UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
University of Birmingham Research at Birmingham

Validity and scope as criteria for deliberative epistemic quality across pluralism

Knops, Andrew

DOI:
10.1080/02691728.2017.1317871

License:
None: All rights reserved

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):
Knops, A 2017, 'Validity and scope as criteria for deliberative epistemic quality across pluralism', *Social Epistemology*. https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2017.1317871

Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal

Publisher Rights Statement:
This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Social Epistemology on 16th May 2017, available online: http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/02691728.2017.1317871

General rights
Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

•Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
•Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
•User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
•Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy
While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

Download date: 23. Apr. 2024

Validity and scope as criteria for deliberative epistemic quality across pluralism

This paper examines the properties of the validity and scope of arguments as standards for evaluating the epistemic qualities of particular deliberative exchanges within a context of value pluralism where parties can hold differing views of the common good based on incommensurable basic values. In this context the task of political decisions is to maximise the interests of all, only judging between internally coherent versions of the common good on the basis of their mutual impact. The paper argues open, democratic, deliberation provides the best chance of discovering such a path, through developing mutual understanding across incommensurable positions. Identifying the validity and scope of a deliberative exchange enhances this potential. Any deliberative exchange may be characterised in terms of its validity – the reasons that support its conclusions – and scope – the unquestioned assumptions that mark the boundaries of that reasoning. The paper explains the epistemic role of these two features in developing understanding across plural positions. Clarity about the validity of an exchange reveals positions that can be shared. Acknowledgement of its scope avoids over-extending its conclusions and reveals how positions differ, providing the starting point for further deliberation about their co-ordination. The paper ends by drawing the conclusion that deliberation characterised in this way should be democratic and open.

Keywords: Political Theory, Deliberative Democracy, Consensus, Legitimacy, Procedural, Epistemic

1. Introduction

This paper examines the properties of the validity and scope of arguments as standards with which to evaluate the epistemic qualities of particular deliberative exchanges within a context of value pluralism. The paper begins by defining value pluralism, and the tasks of political decision making in such a plural context (section 2). It then demonstrates how deliberation functions within this context. First, it models the process of developing understanding across plural positions, using Wittgenstein's later theory of language (section 3). It then shows how deliberation maps on to this approach (section 4). The way in which deliberation permits understanding across plural contexts is then developed in section 5, bringing out the role of beliefs in this process in a way which highlights both the epistemic potential and limitations of deliberation. This description of deliberation focuses on the part played by reasoning in

bridging diversity while respecting it. From this, I identify the importance of the twin concepts of validity (section 6) and scope (section 7), related by the activity of questioning, for optimising pluralism through deliberation. I then bring out the epistemic function that characterising the validity and scope of deliberative exchanges plays in working towards this goal (section 8). Section 9 concludes by drawing out the democratic implications from this epistemic process for the practise of deliberation in the context of pluralism. The paper is thus an exercise in theoretical clarification of standards of practice and the benefits which can accrue if they are met – an epistemological consideration of how we can come to a particular form of understanding. It is not an argument about the extent to which those standards are or are likely to be conformed to in actual practice – the province of empirical study.

2. Pluralism

This paper's starting point is pluralism: the belief that it is possible for two or more parties to reasonably hold distinct positions based on fundamentally different political values. Normally, assessments of the epistemic qualities of deliberation go further, and assume at least some political issues have a correct resolution judged against an objective criteria independent of both the procedure for reaching a decision and the beliefs of those deciding (Martí 2006: 34). To avoid falling foul of the pluralist assumption, the content of such a correct view is not specified. Different processes are then assessed for the likelihood they will predict the correct outcome, where it exists (e.g. Estlund 1997; Gaus 1997; Martí 2006; Landemore 2012).

This paper differs. It does not presume the existence of a single objective solution in any cases. At the same time, it does not rule out that such a solution might exist, and be reasonably agreed upon. Moreover, it also assumes the purpose of any procedure designed to take decisions on collective policy should be the fulfilment, to the maximum extent, of the interests of all those in the collectivity. To be clear: this is not a *laissez faire* maximisation of the freedom of each individual to pursue their own interests even at the expense of others. Rather, the aim is a system that maximises the interests[1] of all, taking their mutual impact into account, by governing their interaction. In that sense this goal remains consistent with

[1] Here 'interests' may encompass altruistic goals – e.g. about fair resource distribution.

the assumption of pluralism, in that it does not seek to judge between different internally coherent versions of the common good[2].

