Original Article

Rationality and deliberative democracy: A constructive critique of John Dryzek's democratic theory

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Abstract John Dryzek's justification of deliberative democracy rests on a critique of instrumental rationality and a defence of Habermas's idea of communicative rationality. I question each stage of Dryzek's theory. It defines instrumental rationality broadly but only criticises narrow applications of it. It conflates communicative rationality with Habermas's idea of 'discourse' – the real motor of Dryzek's democratic theory. Deliberative democracy can be better defended by avoiding overstated criticisms of instrumental rationality, by altering the emphasis on communicative rationality, and by focusing more on different models of politics than different models of rationality. Dryzek's theory can thus present deliberative democracy as a better means to better ends – a more powerful and more positive position.
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Introduction

Q2 This article is a constructive critique of John Dryzek's democratic theory – 'discursive democracy'. Dryzek is a prominent exponent of Habermas and an influential deliberative democrat. Using Habermas's ideas, Dryzek attacks elitist politics and defends deliberative policy making by citizens. This argument is very important: too often, we treat 'public policy' as something done *for* but not *by* the public.

However, discursive democracy is weakened by its account of rationality. Dryzek's theory links elitist politics to instrumental rationality, and deliberative democracy to 'communicative rationality'. In my opinion, this critique of

instrumental rationality is overstated, this defence of communicative rationality is mis-stated, and this justification of deliberative democracy should be restated.

Instead of trying to show that different models of politics are based on different types of rationality, discursive democrats could accept instrumental rationality. Indeed, they can say that discursive democracy is more instrumentally rational than elitist politics. That makes Dryzek's democratic theory more powerful and more positive. My article is thus both critical and constructive. I aim to be 'creative and enabling, not just chastening and constraining', in Dryzek's words (1996, p. 10).

My argument runs as follows. After explaining Dryzek's importance, I examine his strategy of criticising instrumental rationality (the ability to choose good means to ends) and defending communicative rationality (the rationality of sincere discussion, roughly). I suggest that his theory makes overstated criticisms of instrumental rationality: although instrumental rationality is always defined broadly, narrow applications or conceptions of it are then criticised. Discursive democracy needs instrumental rationality.

I then address communicative rationality. This idea of Habermas is not normative enough for discursive democracy. Communicative rationality is only mildly normative; it is about understanding more than legitimacy. Dryzek's theory needs Habermas's idea of 'discourse', which should not be confused with communicative rationality.

This entails a different justification of deliberative democracy. Because the different types of rationality apply in *both* elitist and deliberative democracy, there are no straight lines from a theory of rationality to a model of politics. Dryzek's normative conclusions need not change but his theory should become more empirical: the different rationalities, he can argue, are simply more prominent in deliberative democracy.

I conclude by suggesting that Dryzek's theory should focus more on different models of politics than different models of rationality. Deliberative democracy can be defended as a better means to better ends. Overall, this modified account of rationality strengthens rather than weakens Dryzek's democratic aims.

Note that I talk of 'elitist' politics, which is not Dryzek's term, as shorthand for the model of politics which he criticises – administrative, technocratic, hierarchical, competitive, dominated by bureaucrats and politicians, and driven by self-interest. For ease of argument I talk of an elitist/deliberative dichotomy, but reality is obviously more complex. I follow Dryzek in sidestepping Habermas's distinction between strategic and instrumental rationality, and in talking about both simply as 'instrumental'.

Finally, two points need emphasising if I am to avoid misinterpretation. First, we must distinguish narrow and broad notions of instrumental

rationality. One way of reading Dryzek's opposition to instrumental rationality is that it is part of a broader desire for a world where people control their own destinies rather than being governed by economic incentives, for example. This, though, is not a criticism of instrumental rationality as Dryzek himself defines it – broadly. It is a criticism of a narrower, Frankfurt-School notion of instrumental rationality. If that is how some readers want to define instrumental rationality, they should also say whether they reject the broader notion, as defined by Dryzek and many social scientists. That task is much harder, as I explain below.

Second, I should emphasise what I am *not* saying about rationality and norms. I am not denouncing arguments like the one cited above – Dryzek's opposition to a world dominated by economics – but I do deny that instrumental rationality is to blame. I am not pretending that well-rounded moral or political theories can make do with instrumental rationality alone, merely that it deserves much more support than Dryzek's theory gives it. I am not rejecting Dryzek's model of democracy, merely the way it is derived from his account of rationality.

Why Dryzek?

Dryzek is important in his own right and as an influential exponent of Habermas. Even before Habermas championed deliberative democracy in *Between Facts and Norms*, Dryzek's book *Discursive Democracy* (1990a) had used Habermasian ideas to produce one of the earliest extensive accounts of deliberative democracy. This book and Dryzek's well-known paper on public choice theory (1992) are his most important critiques of instrumental rationality. His later works, especially *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond* (2000) and *Deliberative Global Politics* (2006a), remain concerned about instrumental rationality, and again draw on Habermas inventively, especially as regards environmental policy and global democracy. But these latter books are less Habermasian, perhaps reflecting his 'lament' at Habermas's 'defection' from radical to liberal (2000, pp. 8, 27; see also Dryzek, 2001).

This helps to explain Dryzek's importance. Not only is he one of the core deliberative democrats, but his shunning of liberal, state-centred deliberative democracy distinguishes him from most other core deliberative democrats, including Habermas. Dryzek has also addressed more concrete questions of institutional design than Habermas and most of his followers; rationality is crucial here (Dryzek, 1990a, pp. 29–56).

