Towards a Reflection-Centric Idea of Deliberation: What Consequence Can We Expect from the ‘Beyond Talk’ Perspective?

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Abstract

This paper examines a theoretically anticipated consequence of reconsidering deliberative democracy in terms of the ‘beyond talk’ perspective. By revisiting some feminist critiques of the justification-centric idea of deliberation and examining political theorists’ works focusing on listening and silence, this paper argues that if we taking the implications of ‘beyond talk’ as serious issues would result in a radical reconsideration of the place of justification and/or argumentation in deliberation. Deliberative democracy should be considered as a more reflection-centric one.
Introduction

The primary elements of deliberative democracy are justification and reflection. Justification requires reason-giving and argumentation as a mode of communication, while reflection entails the transformation of both preference and opinion. As John S. Dryzek points out, these elements are sometimes in tension (Dryzek 2016). Nevertheless, it is a commonly shared assumption among deliberative democracy scholars that both justification and reflection are necessary for deliberative democracy.

This paper takes a different viewpoint by arguing that taking non-verbal communication in deliberation as a serious issue can result in the reconsideration of the balanced understanding of justification and reflection. That is, this study proposes a more ‘reflection-centric’ idea of deliberative democracy.

This paper focuses on listening and silence as non-verbal (i.e., ‘beyond-talk’) components of deliberation. When deliberation is understood as a reflection-centric, it is not necessarily important to consider how to argue and/or provide valid reasons. Rather, it is more important to carefully consider the verbal and non-verbal responses of others. Not only listening but also silence can contribute to this process. Sometimes even silence is required to receive information and reflect on what is talked about. This study attempts to defend a ‘reflection-centric’ idea of deliberative democracy by demonstrating that both elements can be properly examined not in terms of justification but in terms of reflection.

Allow me to briefly examine listening and silence here. Listening certainly accompanies talking, but it is not related to aspects of argumentation and reason. Rather, it is related to the aspect of receiving of what are talked. Silence is not a form of verbal communication. Importantly, it is sometimes a consequence of non-deliberative communication. We can suppose the validity of feminist observations regarding female silence when interacting with males. Nevertheless, some feminist researches have indicated that silence might contribute to deliberative communication when we seriously consider the concept of ‘care’. Silence might motivate people to face others in reflecting on their circumstances and relationships. The distinction between anti-deliberative and
non-deliberative silence might be useful (cf. Rollo 2017). Thus both listening and silence can contribute to re-examine deliberative democracy as more reflection-centric.

The figure below illustrates the relationship between the four elements of deliberative democracy. This paper examines the relationship between the non-verbal and reflection-centric.

Figure 1. Reflection-centric deliberative democracy

In section 1, I discuss some of the feminist attempts to reconsider the Habermasian, justification-centric idea of deliberation. These feminists criticize the exclusive tendency of the justification-centric idea and search for a more inclusive idea of deliberation by recognizing more ‘emotional’ ways of communication. However, their attempts are still

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1 Dobson offers interesting consideration for distinguishing between ‘good listening’ and ‘bad listening’. He identifies ‘apophatic listening’ as an ideal type of listening that ‘involves a temporary suspension of the listener’s categories in order to make room for the speaker’s voice and to help it arrive in its “authentic” form’ (Dobson 2014: 68. Emphasis in original).
talk-centric. In section 2, I examine both a reflection-centric and non-talk-centric idea of deliberative democracy according to the work of two political theorists.


The purpose of this section is to rethink feminist critiques on deliberative democracy. Feminist theorists such as Nancy Fraser, Jane Bratten, and Iris M. Young have criticized the justification-centric tendency of deliberative democracy; these critiques are still significant. However, the problem here is that they still focused on the talk-aspect without paying sufficient attention to the ‘beyond talk’ moments.

Nancy Fraser’s critique of Jürgen Habermas’s concept of the ‘bourgeois’ public sphere is one of most comprehensive attempts to rethink the justification-centric idea of deliberative democracy. Here, I will confirm some of her some points. First, Fraser criticizes that the bourgeois public sphere is not ‘open and accessible to all’. In reality, it is not a sphere of free speech since existing social inequality influences the public sphere. It is not possible for interlocutors ‘to deliberate as if they were social peers’ (Fraser 1997: 79. Emphasis in original). For example, in a meeting in which both men and women participate together, ‘men tend to interrupt women more than women interrupt men’, ‘men also tend to speak more than women’, and ‘women’s interventions are more often ignored or not responded to than men’s’ (Fraser 1997: 78).