I argue that deliberation is required to discover such an optimal path, and that deliberation must be open and democratic. While there may be no single right way to act to maximise interests in this sense, deliberation is necessary first to ensure that differing interests are fully represented and understood, and second to explore the extent to which agreement is possible on substantive political issues. Where such common ground is not uncovered deliberation may yet facilitate the construction of a higher level framework within which to co-ordinate interaction across substantive differences, according them mutual respect. So the epistemic dimension of deliberation I want to investigate here is its utility in identifying the extent and content of consensus on political matters within a context of substantive pluralism.

I will develop this case by first modelling what is involved in building understanding across internally coherent but distinct – plural – perspectives. I will then relate this process to deliberation, showing that deliberation involves the same procedures. At the centre of this account is the role played by the dialogic exchange of reasons.

3. Mutual understanding across pluralism

Wittgenstein's later theory of language can be characterised as conceptualising internally coherent but rationally incommensurate positions, and their relations. In this sense it is a plural theory. Some see his approach as ruling out rational consensus altogether (Mouffe 2000: 70-71). However, while Wittgenstein views plural positions as ultimately grounded in practice, not reason, it has been argued he retains a role for reason in developing understanding across such positions (Knops 2007: 121). An examination of his theory will therefore assist an appreciation of pluralism itself and the mechanisms through which shared understanding may yet be constructed within such a context by reasoning.

In his later theory of language Wittgenstein argues we come to attribute meaning to words through their *use* in specific contexts in which we associate with other people (Pitkin 1993: 49; Cavell 1969: 52). Through our experience of past interactions we develop an

[2] So it is close to the aims of 'difference democrats' (Dryzek 2000: 55-80) such as Young (1996; 2000).

understanding of how to deploy words to obtain a response from others which we desire. For example, I might have learned a 'thumbs up' gesture indicates satisfaction, from my experience of others using it, and reactions to my use of it. Visiting Sardinia, I make the same gesture to indicate I would like a loaf of bread a baker is pointing to. I am surprised when they recoil, and proceed to give me short shrift. In Sardinia, the same gesture is offensive. A different meaning has developed through interaction between different individuals in a different context. The point Wittgenstein highlights is that ultimately there is no rational basis for this different usage. In Wittgenstein's terms, if we seek to justify why we use the thumbs up gesture offensively rather than to indicate assent, in the final analysis all we can say is that this is just what we do (Wittgenstein 1963 para. 217). In that sense, language and the meanings it conveys emerge within what Wittgenstein calls a shared 'form of life' which, while internally coherent, is ultimately founded on the brute fact of practice (Wittgenstein 1963 para 23). Seen in this way, different forms of life and their associated language and meanings can be understood as having a plural structure.

Despite this plurality, grounded in divergent practises, there is still space in Wittgenstein's schema for understanding to develop across languages and their constituent forms of life. The vehicle for this process is dialogic reason. While language is founded in use within a particular form of life, and so is ultimately a practical product, Wittgenstein recognises that reason can be used to provide an *explanation* of a practise to those to whom it is unfamiliar (Wittgenstein 1963 para. 87; Tully 1989 p. 180). When I use a word, or a gesture like 'thumbs up', I do so on the basis of my understanding of what it conveys, through my past experience. That understanding – of my action on the world in uttering a word or making a gesture – leads me to expect a particular type of response. When this response is other than predicted – for instance the hostile reaction I received from the Sardinian baker – I can use the information gathered from this reaction to reflect on my understanding, with the aim of developing it so that future actions do meet with a predicted response. In the gesture example, I would already be able to deduce my action had a negative effect. On that basis I would probably refrain from using the gesture immediately. But I could observe its use by others – perhaps directed to me. In doing this I would again be learning through a dialogic interaction with this 'form of life'. Note though that the understanding I developed would retain my old meanings intact. A full comprehension of the gesture would involve an appreciation of its obscene nature, akin to 'showing the finger' in UK or US culture. Mapping the two gestures in this way develops a shared dimension through which the two,

different, practices are related, but which leaves the original meanings intact. It provides a framework that allows a full appreciation of the meanings developed in one language, practise and 'form of life' in the terms of those of another.

Thus, Wittgenstein recognises a mechanism through which it is possible to establish common understandings that bridge meanings developed from practices – including languages – that have not been shared, in a way that respects the positions that are bridged. It is precisely this intersubjective understanding across internally coherent positions that we are interested in when investigating the potential for political agreement within a context of value pluralism. Habermas's theory of communicative action, with deliberation at its heart, shares this goal of intersubjective mutual understanding. Comparison with Wittgenstein's position will provide insight into the role of deliberation in facilitating this process.