Rationality is thus central to Dryzek's significance, putting him at the forefront of three key shifts in democratic theory: from aggregative to deliberative democracy, one of the most striking developments in political theory in the

last 25 years; from elitist to radical politics; and from abstract to concrete, practical democratic theory.

Dryzek has had considerable impact across politics more widely. His book *Discursive Democracy* was as much about public policy as political theory, and he remains influential in public policy (Gottweis, 2006, pp. 472–473). He is one of the best known representatives of postpositivist public policy (deLeon, 2006, p. 51). The arguments discussed here have had some effect on rational choice, social choice and public choice theorists (Mackie, 2005, p. 7).

Dryzek has even been influential outside of politics, especially in planning studies, where he has helped to stimulate the surprisingly large literature inspired by Habermas and critical theory (see Lauria and Wagner, 2006). I cannot gauge Dryzek's exact impact here, but many planning theorists echo the errors criticised in this article (Blau, 2007). With certain modifications, my arguments apply to these writers too – as well as to critical theorists in international relations (Risse, 2004, pp. 294–300), management studies (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000, pp. 90–93), and philosophy of social science (Potter, 2000, pp. 113–114, 238). While Dryzek's work is my primary focus, then, my criticisms have wider resonance.

Therefore, Dryzek's theory needs challenging. We should correct its misportrayal of Habermas and its misrepresentation of instrumental rationality, for three reasons: because of Dryzek's particular importance to deliberative democratic theory; because of his significance in political theory, in politics more widely, and outside of politics; and because some problems with his theory are found in the work of other critical theorists.

The Critique of Instrumental Rationality

Dryzek's critique of instrumental rationality is strongly influenced by Habermas, and by Habermas's teachers, Adorno and Horkheimer, who presented modernity as being dominated by science, technology and instrumental rationality. On this view, the Enlightenment and modern society were not seeing the progress and emancipation promised by reason, but the increasing advance of an instrumental form of reason, resulting in domination, authoritarianism and the Enlightenment's self-destruction.

Habermas challenges Adorno and Horkheimer's account of instrumental rationality for 'oversimplify[ing] its image of modernity so astoundingly' (PDM, pp. 112–113). Their overly pessimistic critique led Habermas to explore a broader, communicative idea of rationality. Despite these disagreements, all of these critical theorists stress the normative dangers of limiting rationality to the choice of means to ends set by other people, or set by markets (Finlayson, 2005, pp. 4–75).

A common strategy in Dryzek's work is to contrast instrumental and communicative rationality, criticise instrumental rationality, and defend communicative rationality. But these criticisms of instrumental rationality, I suggest, are based on a fallacy. They define instrumental rationality broadly, but then criticise narrow applications of it – choices of bad means, or the pursuit of bad ends. These important criticisms are correct. But we can still defend instrumental rationality without committing such errors.

I will briefly expand on this. Dryzek's writings often contrast two types of rationality only, for example in discussing Habermas on modernity's 'two sorts of reason', instrumental and communicative.[1] The instrumental/communicative distinction, writes Dryzek (1992, p. 400), is 'central' for Habermas. Of course, Dryzek never says that there are only two types of rationality, and sometimes discusses more (for example 1990a, p. 9). But Dryzek usually implies that the main options are instrumental and communicative rationality; and by criticising instrumental rationality, he points us towards communicative rationality.

At least nine times, Dryzek's writings define instrumental rationality broadly: 'the capacity to devise, select and effect good means to clarified and consistent ends'.[2] This is fairly standard (for example Elster, 1983, pp. 1–15). The problem is that after defining instrumental rationality broadly, Dryzek's theory usually criticises *narrow* conceptions or applications of instrumental rationality. I will consider three such criticisms: instrumental rationality is (a) anti-democratic, (b) bad at dealing with complex problems, and (c) misused by some social choice theorists.

Instrumental rationality as anti-democratic

Dryzek's theory holds that instrumental rationality 'represses individuals' and is 'antidemocratic … insofar as bureaucratization entails the concentration of political power', as instrumental rationality provides 'justification and organizing principles for bureaucracy' (1990a, pp. 4–5). This is a form of Weberian syllogism: bureaucracy is the epitome of instrumental rationality; bureaucracy is anti-democratic; therefore instrumental rationality is anti-democratic.

But consider again Dryzek's own definition of instrumental rationality. Defined broadly, instrumental rationality cannot be the basic problem. Instrumental rationality is not inherently anti-democratic or repressive. There is nothing anti-democratic and repressive about seeking good means to ends unless the chosen means or ends are anti-democratic and repressive. Instrumental rationality can serve democratic and non-repressive purposes, or anti-democratic and repressive purposes. The problem, rather, is when bureaucracies serve anti-democratic ends and choose repressive means.

Yet this is a criticism of bureaucracy, not instrumental rationality. Discursive democrats can legitimately say that bureaucratic decision making, whose guiding principle is instrumental rationality, violates political equality and may infringe citizen interests. This criticises some applications of instrumental rationality without suggesting that instrumental rationality 'represses individuals'. It is true that some *applications* of instrumental rationality – some means or some ends – repress individuals. It is quite another thing to say that *instrumental rationality* does so.