Second, the idea of the public sphere as a single and inclusive one is not appropriate. Rather, it should be conceptualized as consisting of plural, contesting groups and spheres. In addition to women, various social minorities (e.g., gay, lesbian, and non-white individuals) have created discursive arenas in which counter-discourses against majorities are invented, articulated, and transmitted. Fraser calls these the ‘subaltern counterpublics’. Deliberation in these areas has resulted in new words and concepts such as ‘sexism’, ‘double shift’, and ‘sexual harassment’, which critically re-describe social realities
The attainment of ideal equality might be possible through such deliberative engagements involving plural subaltern counterpubl
cics.

Third, issues of deliberation in public spheres must not be limited to the ‘common good’ or ‘common concern’. What is ‘common’ is not predetermined, but ought to be determined through discursive contestations in public spheres. Any claims based on ‘private interests’ should thus not be excluded from public spheres. What was previously deemed as ‘private’ can become a ‘public’ issue through deliberation in a public sphere (Fraser 1997: 86-87).

Fraser’s points are still important. While her main focus is not on deliberation itself but on the public sphere, she points out problems of deliberation that is conducted in a ‘bourgeois’ public sphere in which all speeches and claims are not accepted fairly.

However, two points should be considered (see Figure 1). First, it is not clear whether Fraser’s position is either justification-centric or reflection-centric. Fraser, though having the critical perspective, essentially supported Habermas’s idea of both the public sphere and deliberation which emphasized the role of the rational/reasonable argument, even though she insists on the role of (self-) interest and the necessity of reconsidering the public-private distinction. Even if deliberation in (plural) public spheres must become more open, plural, and inclusive for her, its basic idea seems to be maintained. The problem for Fraser, in other words, is not the ideal of deliberation itself based on rational argument, but the reality in which it is hindered. Second, she does not examine the deliberative capacity of anything other than talk. While she points out the problem of being ‘silenced’ and ‘not heard’ by referring to Jane Mansbridge’s argument (Mansbridge 1990: 127, cited in Fraser 1997: 78), this is also a problem of deliberation, not a defence of the positive role of non-talk-centric communication in deliberation. Fraser looks for equal communication between men and women, but her conception of deliberation is still talk-centric.

However, some feminists have attempted to revise the ideal of deliberation itself. The issue is how to rethink the rational and/or reasonable argument-centric idea of deliberation. While Fraser emphasizes the role of self-interest, others have considered the ‘non-rational’ modes of communication. For example, Jane Braaten (1995) contends that
the problem with Habermas’s theory is his understanding of the concept of rationality as the individual capacity to justify. This contradicts the dialogical and inter-subjective elements of Habermas’s theory. Therefore, the concept of rationality (especially for feminists) should be re-conceptualized so that it is not reduced to individual capacity (Braaten 1995: 141-142).

What Braaten investigated is the reduction of the role of justification in the constitution of people’s relationships. First, there are elements other than justification that are important in these relationships, including mimesis, empathy, and affection (Braaten 1995: 149). Second, the prospect of inter-subjectivity is unlike anything asserted by Habermas. It is not necessarily grounded in the possibility of accepting or rejecting arguments. Braaten argued for the significance of social embeddedness, although Habermas regarded it as insignificant for achieving reciprocity through justification. However, any feminist conception of the inter-subjectivity of reciprocity should be considered as beginning from the state of social embeddedness intended to reach reasonable knowledge. What is important here is storytelling, through which people can connect particular experiences to a shared, general perspective. ‘From the multifaceted diversity of the particular experiences shared in these acts of communication, there are larger pictures to be drawn’ (Braaten 1995: 15).

Iris M. Young is one of the most famous critics of rationality and the argument-centric idea of deliberation. She suggested varieties of communication mode other than rational argument (Young 1997: Chap 3). After arguing about the biases and exclusionary implications of rational and argumentative deliberation on race, gender, or any other social difference, Young introduces alternative modes of communication, including greeting, rhetoric, and storytelling.2 Her idea of ‘communicative democracy’ is distinct from deliberative democracy,3 as follows: ‘[T]hese communicative forms supplement argument by providing ways of speaking across difference in the absence of significant shared understandings’ (Young 1997: 69).