4. Deliberation

Like Wittgenstein, Habermas is concerned to explain language and its use. Unlike Wittgenstein, Habermas's primary concern is reason (1984). He examines the rational properties of language. In particular he focuses on claims – to truth, moral rightness or subjective authenticity (1984: 236-7) What makes such claims rational, according to Habermas, is their capacity to be rejected, in the simplest case by uttering a 'no' (1998: 140; 1987: 73). It is with this response that the request for reasons, latent in all rational statements, is activated (1990: 67). This focus on the rational potential of language might seem the opposite of Wittgenstein's stress on the limits of reason within language. In fact, the two thinkers approach the same problem from different sides. While the paradigm way in which a claim can be rejected is with the utterance of a 'no', in a wider sense any unpredicted response to an utterance constitutes its rejection. Once this is appreciated, the similarities between Habermas's deliberative procedure and the explanatory role that reason plays for Wittgenstein can be appreciated.

With Wittgenstein, Habermas sees 'normal' language use taking place against a backdrop of conventionally shared meanings or understandings, developed through continual interaction (1984: 52). This aspect of Habermas's 'lifeworld' (1987: 119-152) equates to interaction within Wittgenstein's 'forms of life'. Habermas argues that it is only when the assumption that meanings are shared breaks down that reasoning is required. Classically, this breakdown

is signalled by the rejection of a claim with a 'no'. But as we have seen the rejection of an utterance can be signalled by any response that was not that predicted by the speaker. And for Wittgenstein, such a misunderstanding of the meaning of an utterance can be explained using dialogical reasoning. The two processes are parallels. In Habermas's account, a dialogical challenge and offering of reasons is necessary to develop deeper mutual understanding and re-establish shared meanings after a breakdown has occurred. This mirrors the role that Wittgenstein recognises for reason, in providing an explanation of language and meaning, to those to whom it is unfamiliar.

In both cases one party seeks to give reasons that relate their utterance to the understanding, meanings or language of their interlocutor, and so make it acceptable to them. That party proceeds by reflection on an unanticipated response, or rejection, resulting in a further utterance – reasons, or an attempted explanation of the original utterance – which it is hoped will elicit a predicted response – acceptance – from the interlocutor. The goal is to relate the speaker's position in terms that are acceptable to an interlocutor, through establishing common dimensions within which their differences can be mutually located. Habermas is quite explicit in setting this goal for deliberation. The aim of deliberation, he argues, should be mutual understanding (1990: 130). What a consideration of Wittgenstein emphasises is that there is no need for a pre-existing framework of explicitly shared meanings prior to a deliberative exchange. This can be built and explored across positions developed from independent practises, by members of different forms of life who had little or no previous interaction, and so do not share a language.

5. Plural beliefs

Having established in principle that deliberation can play a part in developing understanding across plural positions, we now consider the process in more detail. We focus on the beliefs that characterise social and politically plural contexts – 'forms of life' or 'lifeworlds' – and the languages developed in them. A better comprehension of the role beliefs play will flesh out our account of plural contexts and the potential, and limitations, of deliberation in building understanding across them – it's epistemic value.

The process of understanding which underpins the account of reason or deliberation developed so far can be generalised as a dialogue with the world in the process of achieving

our goals. If we have a particular goal in view, we formulate a strategy for acting on the world to achieve that goal. The strategy is formulated from our beliefs about the way the world is. These beliefs are derived from our past interactions with the world. Our goals are formed from our values, and what we believe is achievable based on how we believe the world is. We then act on the world to achieve our goal as our strategy indicates. If the result is as our strategy predicts, this confirms our beliefs about the world. If not we need to reformulate our beliefs in the light of information gathered from the unanticipated result. This new understanding can be used to produce a new strategy for action, and hence a new cycle in the dialogue (see Knops 2015 espc. 2-4).

The subject of this process of understanding does not need to be restricted to language in the sense of written or spoken symbols and the meanings that attach to them. It can involve any aspect of the world and our action on it, from purely physical elements, such as understanding how to get from one place to another, or to grow food, or to extract minerals, to social features where the part of the world we are particularly interested in is other human beings and the way they act – which includes, but extends beyond, linguistic acts – and the values and beliefs which motivate those actions.

Of course, a social context involves extra layers of complexity. Its simplest form, a dyad, involves one person trying to understand another who is also capable of understanding using the same process. This has been called a 'double-hermeneutic' (Gadamer 1975) as both parties are engaged in the same process. When I first confront another person, I need to assess how to act in relation to them so as to achieve my goals. This assessment will be based on my beliefs about them, derived from my past experiences and interactions with others. On this basis I will initiate interaction with the other person by acting on them in a way that my beliefs about them suggest will bring about a desired reaction. If the reaction is as I anticipated, then this confirms my beliefs about them. If it is not as I anticipated, I have to reformulate those beliefs.

