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PLURAL VALUES, UNITED CONVERSATIONS: WHY DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND METAETHICAL VALUE PLURALISM ARE COMPATIBLE[1]

abstract

Metaethical value pluralism is the claim that there are many equally fundamental values that matter for normative choice, rather than one fundamental value. Deliberative democracy is an ideal from political theory stating that respectful, reasoned communicative contestations between free and equal citizens about the relative merits of policies is preferable to mere majoritarian voting. At first glance, both claims go together well. However, several theorists argue that they are incompatible: Value pluralists cannot be deliberative democrats, and deliberative democrats cannot be value pluralists. The argument rests on the supposition that plural fundamental values preclude a common standard of comparison that allows for weighing off different values, thereby rendering deliberation about value conflicts pointless. I argue that this supposition is implausible: Plural fundamental values can be rationally compared. The key is to conceive of the relevant standard as less fundamental than the values at stake. I conclude that value pluralists can remain neutral on the issue of deliberative democracy and that deliberative democrats can and should be value pluralists.

keywords

axiology, deliberative democracy, democratic theory, metaethics, rational comparability, value pluralism

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1. Introduction

Metaethical value pluralism is the claim that there are many equally fundamental values that matter for normative choice, rather than one fundamental value. Deliberative democracy is an ideal from political theory stating that respectful, reasoned communicative contestations between free and equal citizens about the relative merits of policies is preferable to mere majoritarian voting. At first glance, both claims go together well. However, several theorists argue that they are incompatible. The argument rests on the supposition that plural fundamental values preclude a common standard of comparison that allows for weighing off different values, thereby, rendering deliberation about value conflicts pointless. I argue that this supposition is implausible: Plural fundamental values can be rationally compared. The key is to conceive of the relevant standard as less fundamental than the values at stake. I conclude that value pluralists can remain neutral on the issue of deliberative democracy and that deliberative democrats can and should be value pluralists.

My inquiry proceeds as follows. In sections 2 and 3, I survey the main arguments for value pluralism and deliberative democracy respectively and suggest that both have immense prima facie plausibility. Section 4 introduces the incompatibility claim, which is based on two premises: The first premise states that a plurality of equally fundamental values precludes a common standard of comparison, since all values can only be compared in terms of a more fundamental value from which they are derived; the second premise states that in the absence of a common standard of comparison it is irrational for citizens, who favor distinct values and corresponding policies, to even engage in reasoned communicative contestations about the relative merits of their policy proposals. In section 5, I argue that while the Irrationality Premise is solid, the No Common Standard Premise is not. We are not committed to claiming that values can only be compared in terms of a more fundamental value. Rather, they can be compared with respect to a less fundamental value. I demonstrate this idea with reference to Ruth Chang's (1997; 2004a,b) covering value approach. Section 6 concludes the article. It summarizes the central arguments why value pluralists can remain neutral on the issue of deliberative democracy, and why deliberative democrats can and should be value pluralists.

2. Value Pluralism: Outline and Arguments

Metaethical value pluralism is an influential axiological paradigm in contemporary moral and political philosophy (see Skorupski, 1996; Heathwood, 2015; Mason, 2023).[1] It states that

1 Since the term "metaethical value pluralism", despite being conceptually precise, is quite a mouthful I will be using "value pluralism" as shorthand throughout this paper.

there is a plurality of equally fundamental intrinsic values such as justice, equality, friendship, beauty, freedom, knowledge etc., which matter for normative decision-making and which cannot be derived from a singular, more basic value. Its rival account is value monism. It is based on the claim that there is, ultimately, only one fundamental intrinsic value such as pleasure (hedonism), preference satisfaction (preferentism), the good (Moorean monism), or happiness (eudaimonism) and that all other values can be reduced to and derived from that value. For instance, on hedonistic reductionism my knowledge of the solar system is valuable only insofar and to the extent that it helps bring about pleasurable sensations and avoid painful ones respectively.

