

# Openness and the Public Space: A Buddhist Perspective on Deliberative Democracy

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## Abstract

Deliberative democracy is a concept developed in Western political philosophy, and has garnered attention for its potential to address the limitations of liberal democracy. However, much of the discourse surrounding deliberative democracy has been modern Western-oriented, excluding examples such as the Indigenous Model, and lacking an interdisciplinary perspective that could enrich its intellectual and practical dimensions. This paper provides a critical appraisal of deliberative democracy from a Buddhist perspective and examines how Buddhist philosophy can contribute to the development of open dialogue in the public forum by exploring the relationship between internality and the dynamics of inter-subjectivity in public spaces. The intention (and practice) is for participatory democratic politics reaching collective decision-making on shared concerns and needs, while the inquiry is from a Buddhist perspective on deliberative democracy from principles and practice such as compassion, mindfulness, and non-attachment. With the addition of radical openness, we suggest certain aspects of Nagarjuna's ontology as helpful. Non-attachment and radical openness can help participants to be open to new ideas and to be willing to change their minds when presented with new information, provisionally and based on reason. The claim is that deliberative democracy, informed by Buddhist principles and practices, has the potential to play a part in creating a more just and equitable society for all by exploring the further reaches of deliberative democracy.

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## 1. Introduction

Much of the conventional discourse concerning deliberative democracy has been modern Western-oriented, and lacking interdisciplinary and intercultural perspectives in order to enrich its intellectual and practical aspects. The current paper will examine how Buddhist philosophy can contribute to enriching the arguments of deliberative democracy for overall experience and participation. In particular, the research, through a brief critical appraisal of modern Western-oriented deliberative democracy and contemporary liberalism (neoliberalism), will examine how internally developed members of society and intersubjective public places for deliberative democracy can strengthen each other to expand the purview of how we consider deliberative democracy. The first section will show the basic features of deliberative democracy. The second part will present a brief introduction to a Buddhist integral perspective where a Buddhist view of self and public place will be examined. While the virtually disembodied self-autonomous individual is placed at the center of democracy in the West, Buddhism proposes a relational non-self. The relational non-self does not mean the denial of self or individuality but rather than seeing different selves as independent and fixed entities with firm boundaries, Buddhism refers to understanding the self as within the interconnected web of life and human nature where there is no fixed self (empty). Members of society or citizens recognizing the non-fixed self can respect and be open to a diversity of values, norms, and interests and enhance dialogical interaction as an open-ended process to co-creating adjustments and new values and visions with others having different or opposing values and goals. Second, a Buddhist view of a public place as an emptied and open place will be discussed. Here, the public place means infinite potential as a generative and mutual learning process, producing new values, visions, and ideas with no apparent closure, hence radical openness.

Third, a Buddhist view of the dynamics of deliberative democracy will be examined. Here, the dynamics of internally enriched citizens and public deliberative process can complement each other to expand the purview of how we should consider deliberative democracy will be analyzed, along with an integralist or Buddhist perspective on deliberative democracy from principles and practice such as reflective and mindful awareness, compassion, and holistic thinking, including non-attachment and radical openness in public space. Focused attention is the practice of attentiveness to the present moment and in public attentiveness to the socio-cultural and historical differences of people having diverse values, views, and interests. Refining reflective and mindful awareness helps people to focus on the present moment and avoid impulsive and reactive interaction with others having differences. Compassion means the

recognition of the suffering of others and the desire to alleviate it, where enacting compassion can help to create a more inclusive and mutually respectful dialogue as participants come to show empathy with others as a human commonality. Compassion coupled with holistic thinking and non-attachment penetrates into the fundamental interdependent relationship of any form of opposing or prima facie antithetical values, norms, views, and interests and recognizes the ultimate non-reality of claims by any view and value as absolute or complete. While somewhat difficult to realize and practice, the person opens up to new ideas and views and may be willing to change their minds when presented with new information and perspectives. With the enhancement of non-attachment, participants become open to co-creating new values and adjustments to norms, and common interests with others having different or opposing views and perspectives, all towards collective decision-making.

The Buddhist proposition of the relational non-self and public places as radically open and generative spaces, along with the merits of practicing reflective self-awareness, compassion, and holistic thinking and non-attachment, can add to deliberative democracy. The entirety would perhaps lead to a continuous transformative process of intersubjective interaction in public space with no end point and thereby move towards the best possible form of society that can evaluate empirical information, adjust social norms and rules, and be inclusive fundamentally.

## **1. Critique of liberal democracy and overview of deliberative democracy**

The principles of democracy are the dignity and liberty of citizens, equality before the law, participation (in how rules are made), and pluralism (Crick, 2002). Liberal democracy in the modern Western world liberated modern humans from various external constraints and enhanced human freedom with liberty as foundational to modern constitutions as Europe moved into the Enlightenment (Dallmayr, 2019). Liberal democracy promoted various rights including the freedom of religious belief and practice, freedom of thought, speech, and expression, freedom of assembly and association and thereby underpinning a regime in which individuals are as free as possible to pursue their interests as they see fit on condition others are free to do the same and not be imposed upon. Jurgen Habermas developed the foundations of discourse in western political philosophy concerning discourse ethics and deliberation. In commenting on political philosophy, Rawls and liberalism, he writes, "Liberals have stressed the 'liberties of the moderns': liberty of belief and conscience, the protection of life, personal liberty, and property-in sum, the core of subjective private rights. Republicanism, by contrast, has defended the 'liberties of the ancients'. It is the former, or the political rights of participation and communication that make possible citizens' exercise of self-determination, which scaled up to the transnational such as in the case of the war in Southeast Asia (Vietnam) and today concerning Afghanistan, Iraq, Ukraine (Habermas, 1995b, p. 127) Habermas' foundation for discourse ethics and the development of deliberative democracy was an empirical matter of validity of claims, articulation of arguments and explanations, and so forth, where discourse was necessary for social production (Habermas, 1995a; Rehg, 2023). However,