That reformulation will involve reflection on what the other person's beliefs, values and goals are – in respect of me and their wider world. In this sense it is more complex than the reflection involved in understanding the physical world. Nonetheless, the process remains one of reformulation of my beliefs about an aspect of the world – in this case another person. I use the further information furnished by the unanticipated reaction to help rework my

beliefs, on which basis I modify my strategy to guide further action and so initiate another cycle. Importantly, the understanding produced relates my earlier beliefs to their more developed, revised form. To that extent it builds on those earlier beliefs and relates my values, beliefs and actions to those of the person I seek to comprehend. If successful in this endeavour, I understand that other person in my own terms. Again, the process and its product retain the same basic structure as any attempt to understand.

Further layers are added when we consider more complex interactions across more than two actors. Developing a shared understanding of another's goals and how they believe the world to be in the way just described can assist us in co-ordinating our interaction with others in order to achieve those goals. In some cases we can even co-operate to assist one another. As this understanding is developed through interaction, it tends to be deepest with those with whom we interact most frequently. We also tend to be attracted to interact more and on a deeper level with those we feel we share most in terms of our goals, values and beliefs.

We can characterise Wittgenstein's 'forms of life' and Habermas's 'lifeworld' contexts as different configurations of interaction, values and beliefs. Through frequent interaction and shared assumptions about what goals are valued and how we should act to achieve them, we form intersecting communities that come together and co-operate in striving for those goals.
A shared language is both the product, and a particular form, of this process: to share a language is to share assumptions about the beliefs (meanings) attached to actions (speech acts). This can then be used to co-ordinate further interaction. As Wittgenstein observes, languages develop from use in contexts of interaction, or 'forms of life' (Pitkin 1993: 49; Cavell 1969: 52). As a key medium for co-ordinating that interaction languages will reflect and permit insight into the beliefs shared in the 'form of life' that produces them.

Such communities and our place within them are thus constituted and bounded by the assumptions their members share. But precisely because they are assumptions that are shared, and therefore not challenged, by others within that community these very foundations are often taken for granted. They become part of the world, rather than being recognised as ways in which we see the world. Furthermore, as these fundamentals frame the actions we take and the goals to which we apply ourselves, they are often the basis of investment of considerable effort and resources. They also structure our relations with the others in the communities of which we are a part. As such they can become very entrenched.

Pluralism recognises that it is quite possible to have different internally coherent sets of values, beliefs and strategies based on them that inform our collective action which coexist. Yet others deviating from our set of beliefs can appear to threaten to undermine personal investment based on those beliefs and the social structures within which we have lived out much of our lives. So encountering individuals or groups of people from other 'forms of life' or 'lifeworld contexts' can often seem a challenge with the potential to disrupt our lives, sense of community and identity. At worst, they appear to pose an existential threat. Instead of fear, suspicion, and hostility however, deliberation holds the potential, at least, to develop understanding across such different positions.

A deliberative exchange that utilises reason in the symbolic medium of language can help facilitate the development of understanding across plural beliefs, although it cannot guarantee it. It offers this potential because it permits the development of mutual understanding between adherents of such positions while respecting the plural beliefs on which their distinct stances are founded.

The process of understanding another through a deliberative exchange does not require us to surrender our own beliefs. As our consideration of the basic dyadic form showed (above, p.8), developing an understanding of another in this manner involves developing an account of their beliefs by relating them to our own, in a way that allows us to predict their reactions to our actions on them. While this does require us to be able to appreciate their perspective – to put ourselves in their shoes – it does not require us to abandon our own perspective in favour of the perspective of the person we seek to understand. Understanding of this form allows us to agree that we *would* accept another's conclusions *if* we shared their beliefs. This key feature of deliberation permits both insight into another's position from our own – we can appreciate their beliefs and how a given conclusion would follow from that – without surrendering that position. This is the epistemic value of deliberation in facilitating understanding across pluralism.

Deliberation takes place in the medium of language. In this medium, speech acts replace direct acts. This avoids the greater effort, resources and, potentially, damage that direct action can entail. As we have seen, though language develops from and reflects the values of a particular 'form of life' or 'lifeworld context', it is possible to build understanding through

deliberation across languages that are not shared because they were produced in different 'forms of life'. A deliberative 'virtual exchange' of this sort in the symbolic realm allows parties to develop understanding of the values, beliefs and goals that might motivate the actions and the meanings attached to them prior to taking those actions. By attempting to reach such an understanding using language, prior to other forms of interaction, deliberation prioritises the epistemic value that it offers. This further minimises the danger that a party's position will be undermined by action based on misunderstanding, diffusing the threat that encountering apparently different cultures appears to pose.

