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Ritual Deliberation*

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> Since most members have already made up their minds, the audience is pitifully small and often inattentive. ... The debate ... changes few votes. Why do the senators engage in this seemingly futile exercise? .... [Still,] *motivations* must not be confused with *functions* . ... Viewed in this light, Senate debate takes on a new importance."
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> —Donald R. Matthews (1966)

Deliberation is standardly regarded as a rational process *par excellence*, inviting actors to reflect on and revise their beliefs, preferences, and perhaps even values.[1] Whether in science, ethics, art, or jurisprudence, deliberation is a primary means of reaching sound judgments about matters of fact, value, beauty, and legality. Yet in political deliberation actors routinely talk past one another. They offer arguments as a way of scoring points or rationalizing existing beliefs. They fail to reflect on the reasons offered by others and, in consequence, seldom learn from their interactions or update their view of the world. From the perspective of democratic theory, such discursive exchanges are pointless: they consume time, energy, and other resources but do not achieve any standard deliberative ends. Despite

[1]E.g., Habermas 1983; Dryzek 2000; Cohen 2007; Bächtiger *et al.* 2010; cf. Shapiro 2002; Mutz 2006.

this, political actors routinely engage in these practices, as we shall show, and political theorists need to find some way of accounting for that fact.

Virtually all theorists would agree that for a discursive practice to count as "democratic deliberation," it should display *both* democratic and deliberative elements. Yet many discursive practices fall short of being genuine "democratic deliberations"—some on the ground of not being deliberative enough, others on the ground of not being democratic enough. When they do, they are largely written off as "bad" (low quality) or "inauthentic" deliberations.[2] However, such responses fail to conceptualize these practices in their own terms, leaving us at a loss as to what they involve and why they persist.

That real-world deliberation differs from *ideal* democratic deliberation, as conceived by normative theorists, is of course not a new argument—indeed, it may well be the oldest. Many empirical and theoretical studies have examined how real-world deliberation deviates from the ideal. A few argue that it is normatively permissible that it should do so.[3] Most merely observe empirically that it actually does so.[4] This article provides a fuller description of the characteristic features of *one* such deviant discursive practice, and describes some of the contexts where it appears. It does so by introducing a new explicative concept[5]—ritual deliberation[6]—which gives a better grip on a subset of puzzling, yet seemingly ubiquitous, deliberations in the wild.

The article's original contribution is to provide a systematic account of ritual deliberation and to distinguish it from other deliberative practices falling short of being "democratic deliberations." Where situational constraints preclude authentic democratic deliberation, actors often engage in ritual deliberation. It is a second-best option that, though often seen unfavorably, can still have considerable value. Indeed, there are numerous ways in which ritualized deliberation can yield positive outcomes of both a deliberative and extra-deliberative sort.

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[2]E.g., Gutmann and Thompson 1998; Chambers 2004; Heller and Rao 2015, pp. 29–32; John Dryzek, personal correspondence.

[3]Chambers 2004; Mansbridge et al. 2010.

[4]Bächtiger et al. 2010; Mansbridge et al. 2013.

[5]Following Carnap (1956), an explicative concept is a concept that can be used in lieu of another concept in relevant contexts and that is preferable for being more precise. For a discussion, see Brun 2016.

[6]That politics is replete with ritual is of course not a new observation, either. See, e.g.: Edelman 1974, 1977, 1988; March and Olsen 1984, p. 738.

I. WHAT IS RITUAL?

The term ritual is conventionally used to describe religious activities—practices aimed at invoking the gods and gaining their goodwill. But social scientists have long searched for other meanings and purposes in ritual practice.[7] For them, such practices, defined by a curious relationship between their means and ends, were either irrational (because instrumentally ineffective) or served a hidden, ulterior, or unconscious *group* aim.[8] Political scientists have since expanded the concept's explanatory scope.[9] They have often deployed the term "political ritual" for political practices that are in some sense "empty," that is, unable to achieve their ostensible aim.

To be sure, the concept of ritual is characterized by longstanding disagreement among social scientists.[10] We isolate three core features of ritual which are relatively uncontested and which, taken together, distinguish ritual from other collective practices. These form the "minimal" characterization of ritual that informs our analysis:[11]

(1) Rituals are *staged performances*. They comprise routinized sequences of action that command the attention and respect of the actors involved. In ritual, actors engage in role-play that is socially-prescribed.[12]

(2) From the observer's perspective (if not the participants') rituals typically "'say things' rather than 'do things'."[13] They are expressive but are typically not instrumentally efficacious in achieving their *ostensible purpose*. The ostensible purpose of an action is its publicly declared purpose. And while some participants might privately acknowledge that the ritual is just that, a mere performance, what matters is

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[7]Durkheim 1912; Radcliffe-Brown 1922; Parsons 1949; Bell 2009.

[8]Goody 1961, p. 159.

[9]E.g., Edelman 1974, 1988; Goodin 1978; Taylor 1981; Hertzer 1989; McLeod 1999. Political institutions (voting in particular) are often explained by appeal to their symbolic and expressive value (Wildavsky 1973; Fiorina 1976; Brennan and Lomasky 1993; Brennan and Hamlin 2000; Lovenduski 2012).

[10]Leach 1968, p. 526; Bell 2009.

[11]Gerring and Barresi 2003.

[12]Alexander 2004, p. 568; Bell 2009; Goffman 2005; Beattie 1966, p. 70; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994.

[13]Leach 1968. Of course, there are exceptions: marriage ceremonies, for example, are rituals that by general social convention actually bring about the marriage (Austin 1962, p. 5).

that their pretense is "for the show" and, as such, it is oriented toward a public purpose. Thus, no mind-reading of the actors' private beliefs is required to identify the ostensible purpose of their actions.

(3) Rituals typically fail to achieve their ostensible purpose, but they can still have important social, political, and cultural consequences. This recalls Merton's classic distinction between the *manifest* and *latent* functions of ritual, where manifest functions are publicly intended and recognized by participants, while latent functions are neither intended nor recognized.[14]

II. RITUAL DELIBERATION

For most theorists deliberation plays a valuable role in collective decision-making by producing an essentially *deliberative* outcome—that is, a reasoned consensus, a change of preferences, the pursuit of truth, learning and reflection, and so on.[15] But they have neglected the fact that deliberation can take the form of a collective *ritual*, one yielding only *indirect deliberative value* or *extra-deliberative value* (that is, value that comes from something *other* than achieving a deliberative outcome).[16]

This neglect is doubly unfortunate. First, the concept of ritual deliberation allows us to make sense of some actors' behaviour without dismissing it as "irrational."[17] Second, it can prevent various communicative situations from being too easily dismissed for being "bad" deliberations (because they fail to achieve their ostensible deliberative purpose) or "inauthentic" deliberations (because the actors lack sincere motivations to deliberate). As we point out below, the "badness" or "inauthenticity" of some deliberations may paradoxically constitute a comparative advantage in some contexts.

