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Discourse and Coordination: Modes of Interaction and their Roles in Political Decision-making¹

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Collectively binding decisions can be taken hierarchically, by means of majority rule or through communication. In democracies, hierarchical decisions must be made legitimate through elections, and in all regimes, decisions are prepared through communication. The success of deliberative democracy has in the last two decades shifted the focus of democratic theory, and increasingly also of empirical political science, from matters of aggregation and regulation towards communication. That is, it has shifted the focus from the taking of decisions towards their making.

The idea that political decisions should be pursued through an argumentative exchange of reasons is the at core of the theory of deliberative democracy.² Its promise is that such exchange will not only

¹ I thank Martin Cremer, Simon Niemeyer and Katrin Toens, as well as an anonymous reviewer for the JPP for very helpful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this paper.

² For accounts of deliberative democracy, see, for example: Gutmann and Thompson 1996;

lead to decisions that are more likely to be reasonable and just, but that it will also further agreement or even consensus among its participants. The theory assumes that the exchange of reasons in communicative interaction forms and transforms political preferences, and that if the interaction is sufficiently deliberative, they are transformed for the better. Preferences evolving from deliberation are expected to be better informed and less self-interested: besides the own perspective, they take into account the knowledge, experiences and interests of others.

As deliberative democracy becomes more influential not only in theory, but also in democratic practice, there is an increasing expectation to justify its empirical premises, make more explicit its suggestions regarding institutionalisation, and clarify its role in the democratic process.³ The growing body of empirical research on deliberation⁴ competes, in so far as its descriptive assumptions are concerned, with theories of (international) bargaining and negotiation. Arguing and bargaining have been set up in the literature as alternative modes of interaction.⁵ This dichotomy is doubly misleading, however: it suggests that actors are free to choose between them, regardless of institutional context and interest

Bohman 1996; Dryzek 2000; and Goodin 2003. See also collections by: Bohman and Rehg 1997; Elster 1998; Macedo 1999; and Fishkin and Laslett 2003.

³ See Mutz 2008; Thompson 2008.

⁴ See Bächtiger et al. 2010.

⁵ See, for example, Risse 2000.

constellations, and it suggests that decisions can be viewed either entirely in terms of (moral) truth or in terms of interests.

In this article, I will argue that political decisions always have both informative and distributive aspects, and that decision-making processes and decisions must do justice to both of them in order to qualify as legitimate and be publicly acceptable. From this assumption, I derive two requirements for decision-making to be successful: it must enable discourse and it must enable coordination. The combination of the properties of discursiveness and coordinativeness yields four ideal-typical modes of interaction: discussion, deliberation, bargaining and debate. I try to show that this typology not only provides useful reference points for empirical analysis, but also allows for a more realistic view on the role of deliberation in democratic politics. I thus illustrate how these modes of interaction are and can be institutionalised in political reality, and discuss their respective roles in decision-making. In conclusion, I advocate a sequential model of deliberative democracy, which sticks to the central importance of deliberation while acknowledging the essential functions of non-deliberative modes of interaction.

1. Information and Distribution in Political Decisions

Epistemic models of democracy regard political decision-making as a quest for the right answer or correct solution, while economic ones view decisions in terms of the distribution of material benefits. Both views are

overly restrictive. They fail to do justice to the complexity of political decision-making in modern societies because, as I will argue in this section, political decisions always have both informative *and* distributive aspects. The popularity of theories like deliberative democracy, which have a strong focus on problem-solving, may be explained by the increased awareness of both the salience of distributive conflicts in political decision-making, and the complexity and uncertainty of such decision-making.⁶

To illustrate the informational aspect of political decisions, take the appraisal of new drugs and technologies to be funded by publicly sanctioned health care systems as an example. The pharmaceutical industry comes up with new and expensive developments almost on a daily basis, while budgetary constraints continue to increase. Although companies themselves need to prove that the benefits of a new drug outweigh its risks in order to have it licensed, its comparative effectiveness and the costs to the system are still more difficult to assess. Only experts—in this case physicians, pharmacists, epidemiologists and health economists—may have access to the relevant information and the ability to assess it. It is not just elected representatives in the parliament, but also administrators in the respective ministries, who tend to be overtaxed by such decisions, which is why most countries have set up

⁶ To many, epistemic accounts of democracy, including models of deliberative democracy, may seem less plausible in heterogeneous and complex societies. However, as Habermas has convincingly argued, these very conditions call for new ways of realizing democratic legitimacy, such as deliberation (see, for example Habermas 2005).

more or less independent expert bodies to deal with health technology assessment and appraisal. The popularity of these institutions varies, but the principle of delegation to experts appears to be publicly accepted where a consensus on goals can be presupposed and where there are justified concerns regarding the influence of short-sighted party politics.⁷

Information need not be narrowly conceived of as factual information, but may also be seen as information about relevant values, norms and affected interests, as well as on the distribution of these in the community. Especially for bioethical questions, a large number of 'ethics commissions' exist across the world and are involved in decision making. Members are typically philosophers, lawyers and clerics. For the ethical aspects of a decision, however, the delegation to experts becomes somewhat more problematic. Even if experts are motivated by a conception of the common good, there may be as many different opinions on what actually constitutes it as there are members of a community. And even if there is a consensus on basic values (e.g. the ones written in a constitution), their weighting and aggregation for a specific decision will lead to very different results. It is hardly surprising that ethics commissions tend to have difficulty arriving at consensual decisions, and if they do, this is often made possible only by some kind of bargaining or implicit majority decision.⁸

Not only are disagreements about the common good likely to remain,

⁷ Cf. Pettit 2003.