It is not surprising, then, that Dryzek's theory implicitly uses instrumental rationality in a non-repressive way, asking whether bureaucracies are 'the best means for dealing with any given level of complexity' (2006a, p. 141; see also 2000, p. 173). If the answer is 'no', we should seek better means. Otherwise we are not instrumentally rational.

Dryzek's opponents are let off the hook here. Some instrumental rationalists are overly tied to bureaucracy, seeing it as the purest embodiment of instrumental rationality. They can be accused of inconsistency: if they really want instrumental rationality, and if bureaucracy is not always a good means, they should look beyond bureaucracy.

My suggestions thus strengthen, not weaken, discursive democracy. By diluting their critique of instrumental rationality, discursive democrats can make the same normative arguments – criticising bureaucracy, defending deliberative politics – without trying to rebut something which everyone needs. Discursive democrats get extra critical bite too, by accusing some instrumental rationalists of forgetting its requirements.

Complexity

The narrow view of instrumental rationality is most explicit in Dryzek's important account of complexity:

> Instrumental rationality – and the political institutions in which it is manifested – is ineffective when confronted with complex social problems. Instrumental rationality goes hand in hand with an analytic sensibility, the idea that complex phenomena are best understood through intelligent disaggregation into their component parts. These parts should then be apprehended – and any problematic aspects of them resolved instrumentally – in piecemeal fashion. … *For the sake of brevity I shall often use 'instrumental rationality' as short-hand for 'instrumental-analytic rationality'*. (Dryzek, 1990a, pp. 5–6, 222, emphasis altered; see also 1990a, pp. 57–76; 2006a, pp. 140–142)

This rightly questions the capacity of traditional decision-making bodies to tackle complex problems. Many writers are too optimistic about human abilities and neglect the boundedness of our instrumental rationality. Every politician should read Dryzek, Hayek, Lindblom or Simon, and ask how well elitist methods solve complex problems. Dryzek encourages us to consider deliberative alternatives: more holistic, less disaggregative methods could improve problem-solving.

Again, though, instrumental rationality itself is not the problem. Note first the comment that 'instrumental rationality' actually means something narrower, an instrumental-*analytic* type of rationality that uses disaggregative, piecemeal methods. This raises the question of whether we should worry about forms of instrumental rationality that use non-disaggregative, holistic methods. And Dryzek's theory clearly treats holistic methods as superior when facing complex social problems. Therefore, by definition – indeed, by the definition in Dryzek's own work – his theory cannot be criticising instrumental rationality itself, merely one application of it.

Dryzek's position is not entirely clear when he writes that instrumental rationality 'goes hand in hand' with a disaggregative approach. Does this imply a necessary relationship, with instrumental rationality committing us to a disaggregative approach? Or is it simply the case that instrumental rationalists often happen to take disaggregative approaches in practice? In one place Dryzek implies a necessary connection: instrumental rationality '*requires* breaking such [complex] problems down into simpler components' (2005, p. 84; emphasis added). I prefer a softer stance. There is no reason why seeking the best means to an end requires a disaggregative approach. Indeed, when disaggregative approaches are bad at tackling complexity, they are not instrumentally rational (unless all other ways are worse). If we knew that holistic approaches are better at solving complex social problems, we would not be instrumentally rational to advocate disaggregation. Deliberative democracy may be instrumentally rational – a better means to our ends.

Dryzek's theory again invokes instrumental rationality like this, asking whether bureaucracies are 'the best means for dealing with any given level of complexity', as noted above, and suggesting that discursive democracy 'contains means for coping with highly complex social problems' (2006a, p. 141; 1996, p. 146). If discursive democracy is better than bureaucracy in this respect, instrumental rationality requires the former, other things being equal.

Dryzek's opponents get another let-off here. Instrumental rationalists with disaggregative approaches arguably use bad means to reach their ends. If these writers really are instrumentally rational, they must consider alternatives. Their fallacy would be clearer when faced with Dryzek's original, broad definition of instrumental rationality. Logically, the problem cannot be instrumental

rationality, merely one particular application of it whose prevalence Dryzek legitimately queries.

Public/social choice theory

A different kind of criticism appears in Dryzek's (1992) important critique of the Virginia and Rochester schools of public/social choice theory, associated especially with James Buchanan and William Riker, respectively (compare Dryzek and List, 2003). Dryzek's model of democracy challenges these writers' parched and pessimistic models of politics.

For most Virginia theorists 'it is self-interest … that does the bulk of the damage'. Their gloomy conclusions about politics reflect their assumption of egoistic ends, 'not … the simple fact of the instrumental nature of this pursuit' (1992, p. 406). Dryzek is not claiming that instrumental rationality is inherently egoistic, a view he rightly rejects elsewhere (2000, p. 32; Dryzek and List, 2003, p. 3). Indeed, his concern seems to be that Virginia theorists err by assuming self-interest, not instrumental rationality. Instrumental rationality aimed at ends based on collective interests would produce more palatable models of politics. That is a viable criticism of much Virginian public choice theory (one exception being Brennan and Hamlin, 2000, pp. 6–10).