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[14]Merton 1949.

[15]E.g., Dryzek 2009; Goodin and Dryzek 2006; Goodin 2012.

[16]Political scientists studying political participation more broadly (e.g., Jacobs, Cook and Delli Carpini 2009) have paid attention to other effects of public deliberation but, with a few notable exceptions (Segall 2005; Warren 1996), deliberative theorists have not.

[17]A standard anthropological trope is to reinterpret seemingly irrational behaviour as being rationally oriented toward some goal other than the ostensible one toward which the actors claim (or others standardly assume) it is oriented.

A. Authentic democratic deliberation

What does ritual deliberation look like and how can we identify it? Because we define ritual deliberation in contrast to authentic democratic deliberation, we first need to clarify what we understand by the latter term.

In brief, *authentic* democratic deliberation—a discursive practice that has both deliberative and democratic features—ticks three boxes on our account:

(1) First, democratic deliberation should follow a *proper procedure.* It should entail the exchange of arguments and reasons among participants. Is should be inclusive, by engaging all affected parties, and ensure equal participation.

(2) Second, democratic deliberation should have a *proper end.* It should lead to an essentially *deliberative outcome* among deliberators—either a reasoned consensus, preference change, reflection, learning, or the pursuit of the truth.[18]

(3) Third, democratic deliberation requires deliberative *states of mind: sincere*[19] *intentions and reasonable expectations* to achieve an essentially deliberative outcome, as defined above.[20] Deliberative motivations[21] and expectations contrast with various *non-*deliberative motivations and expectations, such as the pursuit of discursive domination, simple entertainment, personal indulgence, virtue signaling, or mere courtesy.

Of course, the second and third features are causally connected: the presence of deliberative intentions and expectations is more likely to promote (and their absence to impede) a deliberative end.

For the purpose of our argument, we should also note that sincerity is a criterion that can apply to either: (1) people's *motivations* for engaging in deliberation (type-1 sincerity) or

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[18]Habermas 1983; Dryzek 2000, 2010; Fishkin 2009; Gutmann and Thompson 1998; Mansbridge 2015; Sunstein 1995.

[19]Steiner 2008, 2011. Bächtiger et al. 2010. Tschentscher et al. 2010.

[20]Habermas (1983) and epistemic accounts of deliberation (Landemore 2013; Fuerstein 2014; Goodin and Spiekermann 2018; Talisse 2009) emphasize this criterion, while other accounts (for example, deliberation as everyday talk [Mansbridge 1999], if such everyday talk is just an expression of courtesy) might be seen as glossing over it.

[21]Here we use the terms "motivations" and "intentions" interchangeably.

(2) to the *propositional content* of the arguments and reasons they employ in deliberation (type-2 sincerity).

Type-1 sincerity is primarily at stake in ritual deliberation, as we explain below. However, type-1 non-deliberative motivations will often be accompanied by type-2 disingenuous reasons and arguments in deliberation—that is, reasons and arguments that do not represent the agents' true beliefs. This is problematic for various reasons. First, using off-the-shelf justifications and arguments, or deploying rhetoric to awe one's audience, blurs the boundary between debate (which is competitive) and deliberation (which is cooperative).[22] Second, in deliberation, just as in strategic voting, type-2 insincerity can undermine the democratic legitimacy of collective decisions.[23] Third, sincerity in deliberation, as in voting, serves an epistemic function which is undermined when people are not sincere about their private beliefs and information.[24]

Authentic deliberation is thus premised on some assumptions about *deliberative rationality,* assumptions concerning the actors' motivations and expectations. Engaging in authentic democratic deliberation requires epistemic virtues such as epistemic modesty and open-mindedness—some degree of skepticism as to whether one's beliefs are justified and a sincere desire to test them against the evidence and arguments provided by others.[25] Authentic democratic deliberation is premised on a sincere intention and reasonable expectation both to persuade others and to be persuaded by them when faced with better arguments. If actors engage in deliberation without any reasonable expectation or intention of persuading others or being persuaded by them, some other explicative concept is needed to elucidate their behaviour. Ritual deliberation is one such concept. By capturing a particular constellation of deliberative and non-deliberative features, it can explicate a subset of deviant deliberative behaviour.

B. Ritual deliberation—definition

Ritual deliberation combines aspects of ritual with aspects of deliberation. Specifically, ritual deliberation ticks the box of *proper procedure* of authentic democratic deliberation. But while

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[22]Goodin 2005; Shapiro 2002.

[23]Riker 1982, p. 236. That is so, anyway, if we take the democratic legitimacy of collective decisions to stem not only from the decision-making procedure but also from their representing what citizens believe to be the common good.

[24]See Goodin and Spiekermann 2018, ch. 21.

[25]Habermas 1983. For a discussion of epistemic virtues, see Baehr 2011.

ritual deliberations exhibit a good level of justification, such argumentation is purely *pro forma*. It does not track any sincere deliberative motivation or reasonable expectation on behalf of its participants. It is not surprising then that ritual deliberation typically fails to achieve its ostensible deliberative purpose. Hence, definitionally, the first two features— proper deliberative procedure, the absence of deliberative intentions or expectations (or both)—are the "existence conditions" for ritual deliberation. The subsequent failure to fulfill a deliberative purpose is a common but contingent feature of ritual deliberation.[26]

Participants in ritual deliberation assume discursive roles and ceremoniously exchange arguments. They may do so fully knowing that their exchange cannot achieve its presumptive end. Although they appear to be deliberating, participants in ritual deliberations do not seek a reasoned consensus, nor hope to sway their peers. It is clear, when this happens, that such deliberators are merely "playing along."[27] It is a defining feature of ritual deliberation that participants lack any sincere deliberative intentions and reasonable deliberative expectations, yet their exchange remains procedurally deliberative: it display justificatory discourses and engages all parties on an equal footing. Formally and procedurally, ritual deliberation *looks* very much like authentic democratic deliberation.