⁸ On the disagreement of 'ethical' experts, see Bogner and Menz 2002.

but there is also a legitimate role for self-interest.⁹ Deliberative democracy typically assumes that deliberation induces citizens to abstract from their individual interests and base decisions on judgments about the common good.¹⁰ But as Mansbridge et al. forcefully argue, self-interest cannot so easily be discarded. This is (among other reasons) because nearly all decisions have effects on the distribution of important goods; that is, they necessarily have a distributive aspect to which decision-making has to do justice.

Again, take the appraisal of drugs and the allocation of health care as an example. In 2006, the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) in the UK issued an appraisal of the drug Herceptin (Roche) for the adjuvant therapy of breast cancer.¹¹ Herceptin costs around \$ 50,000 per patient and year and has been shown to reduce the probability of the cancer returning after operation and chemotherapy.¹² The Primary Care Trusts, which administer health care budgets at a local level and have to implement NICE decisions, did not receive additional money to fund the provision of Herceptin. Accordingly, they had to cut down expenses elsewhere in order to stay within their budget. A team of oncologists from the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital Trust has calculated that the

⁹ Cf. Mansbridge et al. 2010.

¹⁰ For example, Estlund 1990.

¹¹ National Institute of Clinical Evidence 2006.

¹² Hillner and Smith 2007.

oncology unit could afford treating an expected number of 75 eligible patients with Herceptin if (for example) it denied 208 patients palliative chemotherapies.¹³

Now assume that the health budget cannot infinitely be increased because opportunity costs will become forbiddingly high, and that efficiency reserves are already exploited, so that the decision is one of whether or not to relocate resources from the 208 recipients of palliative chemotherapy to the 75 patients with early-stage breast cancer hoping to be treated with Herceptin. It seems that we have no plausible claims on either group to put aside their vital interest in getting the best treatment available in favour of a vague notion of the common good. How can we then expect patients or their advocates to arrive at a consensus on the distribution of resources through argumentation alone?

The point I am trying to make here is that the coexistence of informational and distributive aspects applies to the majority of political conflicts and decisions, and applies certainly to all decisions that have major impact. This leads to specific requirements on the decision-making process. The informational aspect requires that decision-making has a strong discursive element, which enhances justification and accountability. However, no amount of information or deductive reasoning will guarantee full convergence of opinions and preferences. Typically, sound justifications are available for very different options, and conflict persists. This is what I describe as the distributive aspect of political decisions. It

¹³ Barrett et al. 2006.

requires a coordination of conflicting values or conceptions of the common good as well as of conflicting interests. In rare cases, coordination may be achieved through argumentation alone. This is one of the hopes of deliberative democrats. But in most cases, other pressures and strategies for coordination will be required. This is why we should consider the discursive and coordinative requirements on decision-making separately, which I will do in the next section.¹⁴

2. Discursiveness and Coordinativeness of Political Interaction

I argue that the informational aspect of decisions requires the political interaction from which it evolves to be discursive, while the distributive aspect of decisions requires it to be coordinative. Moreover, I assume that the discursive and coordinative qualities of interaction are determined by contextual factors, especially by the kind of forums and institutions in which interaction takes place.

A. Discursiveness

The notions of “discourse” that we find in the literature range from the highly normative understanding Habermas employs in his discourse ethics and his discourse theory of law and democracy, to Foucault’s view that regards discourses as translating and reproducing power relations and

¹⁴ Scharpf (1997, ch. 6) somewhat analogously distinguishes dimensions of production and distribution in negotiations. His understanding of production, however, is a rather narrow one of problem-solving, and distribution refers in his case only to the distribution of products of negotiation.

including cultural practices besides communication.¹⁵ Dryzek adopts a loosely Foucauldian understanding in which a discourse is a “shared sense of concepts, categories, and ideas that provides its adherents with a framework for making sense of situations, embodying judgments, assumptions, capabilities, dispositions, and intentions”.¹⁶ Both the Habermasian and the Foucauldian understandings give rise to highly relevant normative questions and open up interesting routes for empirical analysis. Nonetheless, I prefer to use a notion of discourse that is neither as normatively charged as Habermas’, which entails strong requirements of equality and freedom from coercive power, nor as encompassing as the Foucauldian. I suggest to describe interaction as discursive in so far as it has both public and dialogical qualities. The case for the latter seems clear: the different notions of discourse all view it as a *social* practice—the monologues of a single speaker do not make a discourse. Publicity, too, somehow seems to be entailed in all notions—unlike a conversation, a discourse is nothing that can be contained within a closed-up room but is characterized by its capacity to spread and to permeate boundaries. But let me look at publicity and dialogue more closely to show how together, they advance the informational basis of decisions.

Decisions are more likely to be rational (in the sense of being based on true assumptions and foreseeing their actual consequences), justified with appropriate reasons, and acceptable to the community they address

¹⁵ Habermas 1984. Habermas 1994. Foucault 1971.

¹⁶ Dryzek 2006, p. 1.

(because they take into consideration relevant values and perspectives), if the premises they are based on are contested and assessed. This requires that actors make generalizable reasons for their positions available and are open to challenges of them. Such reasons are inter-subjectively transferable: they can be reasons not only to oneself, but also to others. The strongest incentive for actors to name generalizable reasons and engage in argumentation of them exists where interaction is public. If a general decision for a community is at stake, actors who fail to come up with generalizable reasons appear to be breaking the rules of the game.¹⁷ By confronting them with contrary positions and subjecting them to challenges and criticism, publicity forces actors to give the best possible justification for their premises and decisions. An actor who cannot provide a good justification is likely to suffer disesteem from his interlocutors if he does not yield to the “forceless force of the better argument,” which Habermas assumes to enable just and rational decisions. However, Jon Elster and Simone Chambers have pointed out that there may be trade-offs between the publicity and the quality of a discourse.¹⁸ Elster shows that while publicity may, through the civilizing force of hypocrisy, promote moral motivations, it can also be an obstacle to the revision of judgments and preferences if speakers experience argumentative concessions as a loss of face. Chambers points out that public reason is not

¹⁷ See the work by Grice (1979) on conversational maxims and Brandom (1994) on linguistic scorekeeping.