There are three arguments that suggest that value pluralism is – despite the historical predominance of value monism (see Chang, 2012) – the more promising account:

The first argument is the *heterogeneity argument* (see Galston, 2002; Chang, 2012). By all appearance, the domain of valuable entities is heterogeneous. It includes a functioning justice system, the pleasure of eating fresh bagels, selfless acts, affordable healthcare, loving relationships, a clean environment, and many more things. Value pluralists argue that it is incredible how there could be just one fundamental value that pervades all those things. As Chang puts it: "[I]t is hard to believe that bearing, promoting, or respecting that value is ultimately all there is to their being valuable". (2012, p. 16141) Those who reject value pluralism, however, have to make this claim. They assert that those entities derive their value from being pleasurable, or good, or instrumental to happiness, or conducive to any value that they consider the fundamental consideration that matters for normative choice. Doing so, they run afoul of our ordinary intuition. Value pluralists have no problem accounting for the heterogeneity of valuable entities. They claim that those entities instantiate distinct fundamental values.

The second argument is the *argument from rational regret* (see Williams, 1973; Stocker, 1990). It is best explained by an example. In 2012, the conductor Asher Fisch announced plans for the first performance of music by Richard Wagner in Israel. While many music enthusiasts welcomed the end of a boycott on the composer, others argued that performing the works of a notorious antisemite would offend holocaust survivors. Eventually, the local promoters cancelled the concert. The interesting point is the following: It is easy to imagine that, on the one hand, the promoters reached the assessment that it was all-things-considered best to cancel the concert and that, on the other hand, they still regretted their choice. They might well have judged that respect for the victims of Nazi terror was of paramount importance; and nonetheless they might have lamented that the Israeli public must forego the experience of listening to Wagner's music. However, those who reject value pluralism have to deny that this kind of regret can be ever rational. Since according to them all normative choices are made with respect to one fundamental value, it is irrational to regret having chosen the best alternative, i.e. that alternative which best promotes that value. The inferior alternative cannot have any normative properties that would make it preferable to the superior one and that are not contained in it. According to value pluralism, however, the promoters may have had a good reason to regret their choice. If one assumes that both options instantiated distinct fundamental values, they had to disregard one value in favor of the other. It may well be that it was all-things-considered best to cancel the concert, but this does not compensate for the loss of the value, which is deemed of lesser significance, i.e. the aesthetic value of Wagner's music. This loss makes it rational, irrespective of the choice being the right one, to regret having acted just so.

The third argument has not been discussed so far in the literature. We may call it the *argument from disagreement*. In their study on public deliberation in contemporary democracies, John Dryzek and Simon Niemeyer (2010) distinguish between two types of disagreement

among members of decision-making bodies which deliberative practice may help address or even overcome: value disagreement and instrumental disagreement. The former are disagreements "regarding the values driving the decision processes" (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2010, p. 93). They concern the problem which value ought to have priority for policy decisions (e.g. if economic policy should maximize utility or promote equality). The latter are disagreements about "how particular actions map onto values in cause-and-effect terms" (ibid.). They concern the problem which policy is best suited to promote a particular value. If there was only one value that ultimately matters for normative choice, all disagreements would be instrumental disagreements. But this claim is not consistent with the self-assessment of the conflicting parties as determined via empirical research. Dryzek and Niemeyer maintain that one can clearly distinguish between cases where there is agreement on the value that ought to be promoted, but disagreement on the best means for doing so; and cases where the disagreement goes deeper and concerns the question of which value among a set of conflicting values ought to be promoted. Other than monistic accounts of value, value pluralism corroborates the claim that value disagreement and instrumental disagreement are two distinct forms of disagreement.

I suggest that these three arguments lend great prima facie plausibility to value pluralism. Other than value monism, it accommodates strong intuitions about the heterogeneity of valuable entities and the rationality of regretting justified choices, and it accounts for the difference between instrumental disagreement and value disagreement.