Ritual deliberations do not ordinarily achieve their ostensible deliberative ends, anyway certainly not directly and intentionally. Sometimes a ritual deliberation might achieve its ostensible deliberative ends, not as a result of the actors' actual intentions and expectations but rather contrary to them. As Harrod notes in his biography of Keynes: "[i]mitation may be instructive" and in "pretend[ing] to understand the merits of the opposite point of view … one ends by really doing so."[28] But such fortuitous accidents

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[26]By ritual deliberation, we refer to cases in which the deliberation as a whole is ritualistic by virtue of having these three features. That is importantly different from there being components within a deliberation that are "ritualistic" in a looser sense. Even authentic deliberations can often be accompanied by "micro-rituals" like greetings, introductions, handshaking, and congratulations. See e.g., Young 2002, pp. 57–80.

[27]Ritual deliberation should be distinguished from *strategic* deliberation (Steiner 2008). Within mainstream political science strategic deliberation is treated as a "game" presenting actors with sets of choices, with players strategically trying to maximize their payoffs (Austen-Smith and Feddersen 2005; Landa and Meirowitz 2009, p. 429). Notice however that according to the model of strategic deliberation, actors would be lying *with respect to what they say*, but with a view to *changing the outcome* of the vote or deliberation. In ritual deliberation, in contrast, actors go through the motions of deliberating without sincerely intending or reasonably expecting their contributions to change the outcome in the least.

[28]Harrod 1972, p. 68.

would inevitably be unintended by-products of ritual deliberation, and presumably relatively uncommon in consequence.

III. EXAMPLES OF RITUAL DELIBERATION

Ritual deliberation is found in diverse institutional settings. Ritual deliberation may be central in the emergence, identity, and perpetuation of some institutions, such as legislatures. Other institutions may, on the other hand, adopt ritual deliberation under cultural pressure, because it embodies norms and values (such as equal participation, inclusion, and rationality) that are prized by the wider community.[29] Ritual deliberation in public and private sector organizations ranging from the NHS to mining and manufacturing companies may be examples of this.

In this section we offer various examples of ritual deliberation in a wide range of social and political settings. The aim is merely to show that these examples could reasonably be regarded as instances of ritual deliberation. What values such ritual deliberations might serve will be discussed in the next section.

A. Legislatures

National legislatures are central to democracy and unsurprisingly among the formal institutions most extensively discussed by deliberative scholars. Existing studies show that legislatures exhibit some crucial features of authentic democratic deliberation. For example, argumentation figures prominently in parliamentary debates and legislative discourses usually exhibit a high degree of justification. Yet high reason-giving sits alongside low levels of reflection and a low incidence of preference transformation.[30]

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[29]Formal organizations often adopt external symbolic structures and ceremonial rules that fail to promote efficiency and coordination within the organizations themselves (Meyer and Rowan 1977, p. 352; March and Olsen 1976, 1984; Feldman and March 1981).

[30]Bächtiger (2014) takes respect levels as a proxy for reflection levels. He also notices that ritualized forms of politeness (e.g., the use of particular forms of address) should not automatically be coded as indicators of respect (Bächtiger 2014; see also Baccaro, Bächtiger and Deville 2014).

Thus, while procedurally deliberative, legislative debates fail to achieve properly deliberative ends. Parties in government and in opposition rarely change their positions on policy in direct response to parliamentary debates.[31] Hence "parliamentary discourse is not an authentic reasoning process or a discussion in search of truth. MPs are fully aware that they cannot realistically hope to persuade political opponents of the superiority of their ideas and beliefs."[32]

Treating these interactions as fully democratically-deliberative would be problematic on several grounds. While many different forms of interaction may exhibit a high degree of argumentation, to be authentically deliberative this argumentation needs to coincide with a sincere intention to let the force of the better argument prevail.[33] We are not alone in doubting the prevalence of this intention in national legislatures. As such, it is no surprise that legislative argumentation largely fails to achieve its ostensible deliberative end. This conjunction of high levels of justification-giving with low levels of reflection and preference change is well captured by the concept of ritual deliberation. Indeed, various scholars have argued that legislative discourse is not only highly stylized, but also highly ritualized.[34] But such linguistic analyses of parliamentary speech should also be integrated within a broader normative account of deliberation, one that sees it as socially valuable in various ways. We elaborate those in section IV below.

Perhaps the considerations we discuss there are actually what motivate MPs to publicly exchange arguments in the legislative chamber, even though they know this will not change their opponents' views, let alone produce a reasoned consensus. But the ritualized and expressive behaviour of MPs might also be partly explained by the logic of appropriateness.[35] Political actors exchange arguments because that behaviour is socially seen as *appropriate* in the legislative setting and in their *role* as representatives. Roles create special obligations, which may entail acting in an expressive rather than instrumental

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[31]The switch from the imperative to the representative mandate was justified precisely on the ground that it would allow MPs to change their minds in response to such debates. See Burke [1774] 1999, p. 11.

[32]Bächtiger 2014. Matthews (1960) portrays floor debates in the US Senate similarly. Deals are mostly concluded behind closed doors and at committee level, and seldom (if ever) in public floor debates. Politicians are more also likely to be reflective, to show respect for others, and to change their opinions, in non-public committees (Bächtiger 2014; Stasavage 2007).

[33]Habermas 2001, p. 34; Bächtiger et al. 2010; Tschentscher et al. 2010, p. 20; Steiner 2008; 2011; cf. Warren 2007, p. 278, n. 11. Cf. Thompson 2008; Markovits 2006.

[34]Bayley 2004; Crewe 2005; Rai 2010, 2014.

[35]March and Olsen 2008.

fashion.[36] Just as for citizens voting has expressive value derived from confirming identity or from acting in accordance to citizen duties,[37] *pro forma* argumentation may serve a similar purpose for MPs. It may allow them to reiterate their public role and act in accordance to the duties established by this social role.

B. International Organizations

Deliberative communication has been shown to have a real impact in international politics, in the human rights area.[38] Yet in this setting as well, communication often takes on ritual form, serving as an instrument of soft power, upholding and extending international norms in world politics. The discursive exchanges occasioned by the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of its member states' human rights records are a case in point.

While the ultimate goal of the UPR is to improve the protection of human rights worldwide, its immediate objective is to promote an open and cooperative dialogue between states. The process takes the form of an "interactive dialogue" between the state under review and the rest of the UN member states. All states have agreed to undergo review. The rules of the process are as follows: all states can question the state under review and make recommendations; the state under review can reply to or decline to answer the questions, and can choose to accept, ignore, or reject the recommendations made.