¹⁸ Elster 1995; 1998. Chambers 2004; 2005.

only threatened by private interests, but also by shallow “plebiscitory” reason that appeals to base common motives of listeners.¹⁹ Moreover, the focus on generalization and inferential justification enhanced by publicity can, in practice, have highly exclusionary consequences for the less articulate members of a group.²⁰ Such practical exclusion of a considerable share of the addressees of a decision will also be detrimental to its informational basis.

Nonetheless, it is not an option to renounce publicity as a defining element of discursive interaction and as a requirement for political decision-making. Whether the positive effects of publicity outweigh the problematic ones apparently depends on a number of contextual conditions.²¹ Moreover, publicity need not necessarily at every stage, moment and place be mass-media publicity—what matters is a logic of publicity. Interaction is more likely to be driven by general and transferable reasons if it is in principle accessible to outsiders and if what is being said is in principle said for everyone to hear. Accessibility could be guaranteed if doors remain ajar, for example if a committee meeting that is not organized for a large audience is nonetheless open to interested members of the public, journalists or researchers.

¹⁹ Chambers 2005, p. 39.

²⁰ See Sanders 1997; Young 2002, ch. 2.

²¹ In an analysis of a Danish deliberative poll, Hansen (2004, ch. 14) found that more active participants in deliberation, who made their opinions public to others, were less likely to change their position, thus offering support for Elster’s first hypothesis. At the same time, participants in groups that were recorded for national TV showed a significantly higher degree of arguing with generalizable reasons (but were no less likely to change their opinions than participants who were not recorded)—a finding that supports Elster’s second hypothesis on the civilizing force of hypocrisy.

To ensure that general and transferable reasons are not only brought up, but also assessed, it is important that assertions can and will be challenged and that every hearer gets a chance to become a speaker. Habermas has drawn a distinction between the listener and the hearer, where the listener is confined to a passive role in which he can make up his mind and keep a discursive score on what the speaker says, but cannot undertake commitments himself, ask questions or challenge the speaker's commitments. The hearer, by contrast, has to take a stance on what is being said: if he does not challenge the speaker's commitments, he implicitly grants entitlement to them and accepts them as premises for further reasoning and decision.²² Because participants are hearers rather than only listeners, they are committed to the outcomes of interaction unless they have explicitly challenged them. For interaction to be described as dialogical and to enable an interactive ²⁰In an analysis of a Danish deliberative poll, Hansen (2004, ch. 14) found that more active participants in deliberation, who made their opinions public to others, were less likely to change their position, thus offering support for Elster's first hypothesis. At the same time, participants in groups that were recorded for national TV showed a significantly higher degree of arguing with generalizable reasons (but were no less likely to change their opinions than participants who were not recorded)—a finding that supports Elster's second hypothesis on the civilizing force of hypocrisy. assessment of reasons, all participants must be hearers rather than

²² See Habermas 2000.

listeners—even if some choose not to speak. However, a dialogue requires not only more than one speaker and a specific role for recipients, but also the presence of more than one perspective or opinion. Even if it takes place in a perfectly friendly and cooperative atmosphere, there is a kind of adversary element entailed in it that keeps the dialogue going and that advances justification and thereby information. Discursive interaction, which the informational aspect of decisions demands, is thus defined as interaction that is both public and dialogical.

B. Coordinativeness

Political conflicts are characterized by the need to take a decision. In conflicts, a non-decision is a decision, too: one for the status quo. Political interaction is therefore always interaction in the shadow of decision, and the politicization of a conflict involves some pressures to settle it by means of a collectively binding regulation. One of the hopes connected with deliberative democracy is the assumption that under ideal conditions, communicative rationality alone will be sufficient to achieve consensus and that hierarchical or majoritarian decision-making is no longer necessary once the rationality of a solution has been established. Most theorists, however, now try to accommodate the fact of persisting disagreement and several have addressed the role of voting and other non-deliberative forms of decision-making in deliberative democracy.²³

I have argued that the distributive aspect, which almost all major

²³ See Mansbridge et al. 2010.

political decisions have, sets a limit to discursive decision-making and results in certain requirements on decision-making processes. These requirements are requirements to coordinate persistently conflicting interests, goals and action plans. Coordinativeness is induced by *decision-making pressures* and requires *reciprocity* of interaction.

In a very basic sense, reciprocity can be understood as mutuality, implied for example in the principle of tit-for-tat: I will do to you as you will do to me (whether in the positive or in the negative). The resulting expectations on both sides amount to a kind of minimal procedural agreement. Successful coordination in political conflicts seems to require reciprocity in a somewhat more demanding sense, though. Following Forst, reciprocity can be said to obtain where nobody can claim the rights and goods that he denies to others and where participants regard certain norms that guide interaction, as well as results brought about in accordance with these, as mutually binding.²⁴ Reciprocal interaction is not necessarily discursive interaction, and it can be more or less friendly: in distributive bargaining, participants may regard one another as opponents but still obey to principles of reciprocity.

²⁴ Cf. Forst 2007, p. 249.