the problems of liberal democracy by current times are glaring as liberalism has come to mean competitive elections and majoritarianism, emphasis on a mechanistic productive and distribution system in economics, and fragmented individualism where the individual is taken as absolute and hence detached from society or group. The above is generally referred to as neoliberalism (Harvey, 2007; Way et al., 2018). When it comes to the individual, the system leaves little effective voice for the participatory aspect in democracy leading to low motivation and apathy and with buildup of tensions internal to societies. The latter is perhaps the cause of identity politics or an extreme reversion into identity groups that refuse rational-critical analysis or subvert discourse itself. The other threat is the techniques of public relations on behalf of special interest groups, the state, and business to direct attention away from democratic process concerning the important issues of the day and generally into consumerism (Bernays & Miller, 2004; Chomsky & Herman, 2014). Habermas, when discussing reconciliation and the public space made an important observation “[the] development of the welfare state shows that the boundaries between the private and public autonomy of citizens are in flux and that such differentiations must be subjected to the political will formation of the citizens if the latter are to have the opportunity to press a legal claim to the “fairvalue” of their liberties”. (Habermas, 1995b). For Habermas, communication is central as the way towards both liberation of the human being and as precision in social adjustments for a better democratic politics, echoing ancient forms of social organization. As an addition, thus, deliberation must be a liberty that is protected such as in the case of fear of retribution from exercising the freedom of discourse and justification. Power relationships must be transparent and understood (Gilligan, 1982). Without such freedom, discourse becomes freedom for those who can participate due to background or systemic advantage due to the “neutral and universal” individual self. Women, minorities, and the poor would be at a disadvantage in liberties for discourse as foundational to get their needs and concerns addressed (Gilligan, 1982).

On the large scale at the end of the last century,, in the world’s only superpower as a unipolar world system, the United States ended up as two parties that are approximately the same and not representative of the populace, nor of the world (Gilens & Page, 2014). In fact, the political system can be seen as factions of one Party echoing John Dewey’s concerns about big business controlling politics. It is these considerations and others that provided impetus to overcome some of the problems and limitations of contemporary liberal democracy that led to the emergence of deliberative democracy. (Bächtiger et al., 2018; Fishkin, 2009) While the various aspects of contemporary societies are acknowledged, the focus of the current Buddhist perspective is philosophical concerning how the person approaches the public space and thus philosophy and meditative practice are combined to respond and correspond to the need for the development of global social and political policies today as an integral matter.

Deliberative democracy emphasizes public reasoning and inter-human communication. We consider contemporary global society with grounding in intercultural philosophy and non-civilized cultures as background to our inquiry that democracy can scale in the world as it is today, and is even more necessary, and we think effective, as major problems such as climate

change and social breakdown must be addressed before existential crisis arrives (Curato et al., 2018; Hewitt, 2023; Thwaites, 1896). As a talk-centric view of democracy and grassroots movements as everyday politics, rather than an aggregate vote-centric view, deliberative democracy places its primary emphasis on the interactive engagement among human beings or the free and open public argument and explanation concerning the common good as integral to the well-being of each human being within a biotic community. (Johansen & Mann, 2000, p. 122-129).<sup>3</sup> Rather than voting every four years and then occasionally at the local and regional level, there is an everyday democracy by, of, and for the People. In essence concerning communication and feedback, rather than a marketplace of ideas, the argument is for a ubiquitous public space or forum in society today and for *open reasoning* as the Digital Age emerges and social media presence is a focus of much of people's lives. The minipublics movement is one example from the Nordic Region where in one case suggestions were made concerning Iceland's Constitution as an open-sourced constitutional initiative (Bani, 2012). The deliberative process seeks to facilitate the discovery of broader interests beyond one's own, and integrate diverse perspectives on complex social problems in a community, bioregion, and on up to the international level. Deliberative process requires human beings to step out of narrow self-interest and to construct arguments that appeal to the common good that they can agree upon, for example air pollution and public health (F. Dallmayr, 2010; Holgate, 2017). In this way, the foundational principles of deliberation found in reasoned discourse and the right to justification can be safeguarded; and disparate cultural perspectives, or cultural pluralism, can be addressed particularly through the foundational common cause of democratic discourse and the right to justification. (Forst, 2011; Habermas, 1995a) Intercultural philosophy and a Buddhist philosophical perspective are proposed to add to the foundation of democracy as an integral foundation for organized human society. Such a foundation protects basic human freedoms for life in community.

However, as mentioned, one of the critical problems with existing liberal democracy is that much of the discourse concerning the process has been Western-oriented (Curato et al., 2018). A modern Western-orientation is understandable given liberalism's accepted origin and development to overcome European theocracy and social oppression, however, since many societies beyond the West and the non-West boundaries are employing democracy, either formally or informally, an intercultural philosophical approach with deliberative democracy can be of benefit to the West and the non-West as it could enrich intellectual and practical dimensions. Buddhist philosophy is not an exception but a recognition (from a Buddhist view) of what has been underdeveloped in existing Western deliberative democracy or the relationship between internal human aspects and the dynamics of intersubjective public places to sharpen the quality and effectiveness of deliberative democracy. In this sense, discourse and consensus has always been foundational aspect of Sangha as an ancient practice and therefore long known for social interaction corresponding to the democratic confederalism (Indigenous

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<sup>3</sup> Our use of *public* refers particularly to a republic and urban system and can be contrasted to the bioregional.