3. Deliberative Democracy: A Short Sketch

Deliberative democracy is a dominant paradigm in normative political theory that posits a socio-political "ideal in which people come together, on the basis of equal status and mutual respect, to discuss the political issues they face and, on the basis of those discussions, decide on the policies that will then affect their lives." (Bächtiger et al., 2018, p. 2). In the vast decades-spanning literature, no canonical definition of deliberative democracy has emerged beyond this least common denominator, and proponents diverge sharply when it comes to the issue of agreement (and disagreement) among citizens and the role it plays in democratic theory building. While consensualists (see Cohen, 1989; Estlund, 1993; Habermas, 1996; Nino, 1996; Lafont, 2006) envisage deliberation as striving towards unanimous agreement, thereby supplanting the need for majoritarian voting altogether, moderate pragmatists (Larmore, 1996; Besson, 2005; Mansbridge, 2010) have no such lofty ambitions. They contend themselves by emphasizing the benefits of deliberation in terms of improving public opinion formation, thus, allowing for a better decision-making basis of majoritarian voting – either directly on policy issues or on representatives.

Irrespective of these fundamental differences, deliberative democrats align in their view of deliberation as a core democratic practice for tackling both value disagreements and instrumental disagreements (see section 2) in the political domain by creating a reasoned and empathetic understanding between conflicting parties. This understanding may, ideally, culminate in consensus; but it may also yield fair compromises, or a more nuanced understanding shared by all parties of the conflict dimensions at stake. On this reading, then, deliberative contestations both presuppose the possibility of rationally comparing and weighing off competing evaluative choices – and they serve as a suitable procedure for collectively addressing such choices in a reasonable, mutually beneficial fashion.

Consider, e.g., the collective choice between two incompatible policies, one of which maximizes the value of utility while the other promotes the value of social equality. According to the deliberative approach, decision-making should not boil down to a mere aggregation of given preferences regarding both policies by means of voting. Rather, it ought to proceed by respectful, reciprocal communication during which citizens face each other as equals free

from coercion or extrinsic incentives and are required to justify their preferences to each other and to take into account their respective views. This process, it is argued, bears the potential for inducing a revision of preferences, the overcoming of biases, or a restructuring of conflict dimensions along less intractable lines.

Deliberative democratic decision-making has several advantages on pure preference aggregation. First it generates *superior policy outputs* (Cohen, 1989; Martí, 2006). Since deliberation requires citizens to justify their political views to each other, it improves the detection of "mistakes in the citizens' reasoning about the world [and] increases the exchange and pooling of information" (Martí, 2006, p. 42). Also, being confronted with the perspectives of other social groups is apt to cause citizens to reconsider the validity of egoistic or exclusively class-based claims (Warren, 1992). Thus, solutions to collective value problems are more likely to be made in light of the best arguments, rather than on the basis of self-centered, shortsighted reasons.

Second, it facilitates the *inclusion of social minorities in policymaking* (O'Flynn, 2010). In political systems where decision-making proceeds on purely aggregative grounds, social majorities can easily outvote ethnic or religious minority groups and thus deprive them of any substantive political influence. The result is a deepening of social divides. By contrast, the requirement to search for reasoned agreements on contentious issues makes it impossible for social majorities to outvote minorities. Instead, deliberative processes incentivize all participants of the political sphere to overcome (or at least lay aside) mutual aversions, listen to each other in earnest, and identify previously unknown shared concerns.

Third, it *reduces the influence of powerful lobbies on politics* (Dryzek & List, 2003). A common worry in democratic theory is that well-organized and wealthy interest groups can manipulate political will-formation by spreading misinformation or one-sided information in order to promote particularistic goals at the expense of collective concerns. Deliberation reduces this risk by increasing the information pool available to all citizens and, in the long run, improving their communicative competences. Therefore, citizens are more apt to uncover manipulative efforts and form unbiased opinions respectively.

The above-mentioned arguments suggest that deliberative democracy is an attractive political ideal that defies criticism of its alleged utopianism by functioning as a regulative principle of democracy in the Kantian sense: i.e. as a standard "with which we can compare ourselves, judging ourselves and thereby improving ourselves, even though we can never reach the standard". (Steiner, 2012, p. 3) Not only does it highlight the shortcomings of real-world democracies, but it also inspires concrete institutional improvements. The ever-growing number of consensus conferences, citizens' juries, planning cells, and similar small-scale deliberative forums in many countries – several of which have significant impact on policy-making – gives testament to the increasing practical relevance of consensus-oriented deliberation (for an overview see Witting, Wagenaar & Hendriks, 2023).