However, none of this is to claim either that parties will embark on deliberation when confronted by others from different 'forms of life' or 'lifeworlds', or that if they do so deliberation will necessarily result in agreement. The threat another appears to pose may seem so great as to deter any kind of deliberative exchange, while past interactions and misunderstandings may lead to a negative spiral of further mistrust, hostility and mutual harm. The argument here is not that deliberation will always be preferred in the real world, nor that when it is it will always lead to agreement. Rather it is that, when chosen and pursued, deliberation maximises the potential for such agreement.

Deliberation increases the likelihood of parties engaging in a process of understanding. As outlined above (pp. 9-10) it does not require the surrender of one party's understanding in favour of another's and it takes place in the symbolic realm of language, thus diminishing the apparent threat posed by those who hold different beliefs. And while it cannot be guaranteed that parties who embark on deliberation will reach understanding, the result of successful deliberation is a framework within which those from one position may appropriately characterise and comprehend those of another tradition, without requiring the abandonment or modification of either. It is then possible, though again not guaranteed, for parties to use such a shared framework to explore the degree of overlap between their positions. To the extent that their positions remain incommensurable, the shared framework may also allow the nature of their differences to be clarified. With further deliberation, this has the potential to form the basis for agreeing meta-principles to govern interaction between adherents to positions that remain grounded in fundamentally irreconcilable principles. Again, the understanding that deliberation can produce does not guarantee that these further steps will be taken, though in principle it is capable of providing the foundation for doing so if deliberation is continued.

It is in this sense then that deliberation has the potential to both explore the degree of substantive common ground between positions, and where this is limited, to develop meta-frameworks to govern and co-ordinate interaction between different positions in a way that respects them through the mutual understanding this permits. That is why deliberation is required – is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition – if we are to fully pursue the goal of political decision making within pluralism. Such a goal seeks to optimise the interests of all. In order to achieve this we need a method which will maximise the opportunity for all to both express their interests, and to understand those of others, in the development of collective goals. As explained, deliberation, when democratic and open to all, provides such a method. Without it any agreement on collective goals runs the risk of privileging one position over others, by failing to fully explore the potential for co-operation and settling for a sub-optimal outcome, or misrepresenting one party's interests in a way that may constrain them.

This discussion has established the epistemic utility of deliberation for developing understanding across pluralist positions, by examining the form that such understanding might take, through a consideration of Wittgenstein's later theory of language, how this maps on to Habermas's model of deliberation, and a deeper consideration of how the beliefs that characterise pluralist contexts relate to the process of understanding. At the heart of these accounts lies the role of reason or deliberation. The next two sections examine how reason works in more detail by pinpointing two key elements of reason that act as criteria for evaluating deliberative exchanges: validity and scope.

6. Validity and argument

Validity is a property of an argument – the process of exchanging reasons. A valid argument relates claims – to truth, normative rightness, or subjective authenticity. One set of claims, known as the argument's premisses, are advanced in the hope that their acceptance will make acceptance of a further claim – the argument's conclusion – more likely. In classic deductive logic, acceptance of the premisses of a valid argument makes acceptance of its conclusion necessary, as the conclusion is logically implied by the premisses. In inductive logic, acceptance of the premisses merely makes acceptance of the truth, normative rightness or subjective authenticity of the conclusion more likely. Importantly, validity should be

distinguished from soundness. A sound argument is one which, in addition to being valid, also has true premisses.

In the process of deliberating to reach mutual understanding across plural positions, validity drives reason. It does so since the aim of a deliberative exchange is a valid argument in which a claim or utterance that has been put in dispute by its rejection by at least one party, is either accepted or replaced by another claim or utterance that can be accepted by all parties. This goal is attained through parties providing reasons, or explanations, that take the form of further claims or utterances. These are advanced in the hope that they will (i) be more acceptable to an opposed party and (ii) such acceptance will make the opposed party more likely to assent to the central claim or utterance. In other words the aim of deliberation oriented to mutual understanding is a valid argument, from premisses accepted by both parties to a common conclusion.