Model) of the Eastern Woodlands of what is now the United States (Garfield, 2001; Hanh, 2003; Hershock, 2006; Hewitt, 2023; Thwaites, 1896). Additionally, a perspective from Buddhist philosophy might help to overcome the retreat into identity politics and epistemic crisis already underway in the West. Therefore, a Buddhist philosophical analysis of human epistemological and ontological dynamics can make a contribution to expanding the purview of deliberative democracy.

## **2. Introduction to Buddhism: The human mind in focus**

Buddhism sheds light on internal human dynamics and causal aspects of human suffering including the extension into external conflict or violence. The focus of Buddhism is the human mind, which is stated in the Dhamapada: “All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind” (Fronsdal, 2018). This position does not deny the existence of objects outside our minds, rather the qualities and attributes of things and objects are dependent upon and made up of the mind (Lai, 1977). Therefore, this realization helps the person to have a better understanding of their lives, others, the world, and nature. The outcome is a better intelligibility and orientation of and for living experience. As the condition of our mind shapes the state of our reality, the root cause of problems facing us is attributed to our minds as stated in the Dhamapada: “Speak or act with a corrupted mind, and suffering follows as the wagon wheel, follows the hoof of the ox” (Fronsdal, 2018). However, when we overcome the cause of suffering in our mind, we can achieve inner serenity and well-being: “Speak or act with a peaceful mind, and happiness follows like a never-departing shadow.” (Fronsdal, 2018). In this sense Buddhist philosophy is a critical study of the structure of the human thought process, which is the realization that some aspects of reality are entangled in a thought construct. Thus, critical examination of how thought construction turns into a cause of suffering is a first step in understanding errors in cognition and its limitations. It is the contemplation of such new understanding and then the implementation or enacting of resolution that constitutes a core aspect of Buddhism (Matsuo, 1987).

### **2-1. Analysis of the Four Noble Truths doctrine**

The Four Noble Truths Doctrine is the Buddha’s foundational teaching and the doctrinal framework of every school in Buddhism (Xingyun & Yun, 2002). The first truth states that human life is basically filled with suffering and trouble. However, rather than offering a pessimistic view of reality, it means that the acknowledgement of our reality being full of suffering leads us to a more profound question: “What is the root cause of suffering?” This is the core of the second noble truth. The second truth states that the cause of suffering is craving – mental state of attachment to certain specific objects or views combined with external conditions (Cho, 2002, pp. 426-440). It is a lack of the correct knowledge of reality along with a lack of understanding the conditions of life in the world. Ontologically and epistemically, in a

state of ignorance,<sup>4</sup> we tend to see things, including human beings, as having a fixed nature and then cling to anything that reinforces our concept of permanence, pushing away any views that threaten our attachment (Tsering, 2005, vol. 1). Further, craving and ignorance give rise to three mental defilements: greed, hatred, and ignorance or delusion, some which are survival instincts and amplified under certain social conditions; hence greed and hatred as “poisons” or as destructive to self, society, and nature. The human mind itself is the locus wherein the gap between reality and the human hermeneutical realities represented in conceptual or linguistic rendering accompanied by desire takes place, resulting in suffering (Park, 2010). The third truth states that a human being will be inspired to overcome suffering by knowing its root causes or at least, have a better understanding such that a better measure of clarity can be attained and suffering diminished. Suffering is considered usually within human reach, and therefore inquiry into how our own craving and ignorance causes us suffering, we can resolve suffering when we properly address the sources.<sup>5</sup> The fourth truth presents the way to address suffering and achieve mental serenity, which is generally called the Noble Eightfold Path. It is: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The gist of the fourth truth is that when we resolve our suffering, three angles – ethical conduct (right speech, right action, right livelihood, and right effort), mental discipline (right mindfulness and right concentration), and wisdom (right view and right thought) need to be considered (Rahula, 2007). When wisdom (an insight into the nature of reality), mental discipline (to monitor our internal dynamics), and ethical conduct (practicing a moral life with honesty, altruism, and compassion) are well integrated, we can build positive and harmonious relationships. The enrichment of deliberative democracy could follow.

## **2-2. Buddhist analysis of human mind and intersubjective human interaction**

The brief analysis of the core tenets of Buddhist philosophy provides the basis for how we can arrive at the public space, both physically and mentally, and then maintain ourselves during the process of deliberation. As mentioned, Buddhism acknowledges the existence of objects and human beings; however, the attributes and meanings we project onto objects and others frame our reality and condition how we think (cognition) and know (or arrive at knowledge, epistemology). We as humans seem to need conceptual thought construction and linguistic knowledge for meaning-making of reality including human interactions, and thus reliance on right understanding can be helpful for intersubjective deliberation. Further, when we are with others in the public space, it is in how we manage internal dynamics of conceptual thought

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<sup>4</sup> Here we mean a basic lack of awareness, rather than deliberate ignorance.

<sup>5</sup> It may be that pain and suffering are analytically different yet connected, however, here we suffice it to say what the ancient or foundational texts report.

constructions and impact on human interaction that can make a contribution to enriching the purview of the dynamics of deliberative democracy.