The UPR process has all the procedural hallmarks of authentic democratic deliberation, such as inclusiveness, argumentation, and equal participation. It is an inclusive process engaging *all* states on *equal* terms (all states have equal speaking times), and in a *collaborative* way. States' discourses are highly justificatory; states are at least expected to provide an answer to their peers and explain their human rights compliance status. No matter how contested or hypocritical their answers are (for example, Iran argued that the US should ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court although it has not done so itself), most states adopt a justificatory tone.[39]

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[36]Of course, actors can act in an expressive fashion for instrumental reasons. That is to say, some actors might participate in the ritual out of self-interest (e.g., to avoid group sanctions); their individual actions might then be "instrumental" although the ritual remains expressive at a *collective* level.

[37]Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Hamlin and Jennings 2011.

[38]Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999.

[39]Chauville 2014.

In practice, however, this open, interactive dialogue proves to be highly ceremonial, in various respects.[40] For a start, the process has no accountability or sanctioning mechanisms. Tellingly, from a deliberative point of view, the "dialogue" is largely a monologue. The state under review is allowed to speak for a total of 70 minutes of the total of 210 minutes of the "interactive dialogue." States can strategically use up virtually all of their time in their presentation, leaving little time for a dialogue with other states.[41] Thus, by using up most, if not all, of these 70 minutes on the opening statement, the state under review secures a pretext to pass the hard questions. But even in the absence of such strategic intention, the state under review will inevitably have to ignore some questions simply because the structure of the process does not allow sufficient time to answer all questions.

Sometimes states deliberately take advantage of this fact to decline to answer awkward questions. Other times they avoid giving a straight answer or even reject other states' questions as irrelevant or inappropriate.[42] A deliberative outcome—such as a reasoned consensus around human rights, or a change of states' opinion—is unlikely to be achieved by such scripted and formalized dialogue.

Finally, "[t]he sincerity of [the states'] engagement varie[s] greatly."[43] On Milewicz and Goodin's measure, between 14 and 22% of questions from other states are softball questions from friends of the state under review, questions designed to obfuscate or to run down the clock.[44] Finally, the deliberations are highly formalized and characterized by many "interaction-rituals" or "micro-rituals" involving "extended formal introductions, the courtly congratulations, the rigorously observed time constraints… and the formulaic structure and style of the UPR documents."[45]

Despite its ritualistic deliberative aspects, the UPR dialogue is nonetheless indirectly consequential in promoting human rights. By having to justify—even insincerely—their position by reference to human rights, states thereby acknowledge the legitimacy and prescriptive force of human rights. States' posturing also opens the way for "norm infiltration" and "norm cascades" that are unintended or unforeseen by state actors.[46] Special

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[40]Charlesworth and Larking 2014.

[41]Chauville 2014.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Chauville 2014.

[44]Milewicz and Goodin 2018, table 1.

[45]Goffman 2005; Charlesworth and Larkin, p.10.

[46]Charlesworth and Larkin 2004, p. 19. Norm infiltration refers to a process by which a norm becomes gradually accepted as internal, as opposed to being perceived as

procedures and treaty bodies are strengthened, in a way, by their being implicitly or explicitly invoked by states when making UPR recommendations.[47] The repetitive character of the UPR in particular encourages the "civilizing force of hypocrisy."[48] All this may help explain why, two years after the first review, states had acted on 40 per cent of all recommendations from their first UPR review.[49] The low deliberative quality and value of this highly ritualized process apparently did not affect the capacity of the process to improve the status of human rights. Indeed, being less antagonizing, and less engaging than an authentic democratic deliberative process, the ritual deliberation of the UPR managed to ensure the participation and compliance of states that might otherwise have been opposed to such initiatives.

C. Public sphere

The examples above find ritual deliberation in the realm of political institutions and organizations. Yet ritual deliberation is not confined to those spaces. We can find it operating in the public sphere as well, and in very different settings. To illustrate the ubiquity of ritual deliberation in the public sphere, we discuss three cases: presidential debates, board meetings in the private and public sector, and public consultations.

1. Presidential debates

Presidential debates are characterized by many procedural deliberative virtues, including a justificatory tone and an equal distribution of speaking times. And while candidates are supposed to answer the moderator's questions, they end up responding to each other's comments and criticisms almost as often as they respond to the moderator's or the audience's questions.

Officially, televised debates were introduced to inform citizens about the candidates' policies, and to allow them to effectively and independently weigh issues and make up their minds. However, as evident in even the first Nixon-Kennedy debate, they quickly ended up

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externally imposed. A norm cascade (or bandwagon) refers to a process by which a norm gathers general consensus in successive stages.

[47] Chauville 2014

[48] Elster 1998, p. 111.

[49] Chauville 2014.

being "well-choreographed joint press conferences," "empty charades" full of "double-talk, cheap shots, pandering and no small concern with appearances" more likely to entertain than inform the crowds. The debates "stressed shallow qualities such as looks and speaking styles"; their plotted and scripted character precluded the critical, rational discourse that had been hoped for.[50]

Over the years, presidential debates were increasingly criticized for their stilted and artificial character and for maximizing image over substance.[51] In the absence of spontaneity and interactivity, presidential debates can only have an ersatz deliberative quality in their immediate context. Televised presidential debates are symptomatic of a shift from a transmission view of communication to a ritual one.[52] Yet, as we point out in the next section, despite their low deliberative value, such ritual deliberations serve an important political function in their enlarged context, in channeling citizens' political passions and renewing their partisan commitment.

2. Board meetings

Meetings of boards of directors of both public and private organizations also fit the description of ritual deliberation. Their official purpose is to allow board members to deliberate together in order to make collective decisions.[53] These meetings are typically deliberative in form. They are inclusive, at least in the sense of including all members of the board, as well as equally participative, all members being equally entitled to speak at the meeting. The discussion typically proceeds through "controlled and rational presentation of arguments."[54]

Still, while the meetings are inclusive and formally equally participative, the members' contributions are mostly just symbolic. Discussions focus "more to limit the potential of tension rather than to explore ways of resolving tension," which means board meetings do little in terms of collective problem-solving.[55] Most board meetings are "formalistic affairs, with meagre debate, few probing questions, little serious discussions even. They were certainly not the forum in which the critical decisions … were made…. [E]ffectively, the

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[50]Greenberg 2009, pp. 7, 9.

[51]Ibid., p. 13.

[52]Greenberg (2009, p. 16), citing James Corey.

[53]Peck et al. 2004.

