedom of participants from the imposition of constraints by rules, norms, or persons in position of authority. Freedom here applies to two dimensions of the deliberative process. First, participants must be permitted to consider any and all proposals that arise in the discussion without exogenous limitations. Second, they must have confidence that whatever decision the group makes may be acted upon without institutional coercion or impediment. Deliberation thus rejects exogenous authority in favour of joint control. This does not mean that public deliberation in a democratic society happens in a vacuum; there must be exogenous structures and rules—legal, ethical, procedural, etc.—in place in order for deliberation to occur in the first place. Moreover, deliberation cannot take place without *some* discursive rules and limits. Any kind of interaction requires regulatory structure of some sort. In deliberation, participants jointly set the terms of their deliberation. They negotiate the framework of their conversation in a collaborative manner, jointly empowered by what is happening *within* their meeting.

The use of reason to support proposals and criticisms. The second element of deliberation is the giving of reasons to support proposals and criticisms. The emphasis of deliberation on ‘rationality’ is a feature that distinguishes it from dialogue. But ‘reason’ in this context does not necessarily mean deductive and inductive logic, which is a particular form of reason—the form that has become dominant in ‘the West’. ‘*Practical*’ reason—the norm-governed activity of giving reasons (i.e., considerations that support judgements of good and bad, right and wrong)—is culturally and temporally contingent. Hence what qualified as reasoning, what counts as ‘*a* reason’, and what is deemed ‘reasonable’ can (and do) vary substantially from culture to culture. The more culturally diverse the deliberating group, the more culturally diverse forms of practical reason may affect participants’ ability (and willingness) to think and talk together (Sanders, 1997; Warnick & Manusov, 2000). The ability of participants to collaboratively negotiate for their group a set of rules for accepting or rejecting reasons and forms of reasoning relates directly

to dialogic attitudes of flexibility and equality, which in turn are connected with the possibility and the quality of joint control.

In contrast to dialogue, which is essentially open-ended and 'messy' as pluralistic reasoning plays out, deliberation is directed toward closure in the form of a shared judgement of decision. As a consequence, participants in deliberation must identify and cull approaches to reasoning that are unacceptable to the group. At the very least, the diverse kinds of reasoning that may be employed by members of a culturally-diverse group are apt to present participants with a substantial challenge. How can they go about the task of culling forms or facets of reasoning that cannot win broad acceptance within the group? Specifically, how can they achieve this goal in a manner that preserves the dialogic spirit?

Instead of competing to convince others that one reasoning style is better than others; instead of seeking compromise; and instead of settling for the mechanical 'decision' method of majority rule (three approaches to conflict resolution that reflect 'either/or' (i.e., 'distributive') thinking, Wilmot & Hocker, 2007), deliberants should strive toward what Thompson (2002) calls 'ethical collectivism'. 'All would be well,' Thompson writes, 'if individuals could discover, as the result of discourse and reflection, a position that all can endorse and thus regard as true. But generally such a consensus cannot be achieved, no matter how earnestly it is sought' (p. 13). Hence the kind of agreement that deliberants should aspire to is a 'constructed consensus' that is 'based upon the collective consideration of the moral opinions of participants in discourse' and that is deemed acceptable if interactants mutually agree that the discursive process is justified, that all cogent views have been considered, and that 'the conclusion agreed upon, judged in the light of the standards of the procedure, is better than any other proposal that has been considered' (p. 2).

Equality. The third key element of deliberation identified by Cohen (1997) is equality. Equality means that the rules of the deliberative procedure should neither advantage nor disadvantage any individual. Participants should have equal and adequate opportunities to speak (Gastil, 1993) and should maintain an egalitarian collective without concretised hierarchical divisions. (If the group requires differentiation of roles—placing one or more members in a position of leadership, for example—it will be best to rotate those roles. This should help prevent stratification.) Inclusion is part and parcel of equality, as it promotes voicing and legitimation of minority perspectives that work against 'groupthink' (Janis, 1972). The more inclusive the group, the better deliberation will be. Diversity helps group members challenge

prevailing rules and norms, and forge new ways of speaking and thinking about their issues. If diverse perspectives are discouraged in deliberative settings, there is little potential for deliberation to produce synthetic and innovative—or at least roundly considered—outcomes. Such outcomes are deliberation’s general goal.

Group effort toward consensus. The final aspect of deliberation identified by Cohen (1997) is group effort toward consensus. There are a variety of democratic decision-making methods that may be appropriate in different deliberative contexts: consensus, majority rule voting, proportional outcomes, and mixed methods (Gastil, 1993). Similarly, there are a variety of formal means for deliberating toward such decisions, including those prescribed in *Robert’s Rules of Order* (Robert, 2000), secularized derivatives of Quaker practices (Atlee & Zubizarreta, n.d.), ‘dynamic facilitation’ (Rough, 1997), and many more. Consensus may not be appropriate or feasible in every deliberative setting (Sager & Gastil, 1999), so deliberation need not involve or result in consensus in order to be bona fide. Cohen (1997) emphasises a *spirit* of consensus as an aspect of ideal deliberation because it reminds group members that they are bound by common goals.