Human beings have evolved with conceptual thought and subsequent linguistic knowledge and then developed it consciously as an important tool to make sense of the world and to communicate with fellow human beings (Ichimura, 1997). Therefore, it seems reasonable that discourse is foundational to human nature and also is used to create further complexity. For survival and enrichment, we build and accept a certain frame of reference—a pattern of worldviews, cultural values, political orientations, religious doctrines, moral-ethical norms and paradigms in intellectual enterprises — apparently to lead a meaningful life in nature and with others in society with individual faculties and then rules and roles (Gardner, 1983; Mezirow, 2003). While building a frame of reference is essential for us as human beings, the fundamental problem is when we privilege a frame of reference as absolute, reifying a particular understanding of reality and objectifying, and even demonizing the other; and ultimately nature. Nationalism is a textbook example of this problem. Another problem that is particularly causing havoc is the intellectual malady of taking all frames as of equal merit; because such a perspective has real social outcomes (Sokal, 2008). When we build values, norms, or gain perspective and claim universal finality for a perspective, it results in dogmatism and exclusion of other views or thoughts (Ramanan, 2016). Depending on social-political systems, and the fact of basic instincts, people can be led to feel threat or hatred of others with distinct values, norms, and views, which provide us with a self-serving justification for discrimination towards those others. Herein is where a contribution to deliberative democracy can be made. The various practices mentioned along with radical openness can help in such difficult situations when we reach public discourse. For instance, even if other views were completely wrong holding no effective merit empirically, they are still perspectives of persons and can be evaluated through deliberation. This basic right to discourse and justification is foundational, and when denied, fragmentation is guaranteed. The assertion is that concerns, grievances, needs and the like can be communicated and collective decision-making can proceed based on the foundation and dynamism of democratic discourse.

It is also necessary to consider, when developing conceptual thought, the mode of thinking itself. Though becoming conditioned by a socio-political, religious, or economic frame of reference is automatic as indoctrination, such realms are fundamentally of a dualistic nature of thought and divide the world into in-groups and out-groups (Wade, 1996). Seeing such indoctrination is a first step towards the radical openness that can enhance democratic discourse. Today, populist nationalism, and as mentioned, identity politics, are a major political threat to societies in the West, while dualistic thought is informed by the principle of the excluded middle. When the dichotomous relationship between in-group and out-group becomes deeply embedded, an imbalanced attitude invested by extreme in-group self-interests are pursued at the expense of others. In the extreme, “mob rule can take over” (McCormack, n.d.) Once we see and treat others as something disconnected from us due to the establishment of conceptual boundaries based on dichotomous thought, it becomes easier to



propagate violence of any form upon those outside our boundary (Zweig & Abrams, 2020). In this dualistic logical and epistemological structure, we tend to project negative qualities upon the outside and take discriminatory attitudes towards them – projection. Further, the mind in a dualistic position swings from extreme to extreme, and sticks to dead-ends, whereby values, ideas, or norms of one’s own group are not viewed as one of many alternatives, but absolutely as the right and only way. Here is one of the failures of liberalism, but not unique to liberalism.

Building a provisionally coherent thought system is an inevitable part of everyday human life and it can change due to a number of situations, some accurate, others highly inaccurate as shown above. When a dualistic thought mode exerts exclusive control on our understanding of reality, it can cause exaggerated differences between people and create supposedly fixed boundaries between the in-group and out-groups. Forming the sedimented and habitual ways of seeing what is supposed as a dynamic and complex reality with fixed perspectives restricts the patterns of awareness and limits our intentional range and capacity for meaning-making and social commitments, and hampers constructive communication between those having different frames of reference to address complex social and global problems that require those having different values, perspectives, and norms to cooperate for collective solutions (Hershock, 2006). For example, at this point in history, human ecology is a major global issue that must be addressed collectively if a reorientation is to occur and threats such as climate change are to be effectively mitigated. In fact, human ecology can fairly easily be arrived at as fundamental to human societies and therefore a sense of commonality and common interests can arise through discourse that can lead to further common ground – ecology as a basis for wider deliberation on current affairs (Hartsell, 2023).

### **2-3. Buddhist insight into conceptual thought constructions**

While conceptual construction is critical to human beings, as shown above, Buddhism claims, as does modern psychology, that our attachment to a particular view, value, or interest, as absolute can morph into the cause of divisive and even violent or antagonistic human relations. Therefore, gaining insight into such cognition or linguistic knowledge helps us address antagonistic and violent human relations and pave the way for more constructive interactions in the public space for better outcomes. While theoretical and abstract at the moment, Buddhist philosophy shows the interdependent and interpenetrating nature of conceptual thought constructions creating ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ boundaries. For instance, the interdependent and interpenetrating nature of conceptual thought that establishes our reality is expounded upon by Nagarjuna: “Without one there cannot be many and without many it is not possible to refer to one. Therefore, one and many arise dependently and such phenomena do not have sign of inherent existence” (Nāgārjuna, 1987). He also states that “If there is existence, then is non-existence; if there is something long, similarly (there is) something short; and if there is non-existence, (there is) existence; therefore, both (existence and non-existence) are not existent” (Tola et al., 1995). The ground of such statements, when it comes to human understanding or epistemology, we see as radical openness comparable to Buddhist emptiness