Table 1. Discursiveness and Coordinativeness

Discursiveness	<p>Publicity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pressure to justify one’s own position with generalizable and transferable reasons <p>Dialogue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - hearers, not listeners: every participant can become a speaker - assertions can and will be assessed
Coordinativeness	<p>Decision-making pressure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - external: decision rule - internal: individual aspirations to reach agreement <p>Reciprocity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mutuality: nobody can claim rights and goods he denies to others - procedural agreement: accepted rules of interaction and decision-making

Decision-making pressures can be created externally, through formal rules and regulations, but can also arise internally within a group or forum. A central external factor is the decision rule. Majority rule can substitute communicative coordination where time is scarce or where conflicts are too deep to overcome through communication, and complement it where

legitimation through an essentially egalitarian procedure is demanded. Majority voting motivates coalition-building, albeit not across ideological boundaries or conflicting interests. Where unanimity is enforced, pressures are higher and compromises become necessary. These can be compromises about the distribution of goods or about compensations and “package deals”, but also compromises that seek to establish a common ground where fundamental values conflict. But even without formal requirements, participants in a communicative forum may have strong wishes to come to an agreement. Internal decision-making pressures, which may be as effective as external ones, can arise where a group defines the goal of interaction as one of reaching consensus and producing a joint output.

Table 1 summarizes the main concepts used in this section. Discursiveness of interaction can in principle be measured empirically at the speech act level by identifying and counting public (arguing) and dialogical speech acts.²⁵ Coordinativeness can be assessed through a more qualitative analysis of institutional constraints and their effects on interaction. However, I think that the main potential of the two concepts lies in their use for a *comparative* analysis and criticism of instances of political interaction.

²⁵ See Holzinger 2005; Landwehr 2009, ch. 5.

3. Modes of Political Interaction – a Typology

Combining the two factors of discursiveness and coordinativeness yields the matrix of modes of political interaction shown in Table 2, where each cell defines an ideal type of one mode of interaction.²⁶ As I will argue below, most real life instances of interaction are best placed somewhere in between these ideal-types, but to begin with, they are of value as reference points for comparison. The labels used for the ideal-types—discussion, deliberation, debate, and bargaining—are common terms both in informal conversation and in the political science debate. It may therefore be important to stress that this article employs its own definitions, which I think are mostly in keeping with common usage, but may differ from definitions found elsewhere in the literature.

Let me discuss these four ideal-typical modes of interaction in turn, addressing three central questions before I go on to discuss their respective roles and functions in decision-making and (deliberative) democracy in the following section. Those questions are:

- How is the conflict conceived of?
- Who participates in what role?
- What is the likely effect of interaction on actors?

²⁶ These ideal-typical modes of interaction are discussed with regard to their effects on preference formation in Landwehr (2009).

A. Discussion

Interaction that is discursive, but not coordinative, seems well described as “discussion”. Discussions take place on the basis of a logic of publicity as described above. References to private interests, like promises and threats, have no place in them. The focus in discussion is on the cognitive rather than the volitional: what is at stake is not so much the actors’ motives, but their assumptions about what is true or correct. What Chambers has described as a “Socratic” logic is dominant here and also the reason why discussions must be dialogical: in the quest for truth, it is unreasonable to deny anyone the right to make or challenge assertions.²⁷ Although it is sometimes claimed that deliberation, as understood by the theory of deliberative democracy, is modelled on university seminars, academic discussions are discussions as they are described here rather than instances of deliberation.²⁸ What characterizes academic and other discussions is that, unlike deliberation, they do not aim at a decision, which is why they lack coordinative qualities.²⁹

²⁷ Cf. Chambers 2004.

²⁸ Saward (2001, p. 566) compares deliberation with interaction in university seminars. Fearon (1998) describes deliberation as “problem-solving discussion”, where “problem-solving” as the goal of interaction indicates an emphasis of cognitive rather than motivational effects of deliberation.

²⁹ Thompson (2008, pp. 501–2) similarly distinguishes discussion from deliberation by pointing out that in discussion, the element of decision-relatedness is missing.

Table 2. Ideal-type Modes of Interaction

	Non-coordinative	Coordinative
Discursive	<i>Discussion</i>	<i>Deliberation</i>
Non-discursive	<i>Debate</i>	<i>Bargaining</i>

Source: Landwehr 2009, p. 112.

In discussions, the conflict seems to be defined as a factual one and the goal of interaction as one of establishing the truth about a matter. The kind of truth that is sought may extend to “moral truth” or correctness. What is central is the idea that it can be pursued cognitively, through evidence and inference. If the truth could be “found” through discussion, a decision would no longer be necessary. In any case, a shortcut to a solution through compromises is ruled out: a compromise could not possibly represent factual or moral truth and truth is what participants in a discussion are seeking.³⁰

While we probably all engage in discussions on a daily basis, discussions in political contexts are often institutionalized in commissions, where the role of participants is defined as “expert” and the goal of interaction is one of information. These commissions typically lack an explicit decision rule: if experts do not arrive at a consensus through communication alone, they should have no material interest in reaching unanimity by means of compromise.