But the equivalent distinction is not made when criticising Rochester social choice theorists. Here, 'instrumental rationality and non-cognitivism do the damage'. For Dryzek, 'non-cognitivism' means that values and preferences are not rationally assessable. (This is a misnomer. Non-cognitivism is the meta-ethical view that moral judgements are not claims about moral truths; this says nothing about assessing values rationally. But I will retain Dryzek's terminology here.) His point is that even if individuals sought common rather than selfish interests, we would still get the paradoxes and voting cycles that Rikerians see as inherent to democracy. Rochester theorists should stop assuming non-cognitivism, otherwise political actors 'cannot escape these problems by subjecting their preferences to rational scrutiny and possible adjustment in the interests of determinate collective choices' (1992, p. 406).

It is not clear why Rochester theorists are criticised for assuming non-cognitivism *and* instrumental rationality, rather than non-cognitivism alone. If the problem for Virginia theorists is that self-interest corrupts instrumental rationality, then the problem for Rochester theorists is that non-cognitivism stupefies it. In neither case is instrumental rationality itself the problem. Instrumental rationality produces good or bad effects depending on what it is tied to.

Dryzek's argument still has force: politics does not have to be as Buchanan or Riker depict it. Values can be non-egoistic and can change rationally.

Nonetheless, these criticisms involve what instrumental rationality is tied to, not instrumental rationality itself. That is probably the main message of Dryzek's 1992 paper. But unwary readers may read it as attacking instrumental rationality itself, not only because of the argument just cited but also because the paper starts by criticising 'instrumental rationalization', an empirical thesis about the rise of instrumental rationality (1992, pp. 399–400).

Summary

Dryzek's defence of deliberative democracy starts with broad definitions of instrumental rationality broadly, as the ability to choose good means to ends. But the ensuing criticisms involve narrow applications of it (bureaucracy, disaggregative approaches) or the ideas some people link it to (self-interest, non-cognitivism). These arguments, although important, should not make us reject instrumental rationality. The same applies to a criticism that I have left out for reasons of space: the domination of instrumental rationality, as Adorno and Horkheimer assert, and as some readings of Habermas's system/lifeworld argument suggest (Blau, 2010a). I would add that many critics and adherents of instrumental rationality are wrong to suppose that instrumental rationality must involve purely technical/efficiency-based means (Blau, 2010b).

Dryzek's position does not reject instrumental rationality entirely. We will find ourselves, he writes, 'flirting with instrumental rationality (which, when all is said and done, is often unavoidable)' (1994, p. 169). But it should be Q3 restricted to 'a subordinate domain' (1990a, pp. 9, 14, 218). This seems too negative, especially compared to the view that 'instrumental and communicative attitudes can coexist; the choice is seldom a matter of one or the other but rather of the proportions in which the two shall be combined' (1990a, pp. 20–21).

Dryzek's theory of democracy will be stronger, not weaker, if it does not target instrumental rationality itself, if it distinguishes between appropriate and inappropriate applications, and if it reproaches writers who claim to want good means to ends but simply presuppose elitist politics.

Is Communicative Rationality Normative Enough?

I now turn from instrumental to communicative rationality. After explaining what communicative rationality means, I show that it does not adequately support discursive democracy.

Habermas repeatedly identifies rationality in general, and communicative rationality in particular, with the ability to give reasons or good reasons.[3] For

Habermas, a good communicative reason is one which is genuinely accepted as empirically true, subjectively sincere or normatively right. Habermas means that when we communicate we refer to one or more of three worlds: objective facts, personal feelings and social norms. A discussion is communicatively rational to the extent that all communicators genuinely agree that propositions are, respectively, true, sincere and right. If one participant tries to get a proposition accepted non-genuinely, say by coercion or bribery, this is strategic not communicative rationality.[4]

In Habermas's first extended example of communicative rationality, an older worker on a building-site tells a younger worker to buy him a drink (TCA2, pp. 121–123). (As we will see, this example undermines Dryzek's stance on communicative rationality.) The older worker makes implicit or explicit references to subjective feelings ('I'm thirsty'), empirical facts ('a shop is nearby'), and social norms ('I outrank you, so you should do what I say').

The normative claim is central for us. 'The informal group hierarchy of the workers on the construction site is the normative framework in which the one is allowed to tell the other to do something', writes Habermas (TCA2, p. 121; emphasis removed). If the young worker is unaware of this norm, he may not see why the older worker is telling him to get a beer. '*I'm* not thirsty', he may say. Once told that his own thirst is irrelevant, and that older workers can instruct younger ones, he has a 'Gestalt-switch', understanding the situation in the same way as the older worker (TCA2, p. 122). Now he sees the norm and fully understands this part of the request. Communicative rationality applies to the extent that the two workers can understand and agree with these implicit or explicit claims about the worlds of facts, feelings and norms. My account here is standard and differs in only minor ways from that of writers like Simone Chambers (1996, pp. 90–97, 119, 132–133).

Despite certain ambiguities in Dryzek's account of communicative rationality (Blau, 2007), there is no doubting its Habermasian nature. Dryzek's work repeatedly links communicative rationality to Habermas and describes it in undeniably Habermasian terms.[5] But crucially, *communicative rationality as understood by Habermas is too narrow*.

To explain this, I address four core values of discursive democracy. Like most deliberative democrats, Dryzek wants policy making by citizens who are (i) autonomous and (ii) open-minded, focusing on (iii) common interests under (iv) inclusive conditions. Decision makers should decide autonomously, free from deception, self-deception and domination.[6] Decision makers should be open-minded and reflective, choosing according to the force of the better argument.[7] Generalisable interests, not self-interest, should drive discussion.[8] And there should be minimal barriers to participation by competent individuals or their randomly chosen representatives.[9] (Dryzek's other prescriptions, like transnational governance, do not affect my argument.)