4. The Incompatibility Claim

At first glance, value pluralism and deliberative democracy go together well.[2] Deliberative democrats have good reasons to be value pluralists. If they do not want to burden their approach with the assumption that citizens are irrational if they regret the outcomes of justified collective choices, they should accept value pluralism. Furthermore, they should not commit to the claim that there is only one type of disagreement that deliberation must address, namely, instrumental disagreement on how to best promote a singular value such as

2 Several political theorists expressly endorse both paradigms, see Dryzek and Niemeyer (2010, p. 639), O'Flynn (2010, p. 305), and Crowder (2013, p. 193). They do so, however, without problematizing their compatibility.

happiness or pleasure. Research on real-world deliberation indicates that this view is overly simplistic. As for value pluralism, there are no reasons internal to this account that either favor or disfavor deliberative democracy. Value pluralists make a claim about the fundamental structure of the domain of values; and in this capacity they should not be concerned with the normative question of whether political decision-making should proceed via by reasoned deliberation.

Several theorists, most prominently Talisse (2010; 2012), Mouffe (1999; 2000), Trainor (2008), Chinalli & O'Flynn (2014), and Martí (2017) argue that these suggestions are profoundly mistaken:[3] Value pluralism and deliberative democracy are *incompatible*. Value pluralists cannot be deliberative democrats, and deliberative democrats cannot be value pluralists. This incompatibility claim is based on two premises that we can call the *No Common Standard Premise* and the *Irrationality Premise*.

> *No Common Standard Premise:* A plurality of equally fundamental intrinsic values precludes any normative standard of comparison with respect to which the relative merits of those values can be weighed off and ranked in cases of conflict.

Any standard that would allow for such a weighting, it is argued, would necessarily have to be a singular super-value that is more fundamental than the values at stake and from which the former are derived. However, assuming such a super-value would amount to a straightforward endorsement of value monism and a rejection of value pluralism respectively. Put differently: Since value pluralism states that there are many values at the most basic level, and since any normative standard of comparison for values could only be a more basic and unifying value, value pluralism precludes – by necessity – such a standard.

This has disastrous implications for the rational resolvability of value conflicts.

> *Irrationality Premise:* The absence of a common normative standard of comparison renders deliberation about incompatible policy choices, each of which instantiate different values, irrational.

Since there is no unifying consideration with respect to which it is true that one value is superior to the other, such conflicts are, as Mouffe puts it, "undecidable" (2000, p. 103) on rational grounds. The consequence is, according to Talisse, "a kind of moral standoff in which opposing parties are *unable* to offer each other justifications" (2012, p. 104, emphasis in original). In other words, it is irrational for citizens, who favor distinct values and corresponding policies, to even engage in communicative contestations about the relative merits of their policy proposals. All sides may have good reasons to champion specific policies. But in the absence of a common normative standard that facilitates the rational comparability of the respective values, a unified normative viewpoint, let alone a bridging of their differences and a rational revision of their views is impossible.

The incompatibility claim forces us into a choice: Either we opt for value pluralism and against deliberative democracy; or we opt for deliberative democracy and against value pluralism. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the above-mentioned theorists choose different sides. Talisse and Trainor argue that deliberative democracy is too important an ideal to be given up (cf. Talisse, 2012, p. 103; Trainor, 2008, p. 911). Hence, they reject value pluralism. Mouffe,

3 Similar, although less detailed arguments can also be found in Karppinen (2007) and Fuente (2013).

on the other hand, argues that since value pluralism is the most promising account of the structure of values, we ought to reject deliberative democracy (cf. Mouffe, 2000, p. 13).

5. Tackling the Incompatibility Claim

I believe that in light of the arguments given in sections 2 and 3, either choice between value pluralism or deliberative democracy is a bad one. Both doctrines are attractive and cogent in their own right. Before biting the bullet and choosing sides, we should exhaust all argumentative resources to reject the incompatibility claim. How should we do this?

