

ENOUGH ABOUT DELIBERATION!

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democracy promotes dialogue, especially between experts and citizens, and claims to solve social conflicts and disputes between people by reaching consensus and ensuring the political legitimacy of decisions. One of the most paradigmatic inclinations in thinking about deliberation—the practical and objectivist tendency—nurtures the idea that ethical and democratic issues are entirely based in people's capacities to achieve clear-cut agreements and make rational decisions on the basis of moral reasoning capacities and sets of pre-defined moral principles.

Considering this trend, this paper suggests shifting attention away from this common way of defining deliberation because ethics and dialogue are thought of abstractly rather than in a situated and practical way. I suggest three shifts: from morality to moral vulnerability, from moral reasoning to moral imagination, and from justice to rightness. To conclude, I suggest that the main issue of deliberation is how it nurtures or pacifies tensions, disputes, and conflicts within dialogue itself.

In the last few decades, deliberation has become a dominant way of thinking about citizen participation and the democratization of decision-making within domains such as scientific research, technological and environmental risk, healthcare, and public policy. As a corollary, deliberation is often believed to increase public participation and democracy.

Deliberation is part of a broader transformation of democracy that coincides with the emergence of deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy calls for citizens to shape their own opinions by educating and informing themselves and by exchanging arguments. In this view, deliberative

FROM MORALITY TO MORAL VULNERABILITY

Deliberation is considered to have the ability to solve disputes, reach agreements, and make decisions while achieving reciprocity, social justice, and legitimacy. The ideal behind deliberation is indeed to solve social conflicts and ensure fair, equal, and reciprocal relations between individuals. In order to reach this ideal, one of the most common rationales for deliberation is to urge people to learn, share, produce, and refer to pre-existing morality, that is, sets of justifications, arguments, principles, and moral values. According to this view, deliberation is thought as a process of moral coordination. In short, through the public exchange of ideas, arguments, and justifications, individual opinions should merge into a single shared opinion. The claim is that this process has the ability to go beyond differences in opinions, bargaining, personal interests, and power relationships.

In this perspective, language and dialogue are limited to identifying and agreeing on the most legitimate and justifiable, that is, morally acceptable justifications, arguments, principles, or values. This rationality and deliberative model require people who can shape their opinions and infer a judgment on the basis of abstract moral reasoning. The problem with this model, if one observes it faithfully, is that it disregards the particularities of situations and neglects our moral interdependency. Indeed, a large part of our moral life is determined by the limits of our individual expectations, stances, conceptions, and visions, as well as by moments of uncertainty and doubt. As humans, all of this makes us morally vulnerable beings.

Focusing on moral vulnerability shifts the ethical issue from the need to reach well-defined

agreements that should respect morality to one of creating a secure space in which people can explore their moral vulnerability to realize what truly matters to them and others, and to imagine different nuanced, morally acceptable possibilities. This requires moving away from the ideal of moral reasoning in favor of moral imagination.

FROM MORAL REASONING TO MORAL IMAGINATION

In reality, while speaking with each other about a situation or a choice, we are sometimes able to imagine intermediate possibilities and gray zones of acceptability that do not call for definitive, clear-cut decisions. Indeed, within dialogue, we can adopt an attitude in which the focus of attention becomes imagining possibilities to potentially respond to what matters to people in different ways. To make this happen, we need to let the words and experiences of others touch us. This creative and poetic stance fundamentally contrasts with one that calls for achieving univocal, shared agreement and making decisions based on abstract moral reasoning capacities. Further, this calls for a shift in the ethical issue of deliberation from reaching justice to achieving rightness.

FROM JUSTICE TO RIGHTNESS

In recent decades, more and more researchers have shown that the theoretical ideal of deliberation almost never occurs in reality. For instance, during my eighteen months of field work at a Swiss acute neurorehabilitation hospital unit for people waking from a coma, I never saw people make a decision by achieving the theoretical and ideal model of deliberation, even when clinical discussions concerned ethically sensitive issues, such as life and death. Rather, I often observed them expressing themselves about the uncertainties of diagnoses and prognoses; about the lack of

For Mansbridge (2015, 27), deliberation is a "mutual communication that involves weighting and reflecting on preferences, values, and interests regarding matters of common concern".

According to Egan (2016), deliberative democracy means that, rather than thinking of decisions as the aggregate of citizens' preferences—as in the case of voting—"deliberative democracy claims that citizens should arrive at political decisions through reason and the collection of competing arguments and viewpoints".

scientific evidence; and about their difficulties, suffering, fears, doubts, expectations, or preferences. In short, people not only address scientific arguments or invoke moral values in order to weigh the pros and cons and justify a possible choice. Instead, I saw ethical tensions arising from precarious, fragile clinical situations and human beings talking to each other and looking collectively for rightness, all while expressing, testing, and sometimes acknowledging the normativity or the vulnerability of their own claims, points of view, or visions. Thus, the main ethical issue of dialogue and moments of deliberation lies in the role people's stances and attitudes play in making and unmaking ethical tensions within a gray zone of rightness.

TOWARD A GRAY ZONE OF RIGHTNESS

Moving away from the idea of moral reasoning to focus on moral imagination is an invitation to look at the tensions that emerge when people live narrowly, strictly, or tightly within their own experiences, conceptions, points of view, and vision. In the clinic, I have observed the difficulty of dealing with different perceptions, attitudes, and matters of concern. Hence, I witnessed ethical tensions arising from the fact that people did not share or understand what truly matters to them and others.

Considering this, people's stances and attitudes often carry with them the possibility of acknowledging the multiple acceptable ways of seeing, experiencing, and deciding. This does not mean that people have to accept everything or that undoing ethical tensions must become the new, normative moral stance. It only means that what is ethical lies in the stances people take toward reality. As a consequence, dialogue is important because it carries the possibility of nurturing people's moral imagination to see multiple human ways of understanding what truly matters in a situation.

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ABOUT A SITUATION OR A CHOICE, WE ARE SOMETIMES
ABLE TO IMAGINE INTERMEDIATE POSSIBILITIES AND
GRAY ZONES OF ACCEPTABILITY THAT DO NOT CALL
FOR DEFINITIVE, CLEAR-CUT DECISIONS.**