However, communicative rationality as Habermas depicts it primarily involves understanding and agreement. It does not involve deliberation about disputed ends, or choices between them. When Habermas writes that communicative rationality includes the assumption that normative statements are 'valid', he means that (a) the norm applies to communicators, and (b) they accept it.[10] In the building-site example, the older worker (a) has an informal right to instruct the young one (TCA2, pp. 121–122). If the young worker (b) accepts this hierarchical norm, he can understand the request, and communicative rationality is achieved in this respect.

Therefore, communicative rationality is about accepting *claims* to truth, rightness and sincerity, not about whether something *is* true, right or sincere (TCA1, p. 302; MCCA, pp. 58–59). The point of communicative rationality is 'to establish and renew interpersonal relations' (TCA1, p. 308), not to *justify* them through argument. Its aim is the mutual 'recognition' of norms (MCCA, p. 58), not their *defence*. 'We must distinguish between the social fact that a norm is intersubjectively recognised and its *worthiness* to be recognised. There may be good reasons to consider the validity claim raised in a socially accepted norm to be *unjustified*' (MCCA, p. 61; emphasis added). (Note that my account largely sidesteps communicative rationality's sociological function: coordinating actions and binding individuals as they recognise shared norms. See for example TCA2, p. 86.)

Communicative rationality, then, is at most only mildly normative. Some communication is entirely non-normative (OPC, pp. 326–327), as with empirical validity-claims like 'it is raining now' (TCA1, p. 313). And communicatively rational discussions which do involve norms merely justify claims according to *existing* norms, as with the construction worker who simply appealed to a pre-given norm. Deliberative democracy needs a stronger form of rationality – one which can question existing norms, and if necessary, change or replace them.

Discourse and communicative rationality

If communicative rationality does not settle disagreements about norms, what does? The key is Habermas's idea of 'discourse'.[11] We can think about the difference between communicative rationality and discourse as follows. Communicative rationality involves factual claims about norms, discourse involves normative claims about norms. Communicative rationality involves claims about which norms do apply, discourse involves claims about which norms should apply. Communicative rationality involves claims like 'older workers are allowed to tell younger workers what to do', discourse involves claims like 'older workers should be allowed to tell younger workers what to do'.

(Discourse can also be about facts but for this article I address normative discourse only, and deal primarily with moral rather than ethical discourse.) Communicative rationality involves understanding for the sake of action, whereas participants in discourse are 'relieved of the pressure of action' (TCA1, p. 25; MCCA, p. 87; BFN, p. 228) as they try to work out what is right. My account here is standard, following writers like Thomas McCarthy (1978, pp. 288–292, 306–314, 323–327), Simone Chambers (1996, pp. 95–101), Gordon Finlayson (2005, p. 323), and James Bohman and William Rehg (2007, Section 3).

Discourse starts when there is a '*lack* of a normative consensus' (TJ, p. 256; emphasis added). In discourse, the issue is also what the norm should be – 'the rightness of … a norm itself' (TCA1, p. 334) – regardless of what the current norm is. Habermas recognises that communicative action is 'precarious' and can easily turn into discourse (BFN, p. 21; OPC, p. 236), as 'participants *continue* their communicative action in a reflexive attitude' (MCCA, p. 67; emphasis added). But he is at pains to emphasise the 'strict distinction' between unreflective communicative action and reflective discourse (RC, p. 235) and insists that 'we can't equate communicative action with argumentation' (PF, p. 111).

Therefore, communicative rationality necessarily entails the 'anticipation and presupposition' of discourse (TP, p. 19; CES, pp. 3–4; MCCA, p. 88; PF, pp. 111–112). When someone makes a validity claim, she presupposes that she may have to justify or 'redeem' that claim in discourse (MCCA, pp. 58–59). But just because A can lead to B does not mean A is B. Similarly, discourse includes communicative rationality: for example, participants in a free-speech discourse might discuss whether certain expressions offend them, subjectively. But just because B includes A does not mean that B is A.

In discourse, the requirements for rationality are far stricter than in simple communicative action. 'Valid statements [in discourse] must admit of justification by appeal to reasons that could convince anyone irrespective of time or place', writes Habermas (JA, p. 52). This requires inclusiveness, equal opportunity for communication, sincerity and non-coercion – assumptions that should motivate participants even when they know that not all assumptions are met (TJ, pp. 106–107; TIO, p. 44). This produces such principles as the universalisation principle: roughly, in moral discourse everyone affected should accept a norm.[12]

Discourse and 'discursive' democracy

What does this mean for Dryzek's democratic theory? *Autonomy* is the only one of its four core democratic values that follows from communicative

rationality. An individual must genuinely agree with what is decided. If the older worker coerces the younger one to get a beer, this is strategic interaction not communicative action (OPC, pp. 218, 221–222).