Since the incompatibility claim is based on two premises, we can attack either one. A number of theorists argue that the Irrationality Premise is untenable (e.g. Nagel, 1979; Anderson, 1997; Swanton 2005). They hold that persons need not refer, either explicitly or implicitly, to a common standard to arrive at a reasoned choice between conflicting values. Instead, they can resort to the faculty of practical wisdom. Thomas Nagel famously claims: "Provided one has taken the process of practical justification as far as it will go in the course of arriving at the conflict, one may be able to proceed without further justification, but without irrationality either. What makes this possible is judgment – essentially the faculty Aristotle described as practical wisdom" (1979, p. 135). The point is that by virtue of this faculty persons just 'see' which option is better, although they are, by necessity, unable to justify their choice (see Mason, 2023)

The problem is that it is quite unclear what exactly practical wisdom is and, more importantly, how it facilitates the rational comparability of values. In my view, there are two ways of interpreting Nagel's claim, and both are equally unattractive for proponents of this reply. Either wise persons reliably judge which alternative is better *simpliciter*, i.e. has more basic goodness; or they reliably judge which alternative is better relative to a common normative consideration *C*. In the first case, however, the response clearly collapses into form of value monism according to which there is a fundamental property of goodness that pervades all things valuable and allows to rank them. This assumption is incompatible with the core thesis of value pluralism which states that there is an irreducible plurality of fundamental values that cannot be derived from a more basic value such as the good. In the second case, one has already assumed a common standard of comparison with respect to which the relative merits of both conflicting values are judged and, hence, given up the idea that practical wisdom facilitates the comparability of values without referring, explicitly or implicitly, to such a standard. Since I see no third alternative, I believe that attacking the Irrationality Premise is a hopeless task. In the absence of a common standard of comparison with respect to which values can be ranked, the rational deliberation of citizens about the merits and demerits of incompatible policies is impossible.

Second, we can attack the No Common Standard Premise and argue that value pluralism does not preclude a common standard of comparison. The problem with this strategy is the following: How *can* we compare the relative merits of two values if there *is* no more basic value with respect to which we can compare them? I want to suggest a solution to this problem that might sound curious: What if two fundamental values were comparable with respect to a *non-fundamental value*, i.e. a value that is not more basic but less basic than the former? If that were the case, we could reject the idea of a singular all-encompassing fundamental value in favor of a plurality of equally fundamental values, and we could still hold on to the notion of the rational comparability of those values.

To make this proposal plausible I want to draw on Chang's (1997; 2004a,b) covering value approach. Chang herself does not stake a stance on the incompatibility claim, but she provides a model of rational decision-making in cases of value conflict that is hugely useful for coming to grips with the issues at hand. She argues that rational comparisons between conflicting values proceed in terms of a so-called "covering value" (Chang, 2004a, p. 119) that contains the

relevant values as parts and determines their relative weights under given circumstances. She provides the following example: Suppose a vacant chair at a department of philosophy must be filled and the choice has narrowed down to two candidates: A and B. While A is a highly original thinker but knows little about the history of philosophy, B is entirely unoriginal but a little bit more historically sensitive than her competitor. Whom should one choose? The value of originality favors A, the value of historical sensitivity favors B; but despite this conflict of values, it is clear that one ought to choose A. And being asked why this is so, the natural answer is that A has more philosophical talent. Originality and historical sensitivity (together with other values like clarity of thought and precision) contribute to making it the case that a person has philosophical talent; and it is the specific combination of those values born by A that makes her more philosophically talented than B. The covering value in the case of the vacant department chair thus is philosophical talent. It is the common normative standard with respect to which – all other things being equal – the great advantage of A in terms of originality outweighs her small disadvantage in terms of historical sensitivity.

Chang argues that all conflicts between values are analogous to the case of the vacant department chair. If someone faces the choices of whether to rescue an endangered person, though at the price of endangering herself greatly in the process, the relative weight of both alternatives (i.e. rescuing or not rescuing the person) is determined by a covering value that contains the values of helpfulness and self-preservation as contributory parts. The same holds for cases in which agents face must weigh off friendship and justice, loyalty and prudence etc. Chang admits that her proposal might strike many as odd. Other than in the case of the vacant department chair, the alleged covering value that facilitates the comparability of helpfulness and self-preservation is *nameless*. We do not have a conventional term for a standard with respect to which the relative merits of those values can be ascertained. However, Chang argues, and rightly so as I believe, that the namelessness of a value is only "an accidental product of our naming practices" (2004b, p. 3) and, hence, does not undermine her claim.[4]

The relevant point of Chang's approach for this inquiry – to which she herself does not seem to give much attention – is the following: In the case of the vacant department chair, the covering value of philosophical talent is *less fundamental* than its contributory values, i.e. originality and historical sensitivity, and yet it serves as a *normative standard* with respect to which the relative merits of the latter values are compared. That this is so can be demonstrated without any metaphysical excursions into the notion of fundamentality (see however Blum, 2023).