This goal of validity acts as a counterfactual framework within which a deliberative exchange is given direction. In providing arguments with which to explain their claim, a party *A* reflects on the reasons another party *B* had for rejecting that claim. Based on this, *A* seeks alternative motivation for *B* to accept *A*'s claim, by applying the mechanism of validity to what *A* can deduce about *B*'s beliefs. This can make *A* aware of the partiality of their own assumptions, on which they made the prediction that *B* would accept their original claim. By offering reasons *A* attempts to make those assumptions explicit, in terms that *B* can relate to, and hence explain *A*'s basis for that claim. Alternatively, the claim itself might be modified. Here the validity is 'reverse engineered'. From *B*'s rejection *A* infers how the assumptions that *B* is likely to hold differ from *A*'s own. *A* then advances a conclusion that is compatible with *B*'s alternative assumptions. In both cases validity helps relate one party's assumptions to another in a search for common ground: mutually acceptable premisses that support a mutually acceptable conclusion. The assumptions that led us to make a claim are related to those held by our interlocutor, by constructing common dimensions within the shared counterfactual framework of validity.

For example, my claim that sole carers of children under school age should not be required to look for work as a condition of receiving benefit might be objected to by you. You feel that sole carers should not be a burden to the taxpayer, but should contribute to the economy like anyone else. Taking this into account, I explain that at this age children benefit from the care

of a parent. Third party childcare is a poor substitute. Problems stemming from poor childcare at this early stage would actually result in a net cost to the state, and taxpayer, in terms of the percentage of children having to rely on benefits, experiencing health problems or becoming involved in crime in later life. On this basis you recognise the partiality of your assumptions. You recognise the underlying dimension – a concern with cost – which frames our common understanding of the issue. This allows me to make my premisses explicit, in a way that relates to your concerns. In light of this, you are willing to accept the conclusion, re-aligning it with your revised assumptions.

In using dialogic reasoning in this way we are forced to think about what might be acceptable to another in terms of their assumptions, and the valid inferences these support, and relate these to our own beliefs and the reasons we have for holding them. To the extent that we understand another's position, we appreciate these assumptions and the inferences to be drawn from them, so can make inferences that are valid from that person's perspective. We grasp their logic. Likewise, if there is a mutual understanding, from their position they can comprehend and deploy our logic. So the product of a successful deliberative exchange is a valid argument in which the premisses and therefore conclusion are agreed by the parties – they both accept the conclusion for the same reasons.

It is important to appreciate, however, that deliberation does not always lead to substantive agreement on every issue. While the goal is an agreed conclusion which is accepted on shared premisses, it may be that the process of seeking such an agreement makes plain the divergence of the parties' views. Rather than emphasising what the parties share, the process appears to highlight their differences. As others have argued, too much pressure on parties to resolve their differences runs the risk of constraining their full expression (Kuran 1998; Femia 1996; Dryzek and Niemeyer 2006). Therefore it is necessary to acknowledge a clearer recognition of difference as an acceptable product of deliberation (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2006; Niemeyer & Dryzek 2007). Such an outcome is nonetheless of epistemic value in the sense meant here, since it both charts the extent of possible agreement, and helps clarify the basis of that agreement in exposing the reasoning of each party. To that extent greater understanding results. Moreover, such clarity can provide the foundations for bridging principles that co-ordinate these differences. How this process might be facilitated leads to a consideration of the second aspect of argument, derived from validity – its relative scope.

7. Scope and questioning

The search for validity is triggered by an awareness that our assumptions or premisses are different to those of another in some respect. We make a claim or utterance which we expect to produce a particular reaction, but it does not. This indicates the relative *partiality* of our understanding. Explanation or argument – the provision of reasons – is thus initiated by having our assumptions *questioned*. This activity of questioning plays a similar role during argument. Different claims are advanced by either side, in an attempt to gain acceptance from the other. However, these interim claims may also be challenged. Of course, in the act of being challenged, we gain information about the differences in belief that might motivate such a different reaction. We can also explicitly request such information.

As we have seen, the aim of such questioning and this process of explanation, or the exchange of reasons in argument, is to discover a set of claims – premisses – that parties can jointly accept, and from which the joint acceptance of a shared conclusion follows. Thus the exchange of reasons and questions in search of a valid argument ends with a further, shared, set of assumptions. These are accepted by the parties, not questioned. They can therefore be said to mark the boundary, or scope, of the process of a deliberative exchange. The search for a valid argument, triggered by and pursued through questioning, also comprises the search for shared premisses that can be agreed. The product of that search comprises both the agreed premisses and the valid inferences that support the consequent acceptance of a conclusion. The result of deliberation is therefore characterised by both its scope – the unquestioned, but accepted premisses that mark the extent of the reasoning process – and the valid inferences, or reasoning, by which they underpin the claim made in the conclusion.