Open-mindedness only has a limited role in communicative rationality. Communicators must be open to Gestalt-switches: if the young worker cannot recognise the background norm, communicative agreement is impossible. But deliberative democracy requires a stronger form of open-mindedness – opinions shifting according to the force of the better argument. We should discuss the pros and cons of issues, rather than simply accepting or rejecting current norms on the basis of 'cultural taken-for-grantedness'.[13]

Common interests are not a necessary part of communicative rationality. In the building-site example, the main interest is the older worker's, and the younger worker has a subsidiary interest in fitting in. These are not common interests, though. Indeed, lifeworld norms can be patriarchal and repressive (Fraser, 1995, pp. 24, 35–36; see also Dryzek, 1992, p. 401). Moral discourse, with its universalisation principle, would not permit patriarchal repression, yet communicative rationality does. Dryzek's position is that communicative rationality 'can pertain to the generation of normative judgments' (1990a, p. 14). But communicative rationality does not itself generate norms: it confirms or rejects existing norms. Nor should we say that in communicative rationality, a norm can be justified 'on the grounds that its adoption by all individuals would produce felicitous consequences' (1990a, pp. 14–15). This is part of discourse, not communicative rationality itself.

Inclusion is not required by communicative rationality either. If the older worker had asked the young one to get beer for all workers on the building site, the young worker would not need to discuss this with each worker to understand what was required. Dryzek's position is that communicative rationality requires inclusion (1990a, p. 15). But only discourse requires this. It is not wrong to say that '[c]ommunicatively rationalized *discourse* requires … that there be no barriers to competent participation' (1990a, p. 72; emphasis added). But communicative rationality need not be mentioned here.

In sum, communicative rationality is primarily about understanding and agreement, with at most a mildly normative justification. And even the understanding involved in communicative rationality is too narrow for Dryzek's democratic theory. Communicative rationality, we are told, involves 'the reflective understanding of competent actors' (Dryzek 1990a, p. 14). But for Habermas, reflection comes in discourse, not necessarily in communicative rationality. It is incidental to communicative rationality whether someone who accepts oppressive lifeworld norms has reflected on their legitimacy – just as instrumental rationality can aim at repressive or non-repressive ends, as explained earlier. Ironically, Dryzek's position now presents an 'expansion of communicative rationality beyond Habermas's own narrow and unnecessary

emphasis on argument' (2006b, p. 196). But the argument involved in communicative rationality is at most a simple yes/no affair as discussants raise validity claims about facts, feelings and norms; and these claims might only be implicit. Deep-seated argument belongs to discourse.

Dryzek's theory thus appears to equate discursive and communicative rationality. The 'precursor' to communicative rationality is the ideal speech situation (Dryzek, 1995, p. 104; 1990b, p. 102), but Habermas mostly restricts this to discourse.[14] The same applies to 'the ideal discursive community of communicative rationality' (Dryzek, 1994, p. 165), which actually belongs to discourse. 'Under communicative rationality, the only power exercised is … ''the forceless force of the better argument'' ' (Dryzek, 2000, p. 171), but again this involves discourse only. My account here is standard (for example McCarthy, 1978, pp. 306–310). Of course, many others blur discourse and communicative rationality (for example Risse, 2004, pp. 294–296). Indeed I too used to do this (Blau, 2007).

Instrumental Rationality Revisited

I now return to instrumental rationality. What is its place in deliberative democracy? How does it relate to communicative and discursive rationality? And what are the implications for Dryzek's defence of deliberative democracy?

Instrumental rationality and deliberative democracy

Instrumental rationality helps us pick good means to ends, which is obviously useful in deliberative democracy. Dryzek's comments on bureaucracy and on complexity, above, even suggest that deliberative democracy is better than elitist politics for choosing means. This is instrumental rationality's biggest contribution to deliberative democracy.

Crucially, though, instrumental rationality also helps us pick *ends*. Dryzek's stance is that communicative rationality lets us choose ends whereas instrumental rationality does not (1990a, pp. 14, 115; see also 1987, p. 201). But instrumental rationality has a role here: as Herbert Simon notes (1983, pp. 7–8, 11), we can ask if proposed ends are good means to other ends that we value. Habermas accepts a similar view (TCA1, TCA2, pp. 170, 172; BFN, pp. 159–161, 180, 186–188; JA, pp. 2–3, 10–11, 63). Discourse ethics involves some instrumental considerations: we must ask if our goals are feasible and if they have undesirable knock-on consequences (Chambers, 1996, pp. 90–91, 100, 188; Rehg, 1994, pp. 48–49, 239). Therefore, instrumental rationality can make a small contribution to choosing ends. And as just noted, communicative

rationality plays no direct part in choosing disputed ends; communicative rationality can even be conservative if communicators simply accept existing norms. Dryzek's theory presents instrumental rationality as conservative (2006a, p. 113), but this link is not necessary: we can seek means to conservative or radical ends.

Instrumental rationality helps not only during but also before deliberative democracy. Consider Innes and Booher's (1999) Habermasian analysis of how role-playing games foster empathy, helping people from different backgrounds to debate policies open-mindedly. Innes and Booher do not see this as instrumental rationality, but their arguments imply that role-playing games are a good means to discursive rationality.

Instrumental rationality and discourse

Discursive rationality can settle instrumental disputes. It is not only communicative rationality which presupposes discourse: Habermas now implies this for *instrumental* rationality too, in discussing 'pragmatic' claims about means to ends (BFN, pp. 160, 163; JA, pp. 10–11). Habermas talks of discursive rationality binding the three other types of rationality – epistemic, teleological and communicative, which involve knowledge, action and speech, respectively (OPC, p. 309). Therefore, when we make instrumental/pragmatic/teleological claims about good means to ends, we imply that these claims can be justified discursively. And we have just seen that discourse ethics may include instrumental reasoning.