What effects does discussion have on actors? While it collects, and

³⁰ See, however, Goodin and Brennan (2001) on bargaining over beliefs. In applications of the Condorcet Jury Theorem, voting also represents a kind of shortcut to truth (Grofman and Feld 1988).

thereby improves, information and may change and enhance the inferential justification of judgments, it is less likely to change the motivation of actors. Where the focus is on factual truth or deductive reasoning from moral principles, motives for action—individual evaluations, preferences and interests—are bracketed out and unlikely to be assessed or changed. Moreover, even if they are in fact convinced, “experts” will often fear a loss of face if they have to change their position on a matter.³¹

B. Deliberation

Where interaction is both discursive and coordinative, it fulfils central requirements to be described as deliberative. Deliberation obviously requires interaction to have dialogical qualities and to be driven by a logic of publicity, which allow to assess and enhance the justification of preferences. Moreover, it is essentially decision-related interaction.³² The point in deliberation is not to track truth (as it is in academic discussions), but to come to a collective decision. Discursiveness of interaction may warrant a supposition of higher reasonableness or justice of decisions based on deliberation. But where, as in politics, decisions are necessary even if many disagreements cannot be resolved, there will be pressures for coordination. Coordinative incentives in deliberation may be due to external pressures where a forum has the task to make a decision

³¹ See Tetlock 2005.

³² Cf. Thompson 2008, p. 502.

unanimously, such as in consensus conferences. Other contextual factors can give rise to internal aspirations, so that participants feel as if they are members of *one group* and develop a feeling of responsibility to produce a joint result.

Through interacting as members of one group and addressing the question of what is to be done, collectively, participants in democratic deliberation live out their role as citizens. Citizens are simultaneously the authors and addressees of the rules that the collective gives itself. As authors, citizens consider what is best for all, even if as addressees, they still have conflicting interests. So the conflict in deliberation is defined as one of value. Factual aspects may in most empirical instances of deliberation play an important role, too. But deliberation as not only a discursive, but coordinative activity only seems to start after some shared definition of the situation and the available options has been achieved and factual misunderstandings have been cleared up.

What most notably distinguishes deliberation from the other modes of interaction, however, is its potential effect on participants. This effect can be accounted for by its discursive *and* coordinative qualities which entail pressures for justification and reciprocity. As it concerns the question of what a collective wants to do, deliberation necessarily addresses motives (norms, values, or interests) that need to be coordinated besides matters of truth or correctness— in contrast to discussion, where motives are bracketed out. At the same time, dialogical publicity (i.e. discursiveness) of interaction promotes the generalizability of reasons and the assessment of

premises—in contrast to bargaining, where interaction is dominated by private reasons.

A central assumption in theories of deliberative democracy is that deliberation enables participants to rationally form autonomous political preferences. Put somewhat crudely, actors are assumed to enter deliberation with more or less ill-informed, selfish preferences and emerge from it with well-informed, other-regarding and autonomous preferences. Thinking of the older meaning of the term “deliberation”, which used to refer to the internal rather than social consideration of reasons, makes this relationship between deliberation and autonomy of preferences plausible.³³ A preference is autonomous when it is based on reasons. Deliberation as a mode of interaction requires reasons gained through internal deliberation and—where it is successfully and fairly realized—allows actors to assess and improve these.³⁴ Eventually, then, interaction must have an effect at the individual level, where reasons are reconsidered and preferences are formed and transformed.

Most explications of deliberation that can be found in the extensive literature on deliberative democracy entail more requirements than discursiveness and coordinativeness, in particular ones for inclusion and equality. The more parsimonious concept used here would still allow for deliberation to be exclusive, biased or even manipulative. While I disagree

³³ On internal deliberation and its practical role in decision-making, see Goodin and Niemeyer (2003, pp. 628–9).

³⁴ Ibid. pp. 640–2.

with Hardin, who regards deliberation as a “method, not theory” which cannot normally be very democratic,³⁵ I think that it is a good approach to describe deliberation as democratic only insofar as it is inclusive and also to consider non-democratic instances of deliberation.³⁶ Allowing for such deficient varieties means that effects on actors can well be for the worse rather than for the better. For example, Sunstein has argued that deliberation in too homogeneous a group can induce a kind of groupthink that shifts preferences towards more extreme positions.³⁷ For a normative evaluation, it is therefore important to see not only whether, but where and how deliberation takes place. Deliberation may be assumed to occur in many informal contexts, but there are also a number of different approaches to institutionalize political deliberation, such as deliberative polls, consensus conferences and other citizen forums.³⁸

C. Debate

The debate is a striking example of a mode of political interaction that is neither coordinative nor discursive. An ideal-type realization of it can be found in the events organized by debating clubs (although these do not aim at political decisions): groups debate over (more or less) randomly

³⁵ Hardin 1999.

³⁶ As Gutmann and Thompson (2004, p. 10) suggest.

³⁷ Sunstein 2003.

³⁸ See Fung 2003; Gastil and Levine 2005..

chosen issues, and the position each takes is decided by drawing lots. After the debate, a vote is taken over who in the eyes of the observers has won the competition. In political contexts, debates take place in parliament, although different types of legislatures in different political systems come more or less close to the debating-club ideal type. Westminster-style parliaments in majoritarian systems further debate-like modes of interaction, while legislatures in presidential and less majoritarian systems are more conducive to bargaining. Even if interaction in parliament comes close to the debates in debating clubs, there are important differences, the central one being that it aims at a collective decision. Nonetheless, parliamentary debates (as in Westminster-style legislatures) do not seem to enhance coordination, although they do of course presuppose coordinative efforts behind the scenes, within parties, coalitions and caucuses. The reason for this is that in most cases, the decision somehow has already been taken by the majority. In the parliamentary debate, the majority is under obligation to defend this decision and the minority gets an opportunity to criticize it and point out what would have been alternative options.

But if all this takes place in public, with different speakers taking the floor and differing positions getting heard, why should the debate be non-discursive? I describe it as such because it fails on the dialogue criterion for discursiveness. Speakers (usually) hold pre-prepared speeches, assertions cannot immediately be challenged and speaking time and order are assigned according to internal rules of procedure. The

addressees of speeches given in parliament are thus listeners rather than hearers, and are therefore not committed to results of interaction. This is why the debate is better described as a sequence of monologues than as a dialogue and should, according to the criteria employed here, not count as discursive. Speakers in a debate do engage in argumentation, but argumentation has a product rather than process character here.