[54]Brannen et al. 1976, p. 175.

[55]Peck et al. 2004.

board was a legitimizing institution."[56] Numerous studies of board meetings in organizations as diverse as the NHS, hospitals, mining, manufacturing and retail companies, or the British Steel Corporation concur in finding that board deliberations serve only a symbolic function.[57] While board meetings do not secure any *substantive* deliberative outcome, they are thus nonetheless useful in defining the board as a social entity, in strengthening solidarity or reducing conflict between board members, and in creating an organizational identity.[58]

3. Public consultations

Public policy consultations are also often criticized for being ritualistic. At the same time, they have the procedural virtues of authentic deliberation. The consultations are open to all affected parties and, when done properly, afford adequate (sometimes even literally equal) speaking time to all interested parties.[59]

One classic example is the Tennessee Valley Authority's formal co-optation program of the grassroots, or "democratic planning," whose aspiration was to promote "the active participation by the people themselves in the programs of the public enterprise. In the end, however, the Authority ended sharing the responsibility and administrative burdens of power, but not the power itself with the voluntary citizen organizations. While the formal purpose of the public consultations was that of broadening participation, in practice the consultations ensured the "mere administrative involvement of the public." Farmer committees were only "a façade" lending prestige to the program, a "mere formality," although they were supposed to give farmers a say in decisions that affected them.[60] In other words, by consulting the public, the Authority was merely eager to appropriate a symbol of democracy.

This is a common feature of public consultations quite generally. March and Olsen, for example, remark upon how "administrators solicit public participation in decision making in order to secure public support for policies to which they are already committed."[61]

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[56]Winkler 1975, p. 140.

[57]See e.g.: Mace 1971; Le Rocker and Howard 1960; Winkler 1974, 1975; Brannen et al. 1976; Peck 1995; Peck et al. 2004.

[58]Schwartzman 1989.

[59]UK HM Government 2008.

[60]Selznick 1966, pp. 28, 219–20, 234, 236.

[61]March and Olsen 1984, p. 738.

Today state institutions increasingly engage in public consultations through explicitly deliberative-democratic innovations such as mini-publics or citizens' juries. Within themselves, those bodies often display all the procedural features of authentic democratic deliberation. Yet from a broader and more substantive perspective, those modes of public consultation sometimes fail to achieve their ostensible deliberative purpose of informing public policymaking.[62] In such cases deliberations can count as "ritualistic" because of the type-1 insincerity of those who convened them with no genuine intention of listening to or acting on their results.

Even if those participating in the consultations are aware of the little difference these discursive exchanges make, however, they often report themselves to be glad that consultations occurred and that they took part in them.[63] That suggests that such ritual deliberations can increase the legitimacy of public policy, inform public debate (when their discussions are mediatized) and reduce polarization surrounding particular policy issues.[64] In extremis, they might even help defuse public tensions and avert massive protests or other forms of (violent) political action.[65]

IV. THE FUNCTIONS OF RITUAL DELIBERATION

Rituals range across time and space. From ancient to modern communities, from one part of the world to the other, human groups have devised and performed rituals. But why are these apparently worthless performances so pervasive and enduring?

There is a large literature addressing this more general question in sociology and social anthropology. Functionalists (e.g., Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown) tried to answer this question by focusing on what ritual "accomplishes as a social phenomenon, specifically, how it affects the organization and the workings of the social group"—that is, its systemic rather than immediate functions.[66] These systemic functions include "identifying group members," "facilitating cooperation with social coalitions," and "increasing social group cohesion."[67] Rituals create or reiterate shared identities and roles, regulate interactions, and promote solidarity. Scholars like Durkheim pointed out the ways in which rituals reinforce

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[62]See Parkinson 2004; Heller 2004, p. 42.

[63]Heller 2004, p. 43.

[64]Goodin and Dryzek 2006; Parkinson 2004.

[65]Wynne 1982, p. 16.

[66]Bell 2009 p. 23.

[67]Watson-Jones and Legare 2016, p. 43.

collective representations by signifying models or paradigms of the community and its functions.[68] Rituals are also a useful way for group members to demonstrate commitment to in-group values.[69] At the same time, they can serve as mechanisms of social control, having their own regulatory capacity.[70] Social rituals (among which some would include voting) also perform an important communicative function, allowing citizens to express their preferences and reiterate their identities. And finally, rituals can also play an eminently epistemic role: public rituals create common knowledge, which in turn is necessary for solving coordination problems that may arise in large communities.[71]

These are the potential virtues of ritual in general. Obviously, any particular ritual might fail to display one or more of those virtues. Equally obviously, any particular subgenre of ritual may typically display some, but not all of those virtues. Below we adduce from the examples offered in section III which virtues may be associated with ritual deliberation in particular.

This is a theoretical exercise, not an empirical one. We are concerned simply to show what indirect benefits ritual deliberation *might* bring, making no claims about how frequently they actually have done so. We draw on existing scholarship surrounding our examples to offer speculative, but plausible, arguments about the latent functions that may be served by ritual deliberations. The main contribution of this article remains thus a *theoretical* one—to develop a novel concept that can be applied to a wide range of real-world discursive interactions, allowing us to see these interactions' deliberative value without unduly stretching the normative concept of "democratic deliberation" itself.[72]

A. The Extra-deliberative Value of Ritual Deliberation

Ritual deliberations do not directly accomplish their ostensible deliberative goal, for reasons we have given. Nonetheless they may have *extra*-deliberative value—value that comes from something other than fulfilling a deliberative purpose (as defined above) in the specific

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[68]Durkheim 1912.

[69]Watson-Jones and Legare 2016.

[70]Lukes 1975; Miller 2005.

[71]Chwe 2001; Ober 2006.

[72]For arguments against concept-stretching in this realm see: Steiner 2008; Goodin 2018; and Habermas 2018, p. 876.

context where deliberation takes place.[73] Drawing on the examples above, we identify several *latent extra*-deliberative purposes of ritual deliberation. Depending on its context, any given ritual deliberation may fulfill any one or several of the functions below.