First, when we are asked to explain what makes it the case that someone has exceptional philosophical talent, we will cite facts concerning their outstanding originality and impressive historical sensitivity. Both values, originality and historical sensitivity, are constitutive of philosophical talent in that one cannot imagine someone being philosophically talented without exhibiting, to some degree, the former values. Thus, we may say that someone instantiates philosophical talent in virtue of the fact that she instantiates originality and historical sensitivity. Second, when we are asked to explain what makes it the case that someone is highly original or unusually historically sensitive, we will not cite facts about their philosophical talent. The latter does not figure in our explanatory accounts of the more basic values of originality and historical sensitivity. For, clearly, someone can instantiate either

4 As Chang points out, the idea that many values are indeed nameless can be traced back to Aristotle who argues, e.g., that the mean between ambitiousness and unambitiousness has no name and that the regulation of feelings of anger involves a nameless value, too (cf. Chang, 2004a, p. 18). For a more detailed analysis of the notion of nameless values in Aristotelian ethics see Gottlieb (1994).

value without instantiating any philosophical talent whatsoever (think e.g. of highly original rock musicians or historically sensitive politicians). In short: Philosophical talent is neither constitutive of originality nor of historical sensitivity, but it is constituted by both values and, hence, less fundamental than the latter.

I want to suggest that for any conflict between two fundamental values there is one non-fundamental value that is constituted by the former – i.e. a covering value – with respect to which the relative merits of those values can be rationally weighed off. Given this assumption, we can accept value pluralism without having to accept the No Common Standard Premise. For, the claim that a plurality of equally fundamental values *entails* the No Common Standard Premise is based on the idea that all values can only ever be compared in terms of a single more fundamental value, which – in case of value pluralism – is not available. And since the covering value approach, as elaborated above, presents a viable alternative to this idea, this entailment relation can be reasonably denied.

There are two objections that can be leveled against this proposal. *First*, one might argue that it is quite mysterious how the covering value of philosophical talent facilitates the rational comparability of its contributory values. I want to suggest the following reply: Both values contribute constitutively to making it the case that someone is philosophically talented; and the more they contribute, the more philosophically talented that someone is. Now, both values – which in this case favor incompatible alternatives (originality favors candidate A, historical sensitivity favors candidate B) – can be weighed off with regard to how much they contribute to making A and B philosophically talented. And it is clear from our understanding of philosophical talent that the little advantage in historical sensitivity born by B does not contribute as much to making her philosophically talented as the great advantage in originality born by A.

Second, one might object that the case of the vacant department chair cannot be generalized. Just because in this example a non-fundamental covering value can be identified with respect to which two values can be weighed off does not mean that other conflicts are structured the same way. There are two things I want to say in this regard. First, it seems that critics would have to explain why exactly this case is an exception, an anomaly of the domain of values which is, apart from this special example, not structured in the way propose here. I do not consider this task particularly promising, though.

Second, we can show that the case of the vacant department chair is no exception by citing further examples where values are compared in terms of a non-fundamental covering value. Drawing on Bruce Douglass' (1980) seminal analysis of the notion of the common good, it can be argued that the common good of a polity is a covering value that figures prominently in political decision-making. If a legislative body faces the choice of whether to pass a law that will greatly improve upon social justice, though at the price of slightly decreasing political liberty, the decisive question is the following: Which course of action best promotes the common good? The common good is the standard with respect to which both values are weighed off, and yet it is less fundamental than the latter insofar as it is constituted by them (see also Honneth, 1998, p. 778). If we are asked to explain what constitutes a policy's conduciveness to the common good, we will cite facts about justice, liberty and other political values such as tolerance and equality. We would be at a loss if we had to provide an account of the common good that omits any reference to the above-mentioned values. Those values, however, are explanatorily independent from the common good. Clearly, we can provide an account of social justice – e.g. in terms of a fair scheme for allocating primary goods among members of society (cf. Rawls, 1971) – without making any reference to the notion of the common good. The same applies to political liberty for which we can, e.g., provide an exhaustive account in terms of independence from arbitrary power (cf. Pettit, 1996). In short:

The common good is neither constitutive of political liberty nor of social justice, but it is constituted by both values and, hence, less fundamental than the former.