Oddly, most Habermas-influenced thinkers continue to talk as if instrumental rationality is opposed to communicative or discursive rationality. Habermas's early work pointed in this direction (Blau, 2010a). But critics of instrumental rationality should now address Habermas's new position. Nor should they depict modernity in terms of just two types of reason: when we move from Habermas's sociological project to his political one, communicative rationality is not as important as discursive rationality, especially its ethical and moral applications. These get most emphasis in Habermas's post-1990 writings, about which Dryzek says little (two exceptions being Dryzek 2001, 2005, pp. 82, 87). Instrumental and discursive rationality are more closely linked than many writers imply.

From rationality to politics?

The most important message of this article involves how we justify deliberative democracy. Dryzek's position implies that different ideas of rationality *necessarily* entail different models of politics. Instrumental-analytic rationality

leads straight to elitist, bureaucratic politics, whereas communicative/discursive rationality requires inclusive deliberation. As instrumental-analytic rationality is so flawed compared to its communicative/discursive counterpart, the answer must be deliberative democracy. Dryzek's theory is not presented quite like this, but this seems to be its essence – that there are direct, necessary links between ideas of rationality and models of democracy.

However, we have seen that instrumental rationality also applies before and during deliberative democracy: instrumental rationality helps us design deliberative institutions and practices, and deliberative democracy may itself be a better means to reaching ends than elitist politics. Crucially, moreover, communicative rationality must exist in some elitist situations. Habermas insists that communicative rationality applies *whenever* two or more people communicate with the aim of reaching understanding and autonomous agreement, as Dryzek recognises (1990a, p. 37). Communicative rationality must thus apply in elitist politics where deliberators seek genuine agreement. (Clearly, they often do not.) Communicative rationality's compatibility with hierarchy is evident in Habermas's examples of flight attendants giving orders to passengers, and older workers giving orders to young workers (TCA1, pp. 300–301; TCA2, pp. 121–123; see too Chambers, 1996, pp. 95–96).

This implies the following conclusion: instrumental, communicative and discursive rationality almost certainly exist *in both elitist and deliberative politics*. We have seen that instrumental and communicative can be found in elitist and deliberative politics. It follows that discourse too can apply in both cases, if two or more people disagree about some factual or normative claim and want genuine agreement. They must present arguments that *could* convince anyone irrespective of time or place, even if not all such people are included (JA, p. 52).

Crucially, if each type of rationality can apply in both elitist and deliberative politics, Dryzek's defence of deliberative democracy is called into question. One answer is that deliberative politics is more *likely* to see each type of rationality, and in higher amounts. On this view, deliberative democracy is more instrumentally rational, especially for complex problems; more discursively rational, owing to the greater likelihood of inclusion, open-mindedness and the pursuit of common interests; and more communicatively rational, because individuals are more likely to seek genuine understanding and agreement, rather than career-advancement or partisan point-scoring, say.

This argument is more empirical. It requires us to examine not only theoretical ideas about rationality and deliberative democracy but also the burgeoning empirical literature on the strengths and weaknesses of deliberative democracy in practice. Empirical arguments are riskier: elitist politics will work better than deliberative politics in some situations. But the revised account of

rationality offered here points inevitably to a more empirical defence of deliberative democracy.

Therefore, there is no straight line between a model of rationality and a model of politics. Once we recognise the true nature of instrumental, communicative and discursive rationality, we need a different justification of deliberative democracy.

Earlier, I noted that Dryzek's work on rationality put him at the forefront of three key shifts in democratic theory. My arguments here challenge his theory in each respect. First, its account of rationality does not itself justify deliberative over aggregative democracy. The account in this article may be a better way forward. Second, discursive democracy's preference for radical over elitist politics is weakened when we see that elitism is not necessarily linked to instrumental rationality, nor radical politics to communicative/discursive rationality. Third, discursive democracy is ultimately defended too abstractly: a more grounded approach is still needed if we are to justify its superiority in terms of instrumental, communicative and discursive rationality.

Overstated criticisms of instrumental rationality thus weaken Dryzek's theory of deliberative democracy, whether the theory is couched in terms of communicative rationality or, preferably, discourse. Criticising instrumental rationality so vigorously understates its use in deliberative democracy. And when defences of communicative rationality are so closely linked to a critique of instrumental rationality, the latter's failure undermines the former. It would be safer to loosen the two parts of the argument, downplay communicative rationality and make discourse central.

Therefore, discursive democrats can still defend autonomous, open-minded, inclusive deliberation aimed at common interests. This position, amended according to the arguments presented here, can now use terms that are truer to the original source, which support Dryzek's preferred term ('discursive' democracy), and which have stronger theoretical foundations.

Conclusion: The Rationalities of Deliberative Democracy

Dryzek's theory of deliberative democracy challenges writers who focus overly on instrumental rationality, neglecting communicative rationality. But Dryzek's account makes the equivalent error, lauding communicative rationality and underrating its instrumental cousin. We are urged to 'overturn' instrumental rationality, and watch communicative rationality rising from 'the ruins of instrumental rationality' (1993, p. 214; 1990a, p. ix). By dropping these overstatements, and theorising the instrumental/communicative relationship differently, Dryzek's defence of democracy can get new critical leverage over instrumental rationalists who choose bad means to their ends.