1. Demonstrating commitment to group values

As with any other ritual, ritual deliberation may play a latent social role that is *not* publicly acknowledged as such by its participants. It may serve for example as a useful test of commitment to the group's values and norms. Insofar as participation in the ritual is both costly to the participants and seemingly useless, ritual deliberation can signal acceptance of the group's authority and its values.[74]

We see this in legislatures: MPs attending deliberations fulfilling no obvious deliberative purpose allows them to demonstrate commitment to the broader values of democracy, such as freedom of speech, inclusion, diversity of opinion, and so on. The exchange of policy information in particular serves this symbolic function. While the exchange of information will not change the MPs' votes, it does signal the legislature's commitment to rational decision-making. Since rationality is valued across the community, this can increase the institution's legitimacy in the eyes of the wider public.[75]

The same can be said of the public consultations. Their format, if not their subsequent impact, signals that political institutions are in principle committed to empowering citizens, recognizing citizens as the ultimate source of political authority, and putting themselves under public scrutiny. All of those are important democratic requirements.

Similarly, in the international arena, ritual deliberation is used to signal commitment to the norms and values of the international community. By participating in the UPR process on an equal footing, justifying their positions, and making recommendations by reference to international treaties, states signal their endorsement of principles of international cooperation, as well as of special procedures and treaty bodies referenced in both answers and recommendations.

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[73]Bächtiger and Beste (2017) propose a similarly "functional" approach focusing upon the goals of deliberation in specific contexts.

[74]Watson-Jones and Legare 2016.

[75]Feldman and March 1971; Shulock 1988.

2. Upholding roles and identities

Ritual deliberation has extra-deliberative value also in establishing or reiterating roles, statuses and identities within the group. Through its inclusive and equally participative formal character, ritual deliberation can reinforce *collective* identities, and thereby support relationships between group members. At the same time the ritualistic aspects of the discursive interaction create a façade that allows participations to channel in a controlled way their disagreements and subgroup identities.

By deliberating with others, even if only in a scripted way, individuals are forced to acknowledge one another as members of the same group and to treat one another as equal sources of authority, even if only formally and symbolically. Ritual deliberation allows participants to show respect to one another as equal moral agents and as equal sources of moral and epistemic claims. Take, for example, ritual deliberation in legislatures. The respectful, even if hypocritical, exchange of arguments and reasons among partisans committed to very different ideals and programs is meant to underplay these divisions, sublimate political conflict, and present an image of unity. The *formalistic, deliberative* features of this ritual deliberation serve to signify that the parliament's decisions embody the will of the nation as one undivided body politic and channel its public reason. Ritual deliberations thereby allow actors symbolically to assume collective roles and identities.

On the other hand, because these group roles and identities are endorsed in a shallow way, via ritualistic role-play, the actors can also retain their more specific identities and commitments (in the case of legislatures, their partisan identities and commitments). The *substantive, ritualistic* features of the interaction—the fact that the deliberative exchange of arguments is only *pro forma* and does not in fact challenge the actors' partisan opinion and commitments—provides political actors with plausible deniability regarding their true allegiance (to the entire nation or to their political party?). While *discursively* MPs are able to represent the entire nation, they are also able, through their *votes*, to channel their partisan commitments and to remain accountable to their supporters. Hence, it is precisely because ritual deliberations in legislatures *fail* to sway opinions (that is, secure a deliberative end) that they can support the expression of partisan commitments that might otherwise be expressed in a violent way. As Lukes points out, legislatures and the behaviour of political representatives reinforce the dominant definition of what "politics" means, the nature of

political divisions, and the permissible channels and limits of conflict.[76] Social conflict and pluralism are played-acted in legislatures through discursive confrontation, while justificatory discourses enable legislation to be seen as both rational and as expressing the popular will. Group roles and identities, supportive of public institutions, are hence able to exist alongside subgroup fault lines.

In the case of legislatures, the fault lines are determined by political partisanship. In the case of international organizations they are determined by national identity and culture. Due to its lack of any enforcement mechanism, the UPR process allowed states to pay symbolic homage to universal international norms and values while in practice pursuing their own domestic interests, norms and values.

Presidential debates perform a similar function of enabling the expression of conflicting identities while channeling the voters' political passions and partisan commitments in innocuous ways. Those debates take place in the heat of political campaigns, which have been labeled "rituals of rebellion" for allowing different segments of society to vent their grievances against the political establishment.[77] However, when those conflicts are expressed through ritual discourse in stylized presidential debates, they are rendered harmless and actually promote the continuity of political institutions.[78]

3. Power distribution

We may also expect ritual deliberation to equalize *symbolic* power in contrast to stark hierarchies of *substantive* power within an institution.[79]

In the domestic context, this latent function of ritual deliberation is prominent in the case of public consultations. While decision and agenda-setting power ultimately remains in the hands of policymakers and politicians, public consultations iron out inequalities of material power by symbolically empowering civil society actors. They are "empowering in the psychological or sociological sense rather than the strictly legal-political sense."[80] Through its emphasis on mutual justification and equal participation, ritual deliberation in public consultations promotes a politics of recognition, placing citizens on a par with

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[76]Lukes 1975, p. 304.
[77]Gluckman 1963; Aronoff 1976; Lincoln 1989; Kubik 1994.
[78]Lincoln 1989, p. 53.
[79]Hallett 2003. On symbolic power, see Bourdieu 1979,1989.
[80]Goodin and Dryzek 2006, p. 234.

political actors. Ritual deliberation can serve the same function in an international context. In the UPR, ritual deliberation successfully equalized symbolic power among states, conferring equal presence and visibility on all states, even those with peripheral geopolitical status. States that are normally marginalized or ignored in international debates are able to speak out and be treated as equals irrespective of their actual political weight.[81]

Why does equalizing symbolic power matter, however? One reason is that symbolic power can convert into material power.[82] Over time, the symbolic power structure upheld by ritual deliberation may gain normative legitimacy in the eyes of group members, giving rise to claims for equal material power. Skillful actors may also successfully convert symbolic capital gained by participating in ritual deliberation into material power. Consider the case of public consultations. While civil society representatives participating in them might be unable to secure any immediate material gains through those ritual deliberations, over time they might nonetheless gain visibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the wider public such that they themselves secure access to material power—for example, by themselves running successfully for elective office. Also in the case of the UPR, ordinarily-neglected Pacific island states took advantage of the forum to amplify some of their older claims, thereby improving their positions in other international negotiations.[83]

Furthermore, equalizing symbolic power may in and of itself help reduce social conflict.[84] We see this in the case of public consultations. Such ritual deliberations reduce conflict not through their practical outcomes but by signaling the political system's "willingness to cope" with social demands.[85] The procedural aspects of ritual deliberations reduce status and functional differences between political and civil society actors which fuel social conflict, by discursively placing all participants on an equal footing. In consequence they can also increase the legitimacy of political decisions that would otherwise be fiercely contested.[86]

B. The Indirect Deliberative Value of Ritual Deliberation

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[81]Charlesworth and Larkin 2014, pp. 13, 16.