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2 Young later mentions gossip and humour (Young 2000).
3 Despite her own statements, I think it is more appropriate to understand Young’s version of communicative democracy as a type of deliberative democracy.
Looking at Figure 1, Braaten and Young move clearer from the first quadrant (i.e., justification-talk) to the second (i.e., reflection-talk). That is, they perceived the exclusionary tendency of justification-centric deliberation. Deliberation becomes more inclusive when diverse modes of communication based on emotion, affection, and passion are allowed as legitimate ways of talking. Importantly, it is possible to characterize such non-justification-centric modes of communication as being reflection-centric. Michael E. Morrell contends that ‘reflective’ does not solely mean ‘reasonable’ or ‘well-reasoned’ even if both are used interchangeably. When defining deliberation as ‘reflective consideration’, we ‘must recognize that reflection does not just involve the invocation of reason as a check on the passions’ (Morrell 2010: 193). It is indispensable for people to freely express their emotions and passions during deliberation for it to be fully reflective. Given this reconceptualization of reflection, the idea of deliberation as revised by Bratten and Young can be more reflection-centric.

However, their reconceptualization is still talk-centric. While their arguments aim to broaden the concept of deliberation, their focus is almost on the talk aspect of it. They seldom consider the non-talk aspect of deliberation. Of course, it is reasonable to suppose they could have taken this aspect into account. For example, storytelling must demand that its recipients are good listeners. Indeed, Andrew Dobson argues that ‘her mechanism for inclusion----validating alternative forms of speech----absolutely requires careful listening’ (Dobson 2014: 13). Therefore, they depart from the justification-centric idea of deliberation, but still remain in the talk-centric position.

2. Toward a Non-Talk-Centric and Reflection-Centric Idea of Deliberation: Dobson and Okano on Listening and Silence

It is reasonable to assume that the concept of deliberation will become more reflection-centric when the role of non-talk-centric communication in deliberation is seriously considered. The reasoning is simple; what is required in non-talk centric communication is not to argue the validity of one’s position, but to consider what the
speaker would like to inform and how she should accept and understand information offered by others. To illustrate this point, I will discuss the work of Andrew Dobson and Yayo Okano, a Japanese feminist political theorist.

2. 1. Andrew Dobson on Listening and Dialogic Democracy

Andrew Dobson contends that listening almost necessarily accompanied talking, but that ‘deliberative democracy has paid remarkably little attention to listening as part of its procedural rules’ (Dobson 2014: 91-92). His analysis of previous works on deliberative democracy indicates how implicit the listening aspect has been in them. Insufficient consideration has been given listening, even in important works either referring to its role (Goodin 2008; Dryzek 2000) or downgrading the role of rational argument/justification (Young 2000).

Dobson tries to critically re-examine deliberative democracy by offering the idea of ‘dialogic democracy’. The concept was not necessarily offered as an alternative to deliberative democracy, but as a correction or addition to it. For example, Dobson criticizes Habermas’s version of deliberative democracy as ‘one-sided’ because he gives little attention to the listening aspect and does not understand the important role of listening as a ‘check on strategizing speech’ (Dobson 2014: 112, 113). Dobson rather highly appreciates Anthony Giddens’s idea of ‘dialogic democracy’ and, even higher, Iris Young’s idea of communicative democracy (Dobson 2014: chap 4). He further enquires into ‘non-vocal forms of communication’ (Dobson 2014: chap 5).

Dobson’s reconsideration of deliberative democracy in terms of the ‘listening’ perspective is important. He definitely departs from a talk-centric idea of deliberation and becomes a proponent of a ‘beyond-talk’ idea. However, the problem is that it is less clear whether Dobson prefers a justification-centric idea to a reflection-centric idea of deliberation. In fact, he often characterizes his idea of dialogic democracy in terms of

4 `[F]ar from ignored in deliberative democracy, listening is implicit in it’ (Dobson 2014: 12).

5 Dobson mainly refers to Anthony Giddens’s work when he examines the dialogic democracy. One of reasons why Giddens is important for Dobson is Giddens regards democracy in the private sphere of daily conversation as almost the same as democracy at the government level. See also my own consideration on Giddens’s concept of the ‘democratic family’, but with more critical perspective (Tamura 2015).
reflection, but does not seem to recognize this. He certainly argues for the significance of listening in terms of reflection. Here, I will provide some examples from his work. When Dobson examines the importance of both listening and temporal silence as checks or bulwarks against strategic speech, it seems evident that he is actually talking about them from a reflection-centric perspective rather than from the justification-centric. This is because listening and/or silence are, as he discusses them, careful ways for the interlocutor to communicate. He is also concerned about inclusion in communication. In chapter 5 of his book, being based on Fraser’s (1997) famous conceptual distinction between affirmation and transformation, Dobson (2014) looks for the possibility of ‘non-“voiced”’ political communication with non-human beings by reading texts by Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett. The point here is that Dobson informed us not about how we as humans could argue with non-humans, but about how we could consider non-humans as interlocutors. Even though Dobson contends that it is not through ‘transformation’ but through a kind of ‘strong affirmation’, this kind of communication would presuppose the reconsideration of ourselves as only participants of deliberation. Therefore, his consideration of listening illustrates an attempt to reconceptualise deliberation as more reflection-centric from our perspective.