and may have value when approaching and participating in public deliberation. The central approach of the Buddhist revelation of the emptiness of building any form of conceptual thought as the independent and absolute view is to expose all views or systems of thought to “bi-negation” (Kakol, 2002). This term means the fundamental contradiction of any form of conceptualization: while one concept needs the other that opposes it, the latter needs the former to make sense. However, the former itself requires the latter and eventually infinite regress continues without end, which leads to the recognition of the ultimate unreality of conceptual thought of any form including nihilism to exist. This statement is not one of dialectic but of the limitations of cognition. The realization of our dependence on any conceptual or linguistic framework enables us to understand that any form of symbolic knowledge that shapes dichotomous human relations cannot be seen as existing outside of the purview of interdependency. This does not imply the suspension or paralysis of critical faculties or the total erasure of difference or demise of all distinctions into a fixed sameness, but advocates a reformulation of dualistic thinking. What needs to be considered is that dualistic “either-or” thinking, though important in some circumstances, is “only one product of the total functioning of the mind” and a mind that we accept has limitations (Tart, 2000, p. 28). In being awakened to the interdependent nature of the symbolic or linguistic knowledge that forms dichotomous relations, we can affect a shift in perspective from a dualistic stance to a non-dualistic stance, wherein *prima facie* opposing views are not seen as fixed pairs of opposites, but as inter-relational constructs (Nagatomo, 2000). When we transcend dualistic thinking, we become empowered to hold multiplex, complementary, “both-and” dialectical thinking, and to appreciate that what appears as the opposite of a deep truth is another deep truth (Braud & Anderson, 1998).

Thus, Buddhist insight into human conceptual thought does not aim at denying or annihilating engagement in building values, norms, or perspectives specifically. By attaining an insight into the nature of knowledge, one can eliminate one’s strong attachment to the certainty of knowledge. Buddhist philosophical analysis of conceptual thought construction can be understood as an exhaustive critique of dogmatism of knowledge of any form, or that which arises from *svabhava*-thought – belief in independent and fixed nature (Sutton, 1991). It is a reflective awareness of the empty or open nature of every conceptual or philosophical view that pretends to give a complete and exclusive picture of phenomena, and which curbs the dogmatic disposition of knowledge as far as human understanding is concerned. By acquiring an essential insight into the real, that is, relativity and ultimate unreality to absolutize a certain viewpoint through a dialectical critique of all views or thoughts, the intention of Buddhist philosophy is to attain a mind-state free from conceptual thought-constructions while appreciating their practical values in certain circumstances within our daily lives and intellectual undertaking. The pinnacle of knowledge in Buddhist philosophy is the complete freedom from all views, where views are freely taken in degree and to what merit they hold. Based on the analysis of Buddhist dynamics of the human mind, the next section will explore how Buddhist philosophy can contribute to enriching deliberative democracy.

### 3 Buddhist support for democracy

As mentioned, concerning the grounds of rule from the *demos*, dignity and liberty of citizens, equality before law, and pluralism constitute the core of democracy, which is acknowledged by Buddhism (Crick, 2002). For the Buddha, Buddhist communities (*sangha*) accommodated all people beyond different statuses, classes, ethnic backgrounds, and gender (Hershock, 2012). The Buddhist teaching of interdependent nature of any form of human relationship and the central teaching of compassion undergirds the horizontal relationships between people with different social and cultural identities. We can see the basic compatibility between Buddhism and the principles of democracy.

One of the critical challenges for many people under the influence of neoliberalism is the deepening split between governance and peoples' political engagement (F. Dallmayr, 2019). Also, building mutual trust and norms of reciprocity and shared verification of facts between people and governing bodies in order to reflect the voices of people in policy-making is critical. Applying Buddhist insight into intellectual reality or conceptual thought in framing human reality, we can see that the governing body of any kind and the governed are interdependent socially and interpenetrating intellectually. As examined through Nagarjuna's philosophical insight, the concept of government would be dependent upon those who are governed, even though the philosopher himself did not advocate for democracy. This shows that governing institutions of any kind – whether they be communal, social, state – are dependent upon people. Any form of governing institution is not an independently and objectively existing entity. The system must be “built” by people and thus follows the foundational value of democracy “by, of, and for the People”.

#### 3-1. On self

Deliberative democracy might welcome something from Buddhism that enables the participants to be liberated from narrow self-interest in favor of an openness towards others. However, in a Buddhist view, what has been underdeveloped in Western deliberative democracy is the critique of the traditional Western sense of self. In the West, the individual is the basic unit of political analysis and the autonomy of the individual is sacrosanct, where the primary responsibility of the liberal state is to create conditions in which all individuals can create life plans according to values and interests that they have freely chosen (Hershock, 2012). However, a prominent concern seen in many liberal states is its degeneration into atomist individualism and self-centeredness or fragmentation from a sociological standpoint (F. Dallmayr, 2019). We think the mechanism of atomization is market capitalism, where for example the individual can agree to contracts that go against their own social protections, such as the rhetoric of *freedom to work*. Psychological illness arises from isolation that comes from atomism. Due to such economic mechanization, the political and social outcomes are devastating. As witnessed in many liberal countries, division among civilians with differing or opposing values and views into identity politics is leading to a failure of political life. Populist

nationalism populism and white supremacy has filled the void of populist politics in the West. Such a situation is attributed to the strong belief in autonomous and independent self, which drives people to solidify the fixed sense of self through supposedly creating severe boundaries with others and culminating in the nationalist state (Ward, 2013). We speculate that an outcome of current conditions in the West, could be a social “implosion” of sufficient density into an authoritarian, fascist system where the corpus of people are co-opted by the state and capitalism thereby ending the U.S. Constitution. (Mussolini, 1933)