Distinguishing Features of Deliberation

Despite deliberation’s dialogic qualities, it differs from dialogue in some important ways. Its distinguishing features are rooted in the term’s etymology and history, as well as in the cultural understandings of those who use the term in contemporary American organisational contexts (Gastil & Kelshaw, 2002). Deliberation’s three fundamentally distinctive characteristics involve task closure, focus on policy issues, and rational weighing of evidence. Concisely put, deliberation is a small-group, discussion-based approach to deciding future courses of action based on careful weighing of evidence. This definition sets deliberation apart from dialogue, which does not necessarily strive for the closed-endedness of decision-making, concern the future tense, or privilege logic and factual evidence.

Task closure. The first of these three characteristics concerns task closure. Dialogue has the chief goal of transforming ideologies and relationships through transcendent ways of speaking. It carries a presumption that such changes in ideas and relationships are the result of an ‘ongoing interplay between oppositional features’ (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 6) that appears as ‘ongoing messiness’ (p. 3). The outcome of dialogue is something continuous and complex,

such as a relationship. In other words, dialogue's chief 'product' is the process itself. Gastil & Kelshaw (2002), assessing dialogue's and deliberation's terminological competition 'for market share in the discourse of public participation', conclude that in American organisational applications dialogue connotes 'open exploration rather than decision making' (p. 55). Deliberation retains key dialogic features, including a certain degree of openness, but it is much more teleological. Its goal is to produce something concrete, such as a policy decision or formal recommendation.

Concern for the future tense. The second important aspect of deliberation's connection to policymaking is its concern for the future tense. In American criminal procedure, for example, deliberation is group decision-making* that considers facts in the past (guilt or innocence) as well as courses of future action (sentencing). But the language of civic participation retains and advances only the latter. This reflects an understanding of deliberation that dates to ancient Greek democracy. Aristotle (1991) distinguished between forensic (*dikanikon*), occasional (*epideiktikon*), and deliberative (*symboleutikon*) civic discourses. These three types represent, respectively, past, present, and future tenses. Deliberative speech deals with the prospective making of policy issues. Though it requires knowledge of past facts and present conditions, deliberative policymaking is essentially a 'future tense' activity. Dialogue, in contrast, may focus more on current attitudes, beliefs, and values. While the prospect of future action may hang over dialogic discussion, the goal of dialogue is not necessarily or even chiefly to decide upon such action.

Concern for analytic consideration of sound evidence. The third major feature of deliberation is its concern for analytic consideration of sound evidence—a concern that dialogue, which is more permissibly emotional, may not have. Habermas (1984), for one, understood reason as the hallmark of ideal public speech, which deliberation (in his conception) embodies. Although Western culture generally values Aristotelian (1991) logic as the basis of valid reasoning, it is crucial to recognise that modes of reasoning are 'appropriate' and 'valid' only in cultural (Warnick & Manusov, 2000) and contextual (Perelman, 1982) terms. If a deliberative body is diverse, then participants will bring different communicative expectations and standards with them to their interaction. Regardless of their cultural communicative preferences, all

* In some contexts, juridical deliberation is referred to as 'deliberations' (plural). This usage replaces concern for the group process with concern for the individual decisions of each juror, privileging individual over group work.

participants must be able to articulate individual interests (Sanders, 1997) and policy preferences (Gastil, 1993) in ways that are understood by others, even if when understood those interests and preferences do not meet with agreement. If participants are not reflective and clear about their differing standards for evaluating each other's appeals and concomitant evidential support, their communication may fail to align or, worse, fall subject to unrecognised or unacknowledged power imbalances (Mansbridge, 1990; Sanders, 1997).

If, on the other hand, participants are explicit about their communicative expectations and standards, they may negotiate means for both deeming evidence legitimate and for reasoning about it. While a purely dialogic event may be 'successful' in its open-ended questioning and potential deconstruction of normative standards, deliberation requires normative questioning and *reconstruction* if decision-making tasks are to be completed. In light of the task-closure dimension that dialogue does not necessarily have, deliberation requires participants to share norms in pursuit of a common good (Bohman, 1996). What is important to deliberation is that such norms be negotiated and understood by participants collaboratively rather than in ways that foster hierarchical opposition and argumentative competition.

Conclusion

Organisers, facilitators, and participants in public meetings and other democratic public interactions benefit greatly when their discursive repertoires are expanded beyond monologic kinds of talk such as public address, question/answer, and debate. The recent and ongoing surge in concern for dialogue and deliberation, which is occurring on both theoretical and applicative fronts, is valuable and is producing useful understandings of these modes of talk and how they may be effectively employed. The conceptual and practical relationship between dialogue and deliberation, however, is often misunderstood, blurred, or obscured. This occurs because the concepts reside in different academic enclaves (e.g., interpersonal communication and political science), because they share dialogic features (which makes them appear closely related or even synonymous), and because both lack a strict procedural methodology.

This essay's purpose has been to set the concepts side by side in order to explicate their commonalities and differences. Perhaps as a result, users of the concepts will be prompted to consider how these distinctive modes can be appropriately applied toward particular ends. At the very least, perhaps the definitions offered here will enable theorists and practitioners to

understand and apply the terms in clear and effective ways. The traditional reliance on so-called 'normal' kinds of talk in public meetings and other democratic public discursive interactions limits our potential for effective public participation and inclusive policymaking. The prevalence of monologic public discourse widens cultural and community fault lines, impedes clear and shared understandings of public issues, and disallows collaborative and innovative policymaking. Dialogue and deliberation, then, are valuable 'abnormal' modes of discourse that provide important antidotes. Given how these concepts and practices overlap and diverge in their meanings, great care must be taken to utter the terms and implement the modes in appropriate contexts, for appropriate purposes.

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