2. 2. Yayo Okano on Non-Talk-Centric Communication in the Family

Here, I introduce another case that highlights a non-talk-centric and reflection-centric idea of deliberation. This involves Okano’s consideration of communication between family members (Okano 2012: chap 3). Okano rethinks the family as ‘the site that makes it possible to talk together with various others’ (Okano 2012: 237). Okano takes the reminiscence of the grandmother by Norma Field (Field 1997) and interprets it in terms of her interdependence approach influenced by scholars of the ethics of care, especially Eva F. Kittay. Okano characterizes ‘communication’ between Field, her mother, and her grandmother as that ‘without procedural or formal conditions of dialogue such as reciprocity, equality, and reversibility’. Such communication is really open to otherness, the aim of which is to affirm the existence of other as they are (Okano 2012: 238).
Field’s grandmother has not already be able to engage with verbal-communication. Thus, while her mother has been caring about her grandmother, communication has not been talk-centric. ‘[W]hen fluttering notes come from my grandmother’s bed, my mother rushes over to ask if she’s all right, if she wants anything. Lately, though, I’ve noticed that instead of running to her bedside, especially at night, my mother floats back a sound, at core a Yes, or an Obaachama [grandmother], but a sound more and more losing its verbal contours and growing melodious…Now, I picture to myself the two old women lying side by side and floating their message each other through the long night’ (Field 1997: 135).

Okano’s interpretation of the communication between Field, her mother, and her grandmother is as follows (Okano 2012: 238-239): There is an emotional gap on the grandmother between Field and her mother. Field often admonishes herself not to see her grandmother through her own ‘logic’. Field also reflects on her own one-sided assumptions about her mother’s devotion in caring for her grandmother. Field now thinks that it was just due to protecting herself that she was convinced her mother had been caring her grandmother without any suffering. Finally, Fields realizes that the distress of her mother cannot be informed through words, but it comes from vague anxieties. Field is able to fill the emotional gap between her and her mother and share the sensibility to her grandmother together. Fields then understands well that her mother did not expect logical or verbal exchange when confronting her grandmother’s needs and desires with deep attention through listening to her grandmother’s breathing and asking her ‘Do you want anything?’. Even without verbal-communication, Field is able to reflect on her own feelings and the relationship between her, her mother, and her grandmother. Therefore, she cannot endure her aunt asking her mother, ‘Why doesn’t Obaachama [grandmother] ever answer?’ (Field 1997: 137, cited in Okano 2012). We examine this kind of communication as both reflection-centric and non-talk centric.

Conclusion
This paper examined a theoretically anticipated consequence of reconsidering deliberative democracy in terms of the ‘beyond talk’ perspective. It argued that, if we seriously consider the ‘beyond talk’ implications, it would result in radical reconsideration of the place of justification and/or argumentation in deliberation. Deliberative democracy should be considered as being more reflection-centric.

However, this paper’s reflections are insufficient. First, not all previous research was considered. I could only illustrate some ‘anti-justification’ feminist scholarship including that of Fraser and Young, and the works of Dobson and Okano. Second, the ‘nevertheless’ question remains. That is, nevertheless, justification should play some significant role in deliberation, and without it deliberation would be impossible.

The second point can be expected easily. Here, reflection-centric can be distinguished from reflection-only. As my position is still a reflection-centric one, this does not necessarily deny the role of justification completely. However, I attempted to theoretically downgrade the role of justification as much as possible.

Finally, I would like to mention that my concern with a reflection-centric idea is derived from concern about the ‘ordinarization’ of deliberative democracy. While some deliberative democrats have talked about deliberation in everyday life through concepts of ‘everyday talk’ (Mansbridge 1999), ‘everyday deeds’ (Rollo 2017), and ‘nested deliberative systems’ (Tamura 2014; 2017), it seems to me that there is still a (strong) atmosphere in which deliberative democracy is only reserved for a small number of people. Many, ordinary people, cannot deliberate well, especially under less institutionalized situations in everyday life. I think this kind of scepticism of deliberative democracy is at least partly derived from its justification-centric nature. Therefore, we may turn our focus from justification to reflection to rebut such scepticism.
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