In principle, in western discourse, human beings are assumed to be rational and self-interested beings or *homo economicus* who are prepared to act justly but who are also limited in their social and altruistic motivations (Mosler, 2011). Human beings are understood as instrumentally-oriented rational beings, who calculate choices of comparable values or profits, and where human interrelationship is pressed into quantified measurement as contracts and money. Human beings are also believed to be motivated by self-interest to achieve material well-being for their own sake by evaluating the benefits and costs of their prospective actions (Essen, 2010). Though social justice has been discussed in the West and there are movements for equality, mainstream discourse emphasizes self-regard as opposed to regard for others and places little value on relational virtues with others that protect the actual living human being as an individual. Additionally, and crucially, nature is seen as a place of commodity for the service of humans. While the autonomous individual self has contributed to enhancing individual liberty and freedom, which culminated in the development of contemporary human rights principles, the *individual self* also shriveled gradually into buffered self-possession or egocentrism (F. Dallmayr, 2020). What this amounts to is that life, the primary liberty, is forgotten as the foundation that requires a reasonable balance between freedom and equality as principles that are realized in actual social outcomes. A disembodied ego might represent the ideology. The self-enclosure based on the strong sense of an independent and fixed self creates the construction of boundaries along “us-versus-them” or “friend-or-foe” lines (F. Dallmayr, 2014). Put differently, the critical problem with an independent and autonomous self is its binary character as fixed entities facing each other in a rigid dualistic or dichotomous self versus self, ego versus community, community versus community, nation versus nation, race versus race (F. Dallmayr, 2014). This condition is not individualism but an aberration and a social pathology. Though deliberative democracy demands human beings to go beyond self-interest to build or identify the common good or common interest, it seems that the individualistic fragmented self remains to be addressed.

Though Buddhism appreciates the value of an autonomous self, it proposes a relational non-self or what indigenists might call a social-self perhaps as *homo hospitabilis* (Hartsell, 2023). In a Buddhist view, what needs to be acknowledged is that the self is basically a conceptual thought construction and yet we are relational in human and animal communities. Though human beings exist as entities, indivisible, they are also inalienable from society and natural rights, hence compassion can be relied upon for restoration. Where human attributes are constructed by our own subjective and intersubjective conceptual thought constructions, our relational

faculty is much deeper than conceptualization (Gardner, 1983). Our attributes projected upon self, or as self, are fluid, contingent and interdependent upon the attributes that we are opposed to since they are conceptual constructions that cannot claim their absolute or independent status (Hershock, 2012). In other words, the relational and interdependent self has no fixed trait of self as far as we know directly or from scholarly literature from millenia.

Buddhist non-self does not deny the existence of self itself or the uniqueness of each person. Rather, the awareness of fundamental interdependent nature of a conceptually constructed self leads to a qualitative transformation of viewing the nature of self. Instead of seeing different selves as independent and fixed entities with firm boundaries, actual realization is to understand the self metaphorically such as the interconnected web of life and then with no fixed status. With the recognition of self as an open and dynamic 'living system' within a larger interdependent and interconnected system, we see that we cannot discriminate ourselves from the actual interrelational web of life without damaging others, ourselves. and ultimately nature as there is an inherent ecology to our existence in human communities (Loy, 1996).<sup>6</sup>

Pertinent to the Buddhist non-fixed self is the correlation between human internal maturity and intersubjective deliberative process. What must be avoided in dialogue is the attachment to any position as absolute. Free and sincere public dialogue requires its participants to be capable of transcending their positional or intellectual confinement (Reardon & Snauwaert, 2015). Deliberation is also protective in that insincere and inaccurate dialogue will be exposed quickly. Political efficacy in democracy, that is, the capacity to engage in the public forum and in critical political action of the day, is dependent upon the cognitive, ethical and self-reflective capacities of citizens coupled with empirical knowledge (Reardon & Snauwaert, 2015). Internally empowered citizens with the recognition of the non-fixed self facilitates perception of a wider scope of the systemic and dynamic interrelationship of diversity of values, and interests. By liberating ourselves from the fixed views of self and recognizing the contingent and fluid nature of values, views, and how the self is framed, we can engage dialogical interaction as an open-ended process to creating new values, adjustments, and visions with those having different or opposing visions and goals. What we describe here, may be the way to move forward and through the numerous challenges and threats of contemporary society in the west, and for the non-west, where conditions might be different and yet the process effective. Practical testing will be necessary.

### **3-2. Public places as open**

Intersubjective deliberation in the public place assumes a central role in deliberative democracy and many today would do well to integrate intercultural philosophy due to the cosmopolitan

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<sup>6</sup> Technoutopians seem to believe that what we describe can be overcome through a technological singularity, however, such is science fiction.

aspect of society in urban centers. However, applying the teaching of emptiness or the absence of fixed structures or essences, Buddhism takes an anti-essentialist attitude towards the social space of any kind – whether it be communal (megasites, gatherings), republic (public state, res publica), monarchy (form of private state) or even global megapolis network. In a Buddhist view, what is important to recognize is that a public place is social-epistemological in nature requiring agreement on conditions derived from the senses and with a particular technics (Hartsell, 2021). In our daily socio-political and economic practical terms, subject and object are interdependent to create practical validity. Without people, public spheres cannot function; and without public spheres, people cannot build and run socio-political and economic lives. Deliberative democracy argues for inclusiveness in public deliberation guided by truth, or verification or accuracy.