Participants in a debate take the role of representatives. In debating clubs, they represent randomly assigned positions, but in political contexts, such as the parliamentary debate, they represent constituencies and/or political parties with their programmes. They are, according to a distinction by Habermas, actors “appearing before” rather than “emerging from” civil society and the public sphere.³⁹ The conflict in a debate is partly defined by the procedure, which demands speakers to act out the conflict and (re)present their respective positions to the public.

This is the reason why the debate, while it may impress listeners, is unlikely to have an effect on the speakers’ positions and preferences. Any revision of the speaker’s own position would be regarded as a form of defeat, which is why participants will refuse to reconsider either their motives or their information premises. When taking the floor, they seek to give the impression that they know what is right and that they are fully informed; in a sense they act out what Gambetta has described as “discursive machismo”.⁴⁰ Where listeners of a debate are concerned,

³⁹ Habermas 1994, p. 375.

⁴⁰ Gambetta 1998.

however, effects on political preferences and positions are no less likely than anywhere else where people are exposed to argumentation. Arguments they listen to can serve as an input to internal deliberation and to instances of dialogical interaction the people who were listeners in the debate take part in as speakers.

D. Bargaining

Of interaction that is coordinative, but non-discursive, bargaining is the central example in politics. It is the mode of interaction deliberation is often, but somewhat misleadingly, contrasted with.⁴¹ Bargaining occurs in situations that imply the possibility of benefits from coordination but lack anything like an awareness of shared goals or a common good. The expected gain from an agreement constitutes what has been described above as a coordinative incentive. Although bargainers have strong (material) motives to reach an agreement, they have no generalizable and transferable reasons to offer for their positions—at least not ones the other party could accept as such. This is also the reason why bargaining is difficult in public and typically takes place behind closed doors.⁴² A logic of publicity that would be required for interaction to be discursive forces interlocutors to name general reasons for their preferences. Where no such reasons exist, hidden agendas are promoted and arguing may

⁴¹ See Holzinger 2001.

⁴² Cf. Elster 1995; Elster 1998.

become purely strategic—under these conditions, bargaining becomes necessary and appropriate.⁴³ Although not public (and thus non-discursive), bargaining is by definition dialogical. Typically, bargaining includes only players with the power to veto any decision, which is why unanimity must be achieved. A player who is not granted the same right to speak (in this case, to make suggestions, promises or threats) as others would surely veto any decision and make bargaining impossible.

Participants in bargaining are those who have strong non-generalizable and typically material interests in the matter to be decided. Moreover, in order to be eligible as partners in bargaining, they need to be equipped with specific resources. In a political context, such resources can lie in the ability to block decisions or their implementation, or they can lie in a potential for unilateral actions that enhance or threaten the common good. For example, large corporations often derive bargaining power from their threat to move production plants to other countries. But there are also cases in which charities or NGOs derive bargaining power from their ability to influence public opinion and motivate resistance. Normally, however, actors without respective resources will be excluded from bargaining, even if they are significantly affected by decisions. The conflict in bargaining is defined as one of interest: participants seek to maximize their own (subjective) preferences under the constraints of the other participants' preferences.

The lack of discursive qualities is the central reason why bargaining is

⁴³ See Holzinger 2004.

unlikely to have significant effects on actors' judgments, motives or political preferences. Transferable reasons that could motivate other participants simply do not play a role here. The kind of unanimity bargaining aims at differs from the coordination (or even consensus) that can be achieved through deliberation, and the compromises it requires are not "deep" or "principled" ones, but rather superficial. The preferences that enter bargaining processes are purely subjective and remain as such. As there are no pressures to justify one's preferences by reference to generalizable and transferable reasons, one's premises will not be questioned, assessed or reconsidered. Instead, the most likely outcome of bargaining is that actors have the same preferences post-interaction that they had pre-interaction, although they may agree on a course of action to be taken.

Scenarios for political decision-making through ideal-typical bargaining are less common than the literature on arguing vs. bargaining suggests. Even in international negotiations, ethical preferences play a role and there are increasingly pressures for justification and accountability. A classical example of this is the success of US and German negotiators at the end of the Cold War in getting Gorbachev to view the German reunification in terms of democracy and self-determination.⁴⁴ Moreover, Holzinger has, by use of speech act analysis, shown that arguing occurs in most bargaining situations, where bargainers seek to justify their positions

⁴⁴ Risse 2000, pp. 27–8.

even where no shared interests or generalizable reasons seem to be exist.⁴⁵

E. The Heuristic Potential of Ideal Typical Modes of Interaction

Discussion, deliberation, debate and bargaining have been described above as more or less ideal-typical modes of interaction. Empirically, however, different modes of interaction can be realized in the same forum and often occur simultaneously rather than successively. A viable strategy might be to regard Table 2's rows and columns not as categorical but rather as scalar and locate instances of political interaction in the two-dimensional space thus created. Interaction in a given forum could then be described as, for example, discussion rather than deliberation (because it is not coordinative enough) or as a particularly discursive instance of a debate (because it is more dialogical than the typical debate). In this way, it is also possible to describe modes of interaction and institutionalisations that have not been explicitly defined here. Mediation, for example, which is currently highly popular as an alternative way of conflict resolution, should be localized somewhere between deliberation and bargaining. Private, non-generalizable reasons are, contrary to the logic of publicity, permitted in mediation. Unlike bargaining arrangements, however, the context requires actors to justify their positions extensively and to take the different perspectives of others seriously.