8. Deploying the epistemic criteria of validity and scope.

Since every deliberative exchange can be described in terms of its scope and validity, clarifying these dimensions can therefore help assess the epistemic value, or contribution, of any deliberative exchange. This in turn can facilitate the process of establishing the nature and extent of consensus across plural positions.

The most obvious way in which clarity over the scope and validity of a particular deliberative exchange assists is that it makes clear to those who are party to a deliberation the extent and

content of any consensus or shared understanding they have established. This mutual understanding provides an important bridge between the parties' positions, through which they can appreciate and respect one another's perspectives. It is therefore important to be clear about the content of that shared understanding – its dimensions and logic – as well as its extent, so that it can serve this function for the parties to deliberation themselves. This is the primary role of validity and scope, in that it allows us to trace how much consensus has been possible, and its nature. As I have argued, exploring the possibility of such agreement is the main task of deliberation within a politically plural context. This understanding can then be mobilised to co-ordinate interaction.

Specification of the extent and content of the results of deliberation contributes to the development of plural understanding in a second way. Clarity about the dimensions of limits to existing agreement, or shared perspectives, help participants appreciate the dimensions of continued areas of disagreement, or differences. This can assist the development of enlarged, 'meta-frameworks' of shared principles that are designed to bridge those differences, while respecting them. To illustrate, take the example of two revelation-based religions that have long been engaged in fruitless attempts to evangelise one another. This failure to persuade highlights that the assumptions of one religion are not held by those of the other, and that the assumptions they do hold are of great value to them. Moreover, since these religions are both based on revelation, or pure belief, ultimately there are no deeper shared grounds, or premisses, from which followers of one religion can argue for followers of the other to accept those beliefs. Yet, in this delineation of the differences separating these internally coherent yet distinct positions, their shared meta-interest in protecting the freedom to practise a chosen faith – freedom of conscience – is exposed. Though hypothetical, this example illustrates how, over time, acknowledging the limitations of current understanding can provide the foundations for enlarging that understanding in a way that spans these limitations while respecting the differences they demarcate. Note that the dimensions of such a shared 'meta-framework' are constructed by relating the partiality of the distinct positions involved. They do not require the adoption of some 'objective' or 'absolute' version of the common good, that transcends this relational perspective.

Explicit acknowledgement of the limitations of any understanding also facilitates an appreciation of the contingency of agreements already reached. This in turn helps lubricate the process of the expansion of understanding through deliberation. The dynamic of building

more comprehensive understanding is facilitated by recognising any agreement, or consensus, is built on particular assumptions. In this sense it is partial. The assumptions that mark this partiality are by definition unquestioned. But their partiality may only be revealed by them being questioned or challenged, in interaction with those who hold alternative assumptions. So we cannot fully predict their partiality in advance. Stating the validity and scope of understandings reached through deliberation should help us appreciate that partiality when there is challenge. It should also make us aware of the contingency of those assumptions, and of the conclusions which are based on them.

An appreciation of this dynamic of contingency and partiality, revealed through challenge, eases the process of development in response to questioning and further deliberation. Such an exchange does not become a contest of absolutes. Rather it can be regarded as extending the scope of an existing position, within which a pre-existing, more partial understanding can still be apprehended. From this perspective it becomes less likely that existing consensus will act as a barrier to further deliberation. Instead of a threat to be resisted questioning and deliberation can be seen as an opportunity to be embraced.

9. The epistemic basis of democratic deliberation

Gauging the epistemic quality of a deliberative exchange in terms of its validity and scope suggests the use of deliberation to explore the potential for agreement and co-ordination across plural political positions should be inclusive and democratic. There are two bases for this claim. One is related to the content of different political positions within a plural context – the subject matter of political decision making. The other is related to the way in which knowledge is developed and expanded – whether political or otherwise. This relates to the process of understanding itself.

The account we have given of how mutual understanding develops, and how its product, a valid argument whose scope is defined by particular assumptions, suggests that it is necessary to ensure that any decisions based upon deliberation are inclusive. Without this inclusivity any decisions taken risk making incorrect assumptions about others' positions, which should otherwise have been taken into account. It is only through remaining open to this wider understanding that decisions that are optimal in a plural context can be constructed. As we have seen, clear specification of the premisses and reasoning that support decisions help with

appreciating the way in which existing decisions are partial, and facilitate the process of challenge and development of those decisions to include a wider range of perspectives and positions. Moreover, we cannot know if our assumptions are shared by all unless our decision procedures facilitate challenge from those who feel themselves excluded in this way. Any attempt at second guessing without the checking mechanism of openness to questioning runs the risk of constraining others' perspectives as, despite our best efforts, the limitations of our assumptions are sometimes only revealed when those assumptions are challenged from a different perspective.