Deliberative democracy should be supported for improving, not avoiding, the application of instrumental rationality: deliberative democracy helps us choose not only better ends but also better means. This argument is about different models of politics, not different models of rationality. Rather than implying that different ideas of rationality necessarily entail different models of politics, Dryzekian deliberative democracy can be defended as a better way of manifesting instrumental, communicative and discursive rationality. This argument also clarifies issues for future research: what models of politics in general, and what particular institutions, procedures and individual dispositions, allow us to choose better means to better ends?

Dryzek's argument can be this: deliberative democracy is a better means to better ends. That important position can be defended better and assessed more accurately with the account of rationality in this article. In short, communicative rationality has much less relevance for deliberative democracy than Dryzek's theory suggests – and instrumental rationality has much more.

Abrreviations

Abbreviations of Habermas's work, with original German and translated English dates in brackets: **AR**: A Reply, in Honneth and Joas (ed.), *Communicative Action* (1986/1991); **ASI**: *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews* (1978–1984/1986); **BFN**: *Between Facts and Norms* (1992/1996); **CES**: *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1976/1979); **JA**: *Justification and Application* (1990–1991, 1993); **LC**: *Legitimation Crisis* (1973/1976); **MCCA**: *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1983/1990); **OPC**: *On the Pragmatics of Communication* (1976–1996/1998); **PDM**: *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985/1987); **PF**: *The Past as Future* (1991/1994); **RC**: A reply to my critics, in Thompson and Held (ed.), *Habermas: Critical Debates* (1982); **ST**: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962/1989); **TCA**: *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vols 1 and 2 (1981/1984, 1987); **TIO**: *The Inclusion of the Other* (1996/1998); **TJ**: *Truth and Justification* (1999/2003); **TP**: *Theory and Practice* (various/1974); **TRS**: *Toward a Rational Society* (1968/1971). In the text, references are given in chronological order where possible. (Some collections of essays have diverse dates.)

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Notes

1 Dryzek (1992, pp. 406–407). See also Dryzek (1987, pp. 200–205; 1990a, pp. 3–21; 1992, pp. 400–401, 406–409; 1994, pp. 160–165; 1995, pp. 111–115; 1998, pp. 589–590; 2000, pp. 21–22).
2 Dryzek (1992, p. 400; 1996, p. 93; 1997, p. 164; 1998, p. 589; 2000, p. 22; 2006a, p. 113). For slightly different definitions, see Dryzek (1987, p. 200; 1990a, pp. 3–4; 1994, p. 172).
3 TCA1, pp. 9, 11, 15, 17, 22, 115–116; PMT, p. 102; OPC, pp. 188, 220, 312; JA, pp. 52–53; BFN, pp. 119–120; TJ, pp. 94–95; see also Chambers (1996, pp. 90–91, 101, 119, 132–133). (See above for abbreviations of Habermas's works.)
4 CES, pp. 1–5, 65–68; TCA1, pp. 38–39, 99–104, 285–287, 295–309; TCA2, pp. 120–126; MCCA, pp. 58, 133–137; AR, pp. 241–242, 291; JA, p. 81; OPC, pp. 217–222, 293–301, 315–329.
5 Dryzek (1990a, pp. 14–15; 1992, pp. 406–407; 1994, p. 165; 1996, pp. 107–108; 1998, p. 589; 2000, pp. 21–22; 2006b, p. 196).
6 Dryzek (1990a, pp. 14–15; 1993, p. 228; 1994, p. 165; 1996, pp. 107–108; 2000, p. 22; 2006b, p. 196). Note that Dryzek talks of autonomy differently (2006a, p. 85).
7 Dryzek (1990a, p. 15; 1992, pp. 406–409; 1996, p. 146; 2000, pp. 1–2, 21; 2006a, pp. 84–87, 113–115).
8 Dryzek (1987, p. 212; 1990a, p. 54; 1992, pp. 401, 408–411; 2000, p. 169).
9 Dryzek (1990a, p. 15, 72–73; 1993, p. 228–229).
10 CES, pp. 3–4; TCA1, pp. 15–16, 88. I use 'norm' more loosely and broadly than Habermas, who talks also of value orientations, rules, institutions, conventions, habits and practices (TJ, p. 103).
11 TP, pp. 18–19; CES, pp. 4, 64, 209; TCA1, pp. 17–20, 42, 334; MCCA, pp. 59, 65–68, 86–94, 201–203; AR, pp. 227, 248–249; RC, p. 272; JA, pp. 10–16, 51–53, 56–60; PF, pp. 111–112; BFN, p. 228; TIO, p. 44; TJ, pp. 102–109, 253–255.
12 RC, pp. 256–257; MCCA, pp. 65–68, 86–93; JA, pp. 32–33; TIO, p. 42; TJ, p. 104.
13 RC, p. 272; see also TCA1, TCA2, p. 335, PDM, p. 298, MCCA, p. 135.
14 TP, p. 19; LC, pp. 105–108; RC, pp. 235, 246, 272; TCA1, pp. 26, 42; MCCA, pp. 88, 202; PDM, p. 323; JA, pp. 53, 57; PF, pp. 111–112; BFN, pp. 15–16, 161–162, 228, 322–323; TJ, pp. 86–87, 101–102, 105. Exceptions are ST, pp. 36, 54; ASI, p. 90; TCA2, pp. 1–2.

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