

“Deliberation as Interactive Reasoning”

William Minozzi, Michael A. Neblo, and David A. Siegel

Discussed by Ian Turner
Washington University in St. Louis

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*“The deliberative conception construes politics as aiming in part at the **formation of preferences and convictions**, not just at their articulation and aggregation.”*

– Joshua Cohen

Deliberation as interactive reasoning

- ▶ Formal model of “ideal deliberative environment” (Cohen/Habermas) using inferentialist semantics (Brandom)
- ▶ “a game of giving and asking for reasons” (Sellars/Brandom)
- ▶ Focused on deliberation as “understanding and being understood.”
- ▶ “the exchange of reasons is closer to a joint exploration of the inferential properties of what beliefs we have in common than it is to a measure of how similar participants’ preferences are.”

The model

Two fundamental pieces:

1. Participants

- ▶ Cognitive structure
- ▶ Discursive priorities

2. Statements

- ▶ Simple: “That building is brown.”
- ▶ Complex: multiple simple statements using connectives like “and,” “or,” “not,” “because”
“a because b,” “a and b, because c”

The model: Statements

- ▶ Participant can make statements of five types:
 1. assertions
 2. disavowals
 3. challenges
 4. query-whys
 5. query-whethers

- ▶ Participants form opinions that capture beliefs about statements
 - ▶ How salient it is
 - ▶ How confident participant is of statement validity
 - ▶ How coherent is statement w.r.t. participants' existing beliefs/opinions

The model: Cognitive structure

- ▶ web of beliefs (long-term memory)
 - ▶ network of simple statements
 - ▶ each simple statement has (epistemic) “authority score”
 - ▶ simple statements assigned (directed) “link-weights” that represent inferential plausibility of one statement being consequence of another
- ▶ opinions (short-term memory)
 - ▶ reliability score: “inferential score-keeping” (Brandom)
 - ▶ this score is applied to speakers and turns on whether agreement with statement is obtained
 - ▶ Three scores: confidence; salience; coherence.
- ▶ discursive priorities list
 - ▶ list of speech acts participant wants to make
 - ▶ Three measures: germaneness; potential impact; urgency

Timing

1. Participant makes a speech act
2. All participants consider the statement and its impact on their other opinions and discursive priorities
3. Each participant chooses whether to add themselves to the speaking queue
4. Repeat 1 – 3

Some comments

- ▶ This is an extremely elegant formalization of leading conceptions of deliberative democracy coupled with Brandom's system of "inferential assertionist semantics."
- ▶ Extremely rich framework that can be leveraged to examine many, many interesting aspects of political/social deliberation.
 - ▶ A fresh look at "opinion/judgment aggregation" (varying congruence of participants' web of beliefs)
 - ▶ The impact of several interesting cognitive capacity issues: cognitive limitations, belief/opinion rigidity, etc.
 - ▶ Social group formation based on cognitive congruence that arises endogenously within the deliberative process itself
 - ▶ Investigation of conditions under which, given pluralism, a sort of Rawlsian "overlapping consensus" can be reached.

Some more comments (or, more specifically, questions)

- ▶ Sequencing of speakers seems really important(?)
 - ▶ a sort of path-dependence?
- ▶ (I am) Unclear what the epistemic content is?
 - ▶ Deliberation—and belief/opinion formation—seems wholly independent of “knowledge”
 - ▶ So, how ought we judge the outcomes of the deliberative process?
(e.g., the (sort of) Cohen/Habermas/Rawls view? — outcomes that emanate from “just” or “ideal” processes, institutions, and/or structures ought to be understood as just?)
- ▶ Process is an end in itself, but what is to be done if consensus/agreement is not reached?

The big picture

- ▶ This is a nice departure from standard formal-theoretic takes on deliberation
- ▶ Takes a different fundamental view of political processes as an end in themselves, inherently public in nature, and aimed at agreement/consensus rather than compromise.
 - ▶ In contrast to, say, social choice – process is instrumental, private political acts (e.g., voting), compromise often the outcome.
- ▶ Overall, I think this framework can go many directions and will greatly further research regarding deliberative processes.