[82]Bourdieu 1989.

[83]Baird 2014.

[84]Trice and Beyer 1984.

[85]Edelman 1977.

[86]Goodin and Dryzek 2006, p. 232.

So far we have argued that ritual deliberations typically do not *directly* achieve their ostensible end in the immediate context in which they are performed. They are procedurally proper deliberations, but not substantively so. They do not (ordinarily, systematically) promote a change of opinion, a reasoned consensus, or the pursuit of truth. It is unsurprising that this should be so. In ritual deliberations, actors by definition lack the sincere deliberative motivations and reasonable deliberative expectations that are part and parcel of authentic deliberation. Still, *indirectly*, ritual deliberations can nonetheless have deliberative value in a *broader* context. Drawing on above examples, we here offer a non-exhaustive list of *indirect* deliberative functions that ritual deliberations may fulfill.

An un-nuanced application of the deliberative systems approach might elide the difference between directly and indirectly deliberative effects, saying that they all ultimately contribute to the same overall deliberative goal.[87] But they do so in *different way,* and mechanisms clearly matter. Identifying some of these interactions as a distinct kind of ritual deliberation allows for a more subtle analysis that reveals the more precise mechanisms at work, drawing a clear distinction between (but exploring both) latent and manifest functions of these exchanges. Ritual deliberation is a distinct element of the deliberative system, and it is important to recognize the distinctive means by which it might serve larger deliberative purposes.

1. Diffuse support for deliberative democratic norms

Paradoxically, a collective practice that is at least procedurally democratically-deliberative can reiterate and reinforce the legitimacy of authentic democratic deliberation both inside and outside the deliberating group. It may do so by upholding discursive rationality and norms of discursive fairness.

After all, imitation is the highest form of flattery, and hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue. If a ritual interaction takes a deliberative form, this means the group engaging in the ritual accepts deliberative norms as legitimate, even if authentic democratic deliberation is not feasible in the particular case at hand owing to various factors (for example, in the case of legislatures, party politics and electoral accountability). Invoking the norms of deliberation, even if in a hypocritical way, signals that democratic deliberation is a

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[87]Goodin 2008; Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012.

settled norm whose formal violation would require special justification.[88] The use of ritual deliberation may not only be a necessary compromise but, in some contexts, the only way to ensure the survival of the democratic deliberative model.

The democratic deliberative norm is upheld not just locally, within the deliberating group. When ritual deliberations take place in the public eye, they secure a wider audience. A different way in which ritual deliberation might in fact support authentic democratic deliberation is by socializing its *audience* into the procedural norms of authentic democratic deliberation. Ritual deliberation may thus prefigure or reinforce a deliberative culture—that is, the cluster of norms and meanings that motivate and regulate deliberation in the broader public sphere.[89]

For example, through the use of arguments and reasons in national parliaments or international organizations, ritual deliberation upholds the value of rationality in public discourse, even if these arguments and reasons are used disingenuously. The style and form of ritual deliberation in the political sphere sets the tone of exchanges in the public sphere as well. It is no surprise then that when politicians refuse to even hypocritically abide by these norms, their behaviour has echoes in society at large. For example, Trump's election in the US saw a spike in hate speech and harassment.[90] While the hatred toward minority groups doubtless pre-existed Trump's political ascent, its unbound expression is nonetheless the result of the erosion of all norms of respectful political discourse and conduct following his election.

While legislative and presidential debates do not achieve their ostensible ends—and hence serve no deliberative purpose in their immediate arena—they can have deliberative value when they reach a broader audience (the constituents, voters, and the citizenry at large). In the age of political spectacle and "ocular democracy," it matters greatly how politicians and elected representatives are seen to behave, even if their behaviour is pure façade.[91] In light of this, it is important to recognise how political institutions, through ritual deliberations, can shape the public sphere by *setting and reinforcing norms* that extend to it.[92]

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[88]We borrow the concept of "settled norm" from Frost (1996, pp. 105–6).

[89]Sass and Dryzek 2014.Where a deliberative culture is missing, or exists in incipient form, "mock" or ritual deliberation could serve as a precursor to authentic democratic deliberation; in communities that already possess a robust deliberative culture, it can complement more substantive forms of democratic deliberation.

[90]Paluck and Chwe 2017.

[91]Green 2010. Marco Rubio defended last year the enforcement of Rule 19 of the Senate, allowing the silencing of speakers engaging in personal attacks on the same ground

2. Structuring disagreement

There is another way in which ritual deliberations may fulfill a latent deliberative function through their effects on their broader audience rather than on the participants in ritual deliberation themselves. Ritual deliberation among participants who will not themselves change their views or reach any reasoned consensus as a result might nonetheless serve the function of helping to structure disagreement across the wider community in a way that facilitates collective decision-making.

Presidential debates, deliberations in legislatures, and public consultations may all perform this latent deliberative function for the wider political community. There, the disagreement is structured along partisan lines. Ritual deliberations—the *pro forma* exchange of arguments across party lines—may not be particularly useful to the participants in the deliberative ritual themselves. But they can clarify partisan positions for the audience, making it easier for people across the political community at least to agree what it is that they are disagreeing about.[93]

Ritual deliberations can, more generally, put forward common frames for interpreting and structuring political disagreement that is pervasive across society. This in turn can simplify citizens' electoral choices, order their political preferences by providing them with a common frame of reference, and thereby enable the political community to reach coherent collective decisions via majority rule.[94]

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that parliamentary deliberations should set an example for the broader public (Cillizza 2017).

[92]This contrasts with the standard approach in the deliberative democracy literature, which evaluates the public sphere in terms of its impact on formal institutions rather than the other way around. Cf. Chambers 2004, 2009.

[93]Riker 1982. In his model of the deliberative system, Goodin (2005, p. 192) similarly supposes "[t]he parliamentary chamber is first and foremost a place to 'put one's case'. Each party sets out the most coherent and persuasive justification it can, for its preferred position. … The various parties are merely 'making their pitch' to the media (lobby correspondents in the old days, television cameras nowadays), and through them to the electorate at large." But Goodin, following Lindsay (1935, p. 47), adds that "in parliamentary debate, no one seriously expects to change any other MP's mind." Neither of them, however, notice the distinctively ritualistic cast that that gives to parliamentary exchanges in consequence.