The social dynamics of the public space are a reflection of different epistemologies and conceptual thought constructions combined with various moral philosophies and psychology, scientific epistemology, and so forth, which can all be necessary for the public sphere, where the public sphere is an intersubjective place wherein people having different positions come together. In the Digital Age, as mentioned, such a public sphere has also become a matter of augmented reality with the Internet and thus a matter of open reasoning, particularly for a democratic technics (Hartsell, 2021; Mumford, 1964). With the dynamical space, at some point, actual socio-political, economic, and ecological problems have to be addressed and solved not only as external problems but as confrontations either due to different views or perhaps cynically produced by those who try to control the public place, a priori, in order to impose certain values, norms, ideologies, and interests (Bernays & Miller, 2004; Chomsky & Herman, 2014). Herein is a major challenge and apparent weakness in democratic discourse.

The negative or confrontational events in public places can be attributed to certain impositions and then the confrontation of different or opposing values, norms, ideologies, facts, and interests that are all part of the public space dynamics. Deliberative democracy has a better chance of preventing dominance from entering than other systems. At times, this process is denigrated as “messy” by the authoritarian mindset; however, the actual case is one of dynamism. Democratic discourse allows for a society to deal with variations more effectively, if only because of better input of members, wider feedback, and thus better flow of information. When stalemated, the public place can be understood as a clash of opposing values, norms, and visions as if they were fixated and immutable and a more sophisticated deliberative democracy might deal with the situation far more effectively. The latter is where a perspective from Buddhist philosophy could be helpful as well. Rather than various individual aspects such as mindfulness, personal passion, and even meditation, it is the integral view described above from Buddhist philosophy that could enhance deliberative democracy (Kikoler, 2013; Safran, n.d.).

As examined, different or *prima facie* opposing values and interests are interdependent, nondualistic, and ultimately untenable as absolute and independent. Though Buddhism does

not categorically deny peoples' values, any kind of subjectively or intersubjectively constructed values, views, interests brought into the public place cannot ultimately dominate the public space as complete and independent because the dynamism and effectiveness of a society will be undermined. In fact, we assert that the undermining of democratic deliberation today is enabled by an authoritarian technics (Bernays & Miller, 2004; Mumford, 1964). The public place is never to be appropriated or controlled by anyone (F. Dallmayr, 2019). The public place should be enacted as an emptied and open place. Emptiness becomes an infinite potential as generative power producing new values, visions, ideas (F. Dallmayr, 2019). Open public space is a generative and mutual learning process with no end point, which is the recognition of radical openness of the public place. Such is a creative springboard for new possibilities and skillful response and adjustments to reality; therefore, it is antithetical to impose dominance on democratic deliberation, as deliberative democracy is a central part of the antidote to authoritarianism (F. Dallmayr, 2019). A current example of such clear, systemic delusion is the jostling for freedom of speech by corporations (Lovejoy, 2023). Again, instead of a focus on mindfulness, passion, and self-development, our proposal is rooted in Buddhist philosophy as integral for deliberative democracy.

When people are in confrontational or agonistic situations in public places, they will find it difficult to acknowledge the public space as an open and even transformative process. However, from a Buddhist view, what are commonly taken to be immutable, including socio-political institutions, or any other public places, are historically dynamic processes subject to considerable change and eventual partial or complete dissolution (Hershock, 2012). Since socio-political, economic, and cultural processes are basically informed by conceptually constructed values, which are contingent and ultimately unreal as complete, people can try to embody a dynamic process of transformation with no specific end – radical openness in the public space.

Seeing all conceptual things including public space as open to revision is directed to promoting the awareness that our attempts to hold on to specific positions and interests, to fix the public sphere in order to achieve permanent forms of security, is counterproductive (Hershock, 2012). Further, seeing all things as open is to realize the illusion to control the public place and that it should not be instrumentalized by anyone (F. Dallmayr, 2019). It is also a process beyond *in-between* since enacting public spaces that are open entails what makes the interaction between people possible (F. Dallmayr, 2019). The recognition of public space as a realm of non-possession and non-domination empowers people to participate in an open-ended horizon of dialogue for wider, shared endeavors beyond confined self-interest. Finally, concerns about power relationships are addressed due to the open space we describe since a distribution of power can be achieved and more effective, and then supportive for all members.

#### **4 Buddhist view of the dynamics of deliberative democracy**

In the previous section, the relational non-self (emptied self) and public place as an open and generative space with no end-point was introduced as part of a Buddhist contribution to

deliberative democracy. The current section will develop the analysis of how internally enriched citizens and the intersubjective dynamics of deliberative democracy can complement each other to expand the purview of the dynamics of deliberative democracy. Constructive and creative public dialogue requires its participants to embody the capability to transcend their positional confinement. For public dialogue to occur freely and constructively, citizens would do well to develop the capability of going beyond the purview of any form of positional perspective as complete. At the same time, they would not give up analytical integrity. How the practice of reflective self-awareness, compassion, and non-attachment and holistic thinking can contribute to enriching the dynamics of deliberative democracy will be examined.

#### **4-1. Reflective self-awareness**

What is critical to intersubjective dialogue is to manage reactive interaction with others having different or opposing ideas and interests. Constructive understanding through intersubjective dialogue requires two important things - mindfulness of respective historical and cultural differences and the long and patient willingness to listen to and learn from one another without rushing into emotionally reactive judgement (F. Dallmayr, 2014). The practice of reflective self-awareness helps us to control impulsive intersubjective interactions and build constructive intersubjective dynamics. What we describe is similar to the Indigenous Model where people would go on for days in conversation on major issues. Their conditions were far different than those of advanced, technological civilization today, however, basic human concerns and intellectual capability were the same.