⁴⁵ Holzinger 2004.

Such description of interaction with regard to the dimensions of discursiveness and coordinativeness and the localization of instances of it on both dimensions could have significant heuristic, if not explanatory, potential. While a precise measure for discursiveness or coordinativeness is illusory, a localization on the basis of plausible estimates can help to explain the course that interaction takes and its outcomes. Finding, for example, that a citizen conference (as an institutionalisation of deliberation) lacked coordinative qualities, such that the interaction was more discussion than deliberation, could explain why preference transformation was insufficient for the production of a consensual vote.

4. Modes of Interaction and their Functions in Political Decision-Making

According to the definition above, deliberation is the only mode of political interaction that, by virtue of its discursive *and* coordinative qualities, seems to be capable of doing justice to both the informational and the distributive aspect of political decision-making. As deliberation is also the mode of interaction that is most difficult to institutionalize, this leads to the question of whether decision-making can ever be truly deliberative and whether deliberative democracy is a realistic option. However, my second argument here is that each mode of interaction has its (ideal-typical) role in the democratic decision-making process and the

presence of other modes of interaction in the process does not mean that it cannot be deliberative.

Each of the ideal-typical modes of interaction can be institutionalized in different ways. For discussion, debate and bargaining, there are well established, although quite different, forums in most political systems: discussions take place in expert commissions, debates in the media or parliamentary plenum, and bargaining in parliamentary caucuses, and in all kinds of informal circles involving politicians. Forums for deliberation, by contrast, are so far typically either of only temporary nature or fluid and informal rather than fully institutionalized. The parliamentary plenum constitutes both a starting and end point of a circular process in which different modes of interaction and their institutionalizations play different roles.

Institutionalized expert discussion can be employed in situations of uncertainty in order to explore the ground for a decision. In some cases, commissions are set up on a temporary basis to address specific new challenges for political regulation. In the case of health care rationing that I referred to above, several countries have employed expert commissions to clarify ethical principles and criteria for allocation. In other cases—typically ones where a shared goal is presupposed—decision-making is delegated to experts on a more permanent basis. Examples of this are independent central banks or, in health policy, agencies for drug marketing authorisation. Both kinds of expert involvement can be productive and legitimate, insofar as information is pooled and premises

are assessed. Assuming that experts are sufficiently impartial and materially disinterested (as they should be), esteem-seeking and its associated antagonistic logics of interaction in discussions can even be beneficial, as challenges help to improve justification. As a result of expert discussion, factual misunderstandings may be cleared up, and in an ideal case a consensual definition of the situation is achieved.

However, information alone is never sufficient to motivate a specific course of action. Where distributive aspects are involved and goals and practical reasons are concerned, plausible hypotheses are that there will be as much disagreement among experts (assuming that their selection is not biased) as in the general population, and that decisions, if they are achieved, will lead to new controversies.⁴⁶ There are a few cases, though, where the permanent delegation of decision-making power to experts enjoys public support. These are cases, such as the delegation of interest-rate policy to central banks, where in the eyes of the public, the informational aspects of decisions clearly outweigh the distributive ones and depoliticization is therefore desirable. In other cases, a more or less consensual definition of the situation by help of expert discussion helps to arrive at a limited number of justifiable alternatives for collective action—and this seems to me to be the most important function of expert discussion in political decision-making. The discursive interaction of citizens has more essential functions in the decision-making process. On the one hand, there is the fluid and informal communication in the public

⁴⁶ On expert disagreement, see, for example, Bogner and Menz 2002.

sphere that can and should not be organized or institutionalized.⁴⁷ A vivid public sphere and an independent and critical media bring issues to the political agenda, politicize problems and control decision-makers and administrators. Many deliberative democrats, including Habermas himself, see the main role of deliberation here, and hope for a broad public discourse and for the media to exert communicative power by means of laying siege to the political system.⁴⁸ However, more institutionalized citizen deliberation can focus on specific issues where consensus on situation and alternatives is presupposed, but where shared values need to be explored and the various practical reasons involved in the conflict need to be assessed, weighted and aggregated. There are a number of different designs for citizen forums, and their potential role and benefits will in part depend on institutional design choices, such as composition, organization and empowerment.⁴⁹ But all models seem to engage participants in political deliberation and serve to carry it beyond the forum. Showing to non-participants that ordinary citizens can fruitfully deal with complex matters, citizen forums can enhance “democratic deliberation within” and help the formation of autonomous political preferences.⁵⁰ Where a deliberative citizen forum meets and passes a vote before the political decision is taken, politicians can show that they

⁴⁷ Habermas 1994, p. 625.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 626.

⁴⁹ Fung 2003.

⁵⁰ See Goodin 2000.

take these preferences seriously.

Both informal and institutionalized deliberation can help actors to explore their own and others' values and interests and to weigh them against one another where they conflict. This weighting and comparative evaluation of reasons is the central function of deliberation in political decision making, which it can fulfil by virtue of its discursive and coordinative qualities. In an ideal case, deliberation can result in a 'deep' or 'principled' compromise between conflicting and seemingly incommensurable practical reasons.⁵¹ But even in less ideal cases, exchange of reasons can help identify more clearly the relevant reasons, dimensions of choice and alternatives.⁵²

In some cases, it may not be possible to find shared reasons in deliberation, or the weighting of these differs so much that even prolonged argumentation does not lead to consensus on a route of action to be taken. Moreover, some actors may have subjective preferences driven by private and non-transferable reasons which are nonetheless legitimate. Self-interest cannot be completely banned from the picture, especially for disadvantaged groups.⁵³ The alternatives that are available where the potential of discursive coordination is exhausted are non-decision, majority voting and bargaining. Majority rule can be seen as fulfilling requirements of pure procedural fairness in the Rawlsian sense,

⁵¹ See Richardson (2002, pp. 144–9) and Gutmann and Thompson (1996, pp. 88–93).