[94]In Riker's (1982, p. 128) words: "[i]f by reason of discussion, debate, civic education and political socialization, voters have a common view of the political dimension (as

3. Information transmission

The second way in which ritual deliberations may indirectly serve a latent deliberative function is by facilitating the transmission of information. While the exchange of information in ritual deliberation may have little to no effect on the deliberators themselves, it may nonetheless serve a deliberative purpose when reaching a broader audience. Even if information is exchanged symbolically among deliberators, this information may in fact influence the audience's opinions.

Legislative debates are an obvious example. The exchange of information among political opponents may be a vacuous enterprise for the participants themselves. Legislative debates seldom provide any additional information that would not otherwise have been available to legislators.[95] They also very rarely affect the legislators' votes.[96] Yet in being picked up by the mass media, the debates can help to inform citizens. Well-publicized ritual deliberations can support a common learning process among the wider public.

V. CONCEPTUAL BENEFITS

For deliberation to be genuine, individuals must engage in sincere justification. They must explain their positions and listen to others, yet be open-minded as well, and not just deliberate in order to score points or satisfy social conventions. For deliberation to be genuine, participants must share a genuine desire to get to the bottom of a collective problem, or to discover the truth of a matter, and be willing to change their views and learn in the process. In ritual deliberation, they do not.

While ritual deliberation satisfies the procedural conditions of authentic democratic deliberation, the other conditions remain unmet. Of course, most real-world discursive exchanges fall short of the conditions of fully authentic democratic deliberation in one way

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evidenced by single-peakedness), then a transitive outcome is guaranteed . . . This fact will not prevent civil war, but it will at least ensure that the civil war makes sense."

[95]Austen-Smith (1990, p. 144) offers a formal model showing that the only difference legislative debates make is one of timing: in it MPs merely share the same information that, in its absence, they would have shared prior to the agenda-setting stage.

[96]Austen-Smith 1990.

or another. This could potentially prevent the concept of democratic deliberation, as it stands, from being applied to a wide range of communicative situations. One response might be to call all such instances "democratic deliberation," whether or not the concept fully applies to them. But that risks stretching the concept so far as to render it meaningless.[97] Another response would be simply to label such exchanges as nothing more than "bad" or "inauthentic" deliberations. But that risks blinding us to their long-ranging extra- or indirectly-deliberative effects.

Reconceptualizing some of these discursive exchanges as a distinct, ritual type of deliberation avoids both of these problems. To this end, we have unpacked the concept of democratic deliberation, combing some of its elements with the concept of ritual to form a hybrid concept. Hybrid concepts avoid the problem concept-stretching, in general.[98] And in this particular context, the hybrid concept of "ritual deliberation" gives us a better grip on an important subset of "actually existing" deliberations that deviate systematically from authentic democratic deliberation.

Ours is in the first instance primarily a *descriptive* concept. It provides a better account of certain practices than does any existing notion. But the concept also has normative implications, some of which we have sketched. Ritual deliberation is not preferable to authentic democratic deliberation and rendering political institutions more amenable to authentic deliberation should be our constant aim. Yet perfecting deliberation in certain institutions will be a Herculean (or perhaps Sisyphean) task. In legislatures, the strict enforcement of party discipline precludes authentic deliberation. In such circumstances, it is worth encouraging at least ritual deliberation. Even if legislators are not changing their minds, it is preferable that they lodge strong justifications for their positions, and that they engage one another in an open and respectful way—not least because legislatures attract and shape a broad popular audience. Deontologists may wince at this hypocritical practice being justified in terms of its consequences. Yet before doing so, they need to explain how our institutions might be better arranged while at the same time retaining their existing benefits. This is no simple task.

The arguments in favor of ritual deliberation developed here are merely *pro tanto* reasons. Depending on what other values are in play, we may well conclude that ritual deliberation should be avoided, all-things-considered. But on its face, this practice is not without merit. Ritual deliberation can lend indirect support to authentic democratic deliberation: it can establish the currency of political discourse as being reasoned argument;

[97]Steiner 2008; Goodin 2018. Habermas 2018, p. 876.
[98]Gerring and Barresi 2003.

it can help frame and inform arguments feeding into the broader deliberative system.[99] Ritual deliberation can, in other ways, undermine authentic democratic deliberation (it might, for example, become so widespread that people assume that ritual is as good as it gets). Which effect is more prevalent, on balance, is an empirical question.

The argument that ritual deliberation fulfills a latent deliberative function—that it has indirect deliberative value—*logically* presupposes the existence of spheres where deliberation can work non-ritualistically. Our argument thereby presumes multiple deliberative spheres. There is reason to think that ritualistically adhering to deliberative norms in one sphere may enhance the prospects of them being respected in others. Absent multiple spheres, however, ritual deliberation cannot fulfill any latent deliberative function. Thus, on our account, the spheres of ritual deliberation and those of genuine deliberation would complement and reinforce one another in a deliberative system, analogously to how the "dignified" (ritualistic) and "efficient" components work in unison in the English Constitution.[100] The unique procedural features that ritual deliberation shares with authentic deliberation and which other discursive practices might lack (equal participation, inclusiveness, and the use of justificatory discourse) are what allow it to fulfill such latent functions in other deliberative spheres. *When* and *how* ritual deliberation serves these latent functions remain open empirical questions.

Different communicative practices should be judged in their own right and according to their own internal standards. We cannot expect ritual deliberation to be sincere, and therefore should not criticize it for not being so—insincerity of a sort is a defining feature of this practice, after all. Yet we can still impose other evaluative standards that do not deny its defining features. We could judge, for example, its degree of publicity and could ask how that affects its extra- and indirect deliberative value.

As confidence in democratic institutions wanes, citizens may rightly wonder "what do legislators *actually* do?" In deliberative terms, the answer, all too often, is "nothing much at all." This view is needlessly bleak. It fails to account for the effects many discursive exchanges have outside their immediate context. While faux deliberations might be written off as mere burnt offerings to indifferent gods, when well performed they can enact the values and ideals of the political community. It is precisely on these terms that ritual deliberations should be evaluated. As Calvin said in a different context, "empty semblance of

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[99]Our argument is thus convergent with, and could be seen as a contribution to, deliberative systemic theory (Mansbridge et al. 2013).

[100]Bagehot 1873.

righteousness is quite enough to satisfy us instead of righteousness itself."[101] Perhaps, by the same token, empty semblance of deliberation ought sometimes be likewise.

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[101]Calvin [1536] 1845, vol. 1, p. 49.

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