Reflective self-awareness is to practice stepping back from the current frame of reference to critically examine the patterns of thought, values, and logic shaping our experience. We become dogmatic when we claim the universality of our own thoughts or values as socially and politically necessary to the point of imposition causing discrimination and violence. Reflective self-awareness involves many things including simple awareness of an object, event, or state, awareness of a perception, thought, feeling, disposition, action, or our habits of doing those things (Mezirow, 1998). The practice of reflective self-awareness helps us to recognize that it can be that variations of our existing beliefs, values, and norms are conditioned by our own socio-political, economic, and cultural environments. Neurological make-up is another of the core attributes, however, it is largely speculative and far outside of our current focus. Honing reflective self-awareness empowers us to sharpen our flexible mind-state with accurate, precise or analytical thinking and to be open to other views, and values, without rushing into judgement. Discernment is necessary. By deepening understanding of the constructed nature of values and norms, while understanding shared concerns that are general and hold merit, for example, ecology was mentioned and through the survival need of clean air, we can be brought back to the common basics in encountering others and explore new visions, goals, and values together. The same commonness can be found in the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic or generally as the need for a new biopolitics (Hartsell et al., 2020). This is what we call true societal innovation.



Mindful engagement (detached engagement?) enlarges attentiveness to broader dimensions of how the mind can work by going beyond fixed habits of thinking and knowing (Hart, 2001). By developing the ability to observe our minds, we come to realize that the contents of reality depend not so much on what happens to us, but on what attitudes, understanding, feelings and reactions we give to those events. Democratic deliberation brings in other viewpoints that can be evaluated for practical use due to accuracy, humanity, and ecology for decision-making and also for what is more commonly seen as individual self-understanding, actualization, and correction of erroneous thought and belief. The openness of intersubjective interaction in the public space, requires our framing to be challenged and transformed by encountering others' viewpoints through a willingness and ability to engage in active listening and understanding (Yeh, 2006). The enhancement of mindful and reflective self-awareness helps us to be open to differences, diversity, and creativity and lead to the central theme of social innovation.

#### **4-2. Compassion**

In a Buddhist view, the principle of compassion is essential in deliberative democracy in promoting constructive intersubjective interaction. Compassion is the exercise of sensitivity to the sufferings of other people and particularly their report of what they themselves need. Further, compassion is to experience deep empathy toward those who are marginalized from society and in other ways become vulnerable. Such a practice or even life-way<sup>7</sup> is to acknowledge shared, common humanity and to enact courage to transcend the dualistic view of human relationships towards a life-way that is interdependent and interconnected. However, as mentioned, transcending the division between self and others does not deny the individuality of an identity; rather, we understand it as the interdependent web of life with no fixed nature (Loy, 1996). Openness ensues.

Another aspect is justice, which means to act with a sense of fairness towards others and to uphold the principle of equality in terms of dignity and rights and to reject all forms of exploitation and oppression as imposed by society, recognized immediately, and attenuated or eliminated if possible. Social and global justice requires the power of imagination and the courage to go beyond the existing patterns of current individuality and various boundaries, within reason, of which we discussed above (Adarkar & Keiser, 2007). Exercising compassion inspires us to acknowledge shared humanity, and feel the suffering of others as our own as beyond contingent boundaries and create the grounds for justice as fairness.

With compassion, we empathize with others' perspectives, fostering deep mutual understanding and shared responsibility and commitment in the democratic process to get our needs met within an assessment of the common good. We become aware that our own well-being and that of others are inseparable and the denial of which would constitute violence

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<sup>7</sup> Compared to lifestyle

(Vaughan, 2002). Understand is thus the awareness of our fundamental interdependence for survival, thriving, and flourishing, despite values, norms, and perspectival differences. As an addition to multiculturalism, multiperspectivalism is suggested.<sup>8</sup> With compassion, democracy is perceived as a social and public paradigm anchored in the love of equality among people and citizens having diverse socio-political, economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds (F. Dallmayr, 2014). Given the current crisis in democracy represented by the rise of extremism and populist nationalism, the systemic practice of openness, compassion, and inclusiveness can be a central part to address the conflicts that are arising. Inclusiveness and relationality mean that citizens need to extend equal respect and empathy to all other participants in the process of deliberative democracy beyond cultural and religious differences (F. Dallmayr, 2014). We recognize that there may be impossible situations or conditions where little can be done at the time, though some version of what we describe in this process can be effective (Hanh, 2003).

Taking an idealistic view on deliberative democracy human beings are embedded in a complex fabric of experience or in a domain of human and ecological inter-being, wherein members of society respect and enact the integral quality of fellow-beings and help each other discover their own potential to make a contribution to dialogue (Hanh, 2003). We need to envision and pave the way for an open public model wherein freedom, empathy, and solidarity beyond boundaries are interlinked and where compassion becomes a foundation; spiritual in the sense we describe here. The practice of compassion inspires citizens to embody social freedom or participation in the social life of a community with a foundation of solidarity in which people are basically sympathetic to each other and help to realize each other's justified needs in an interdependent context through systemic collaboration at the fundamental level (Hanh, 2003).

#### **4-3. Holistic thinking and non-attachment**

In addition to reflective self