Similar considerations apply to the principles underlying the development of any body of knowledge, of which political deliberation is a particular instance. As Popper has argued, knowledge develops best when we maximise the opportunities for challenge or questioning (1966). Kuhn emphasises that the positions around which experts coalesce can become rigid, and are difficult to replace with more penetrating or comprehensive explanations, so this is not easy. Again, he implies that improvements are likely to come from outside a particular consensus, or paradigm, through challenging or questioning assumptions (1996). Moreover, it is impossible to predict where and how these challenges might materialise from within a particular paradigm. Hence the need to maximise openness. Of course, this does not mean that expert understanding cannot develop. Simply that it must remain alert to its own contingency, and open to challenge and the possibility of further development that questioning can bring.

Taken together, these arguments provide a compelling *epistemic* argument for the need for democratic deliberation, directed to mutual understanding (cf. Estlund 1997; Gauss 1997; Martí 2006; Landemore 2012, 2013). Note that such openness is again developed by a clear characterisation of the epistemic quality of individual deliberative exchanges through their validity and scope. While this will never give an absolute assessment of such quality, it does help provide a contingent description of their partiality and the assumptions that they make. This not only allows deliberation to be deployed more effectively, but also allows for more fluid challenge and development to provide more inclusive understanding, through further deliberation.

References

Dryzek J.S. (2000) *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Dryzek J.S. and Niemeyer S. (2006) 'Reconciling Pluralism and Consensus as Political Ideals' *American Journal of Political Science* 50(3) July : 634-649.

Estlund D. (1997) 'Beyond Fairness and Democracy: The Epistemic Dimension of Democratic Authority' in Bohman J. and Rehg W. (eds.) *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics* Massachusetts, MIT Press: 173-204.

Femia, J. (1996) 'Complexity and Deliberative Democracy' *Inquiry* 39(3-4): 359-97.

Gadamer, H.-G. (1975) *Truth and Method* New York, Seabury Press.

Gaus, G. (1997) 'Looking for the Best and Finding None Better: The Epistemic Case for Deliberative Democracy' *The Modern Schoolman* 74: 277-284.

Habermas J. (1984) *The Theory of Communicative Action Volume 1: Reason and The Rationalization of Society* (McCarthy T. trans.) Cambridge, Polity Press.

Habermas J. (1987) *The Theory of Communicative Action Volume 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (McCarthy T. trans.) Cambridge, Polity Press.

Habermas J. (1990) *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, (Lenhardt C. and Nicholson S.W trans.) Cambridge, Polity Press.

Habermas J. (1998) 'Social Action, Purposive Activity and Communication' in Cooke M. (ed.) *On the Pragmatics of Communication.* Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press: 105-182.

Knops A. (2007) 'Agonism as Deliberation – On Mouffe's Theory of Democracy' *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 15(1): 115-126.

Knops A. (2015) ‘A Strategic-Relational Account of Language Use, Discourse and Reason’ *Critical Discourse Studies* 12(1): 1-19.

Kuhn T. (1996) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (3rd ed.) Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Kuran, Timur (1998) ‘Insincere Deliberation and Democratic Failure’ *Critical Review* 12(4): 529-44.

Landemore H. (2012) ‘Democratic Reason: The Mechanisms of Collective Intelligence in Politics’ in Landemore H. and Elster J. (eds.) *Collective Wisdom: Principles and Mechanisms* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 251-289.

Landemore H. (2013) *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence and the Rule of the Many* Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Martí J.L. (2006) ‘The Epistemic Conception of Deliberative Democracy Defended: *Reasons, Rightness and Equal Political Autonomy’* in Besson S. and Martí J.L. (eds.) *Deliberative Democracy and its Discontents* Aldershot, Ashgate: 27-56.

Mouffe C. (2000) *The Democratic Paradox* London, Verso.

Niemeyer S. and Dryzek J.S. (2007) ‘The Ends of Deliberation: Meta-consensus and Intersubjective Rationality as Ideal Outcomes’ *Swiss Political Science Review* 13(4): 497-526.

Pitkin H.F. (1993) *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Popper K. (1966) *The Open Society and Its Enemies* London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Tully, J. (1989) ‘Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy: Understanding Practices of Critical Reflection’ *Political Theory*, 17, 172-204.

Wittgenstein (1963) *Philosophical Investigations* (Anascombe G.E.M trans.) Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

Young I.M. (1996) 'Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy' in Benhabib S. (ed.) *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, Princeton, Princeton University Press: 120-35.

Young, I. M. (2000) *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.