⁵² Dryzek and List 2003, p. 22.

⁵³ Cf. Mansbridge 2006.

and losers may be expected to accept its results because they support the procedure. Neither can be said for bargaining. Although standards of fairness may be applied to bargaining outcomes as well, the selection of participants on the basis of resources and power certainly is not fair, and non-participants cannot be expected to support its results. However, there are cases in which bargaining can enable superior solutions or where it is the only way out of a deadlock. For example, many governments engage in negotiations with the pharmaceutical industry that help to lower drug prices. In other cases, the implementation of reforms in health policy requires the cooperation of stakeholders with vested interests, especially doctors, to be successful. In these cases, and if the results achieved at the bargaining table are democratically sanctioned, distributive bargaining has an important function in democratic decision-making.

The parliamentary debate takes place when the decision has in fact already been taken, although this is truer of majoritarian and parliamentary systems than in consociational and presidential ones. Government politicians explain and justify their policy decisions, while the opposition challenges these and presents alternatives. Interaction in the debate is, although not discursive, argumentative. Arguments given by parties and politicians should be responsive to public debates and should be picked up and questioned in them. In assessing arguments, citizens, as listeners, hold their representatives accountable. As political decisions are never “once and for all”, but are always revisable in a democratic system, the parliamentary debate and decision are at the same time an end point,

at which the majority acts as an umpire,⁵⁴ and a starting point for evaluation and re-assessment of the decision.

In this cyclical and combinatory model of democratic decision-making, discussion, deliberation, bargaining and debate fulfil complementary functions. Deliberation is not necessarily the most desirable mode of interaction that should replace all other modes, but all four play essential roles. In less ideal cases, discussion, bargaining and debate can also substitute for deliberation to some extent. A decision that is informed by expert discussions will often be better than one that is not so, and a decision arrived at through tough bargaining is in many cases better than no decision at all. The parliamentary debate in particular, although it is neither discursive nor coordinative according to my definition provides an important kind of *ersatz* deliberation. While it displays a product rather than a process of argumentation, it can offer reasons and justification and assist citizens in the formation of rational and autonomous political preferences.

A similar model of distributed deliberation is advocated by Goodin, who puts hopes in a plurality of different forums, arguing that “a staged deliberative process, with different deliberative virtues on display at different stages, might add up to a ‘good enough deliberation’ ”.⁵⁵ Thompson adds that deliberation can be decentralized and iterated, highlighting the need for deliberative and democratic institutional design

⁵⁴ Cf. Gaus 1996, p. 186.

⁵⁵ Goodin 2005, p. 194.

in a process of meta-deliberation: “every practice should at some point in time be deliberatively justified”.⁵⁶ Mansbridge suggests a model of a deliberative system where different modes of interaction—besides deliberation particularly bargaining and negotiation—have their place.⁵⁷ Considering the recent work of Habermas himself, it seems that he, too, sees room for non-deliberative and non-democratic modes of political interaction, as long as the architecture of the system as a whole remains both deliberative and democratic.⁵⁸ What matters is that deliberative interaction takes place and substantially drives decisions.

5. Conclusion

This article began with a discussion of the informative and distributive aspects of political decisions, pointing out that to do justice to both, decision-making processes and interaction in them have to be both discursive and coordinative. Discursiveness and coordinativeness as dimensions of political interaction have allowed me to define four ideal-typical modes of interaction: discussion, deliberation, debate and bargaining. I understand them not so much as objective measures for distinct modes of interaction but as *tools for the comparison* of different forums and interaction in them, which might reveal new aspects and

⁵⁶ Thompson 2008, p. 515.

⁵⁷ Thompson 2008, pp. 214–5. Mansbridge 1999; 2006.

⁵⁸ I owe this point to Rainer Schmalz-Bruns. See, for example, Habermas 2006.

provide a better understanding of communicative interaction in politics.

In the second part of the article, I have pointed out why although deliberation, which is notoriously difficult to institutionalize, is essential to democratic politics, each mode of interaction has its function in decision-making. A combinatory and cyclical model of policy-formulation yields a more optimistic outlook than the consideration of the potential of any of the modes of interaction by itself. For any far-reaching political decision, coordination and compromise have to be accomplished anew by means of different modes of interaction. Although the majoritarian decision of a legislature elected by free and equal citizens is normatively and practically indispensable, important other modes of interaction cannot be realized in the parliamentary plenum.

Discussion, bargaining and debate as modes of political interaction are easier to institutionalize than deliberation, and respective forums exist in most countries and policy areas. However, depoliticization and decision-making in forums of expert discussion are unlikely to adequately reflect the plurality of values and interests in modern societies, while bargaining alone always reproduces inequalities and protects the status quo. The parliamentary debate can, if it is not prepared and accompanied by discursive and coordinative modes of interaction, become a mere stage, on which politicians compete for attention.

Deliberative and participatory forums therefore seem to bear the biggest promise for institutional reform. Decisions in which deliberation, wherever it takes place and however it is institutionalized, does not play a

substantial role are unlikely to be based on autonomous, justified preferences. Perceived as poorly informed and unfair in various respects, they will further political disenchantment. Exploring the context conditions for successful and democratic deliberation thus remains the most important challenge for deliberative theory and deliberative politics. The function of deliberation in democratic decisionmaking—the exploration, contextualization and weighting of shared values—is simply too essential to leave to contingencies.

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