Another example is provided by Stephen Grimm (2007). He asks us to imagine that we are on a panel that is responsible for handing out the town's annual Good Citizen Award. Of course, there are a number of values to consider for determining which citizen is most deserving of the award – such as standing up to corruption, helping one's neighbor, and being politically involved – and it stands to reason that different citizens will instantiate those distinct values in different degrees. But despite this fact, we can refer to a common standard of comparison that will guide our choice, namely: "excellence as a citizen" (Grimm, 2007, p. 29). Excellence as a citizen, Grimm argues, can be conceived as a value which "has a number of different parts or components, in each aspect of which someone might excel" (ibid), and which "provides the common measure in terms of which we can compare" (ibid.) those parts. The important point is that excellence as a citizen, very much like philosophical talent and the common good, functions as a normative standard of comparison for a number of values and is yet less fundamental than those values insofar as it is constituted by them. For, clearly the values of standing up to corruption, helping one's neighbor, and being politically involved figure in our explanatory account of what makes someone an excellent citizen – but not vice versa.

This list of examples can be extended ad nauseam. The point I want to make is that individual and collective decision-making is rife with cases where we rationally adjudicate between conflicting values, and in many of those cases we expressly refer to specific covering values to guide and justify our choices. The best explanation of this fact is that covering values obtain in all value conflicts and we just have not gotten around to naming them all. The alternative would be a fragmented picture of the realm of values — a view according to which, in some situations, covering values exist and make comparison possible, while in other situations they don't, and yet we can still somehow make value comparisons. This alternative view seems to me equally unparsimonious and explanatorily unsatisfying.

Since the covering value approach possesses great plausibility in light of the objections discussed above, I believe that we can reasonably reject the No Common Standard Premise. Plural fundamental values can be rationally compared. The key is to conceive of the relevant normative standard as less fundamental – and not more fundamental – than the values at stake. Since the incompatibility claim, which states that value pluralism and deliberative democracy are mutually exclusive paradigms, is based on the No Common Standard Premise, we can reject the incompatibility claim, too. Value pluralists can be deliberative democrats; deliberative democrats can be value pluralists.

6. Conclusion

I began this inquiry by arguing that both value pluralism and deliberative democracy are attractive accounts in their own right. However, several theorists claim that both doctrines are incompatible and that we must choose sides. This claim is based on two premises: The No Common Standard Premise states that a plurality of equally fundamental values precludes a common standard of comparison, since all values can only be compared in terms of a more fundamental value from which they are derived. The Irrationality Premise states that in the absence of a common standard of comparison reasoned communicative contestations about collective value conflicts are rendered impossible.

I have argued that while the Irrationality Premise is solid, the No Common Standard Premise is not. Plural fundamental values do not preclude a common standard of comparison. Chang's covering value approach, which I illustrated with the case of the vacant department chair, demonstrates that two values can be weighed off with respect to a non-fundamental value that is constituted by the former. Consequently, we are not committed to the idea that

the comparability of conflicting values requires a monistic, all-encompassing super-value as envisaged by the proponents of the incompatibility claim.

Since the No Common Standard Premise is implausible, the incompatibility claim can be reasonably rejected: Value Pluralists can be deliberative democrats, and deliberative democrats can be value pluralists. But there is more to be said: As stated in section 3, while there are no reasons internal to value pluralism that either favor or disfavor deliberative democracy, things are different for deliberative democrats. First, they should not burden their account with the assumption that citizens who regret the outcome of justified collective choices are irrational. Second, they should not commit to the assumption that there is only one type of disagreement that deliberation must overcome, namely, instrumental disagreement. Since value monism entails those two implications, and since value pluralism does not, deliberative democrats should clearly endorse value pluralism.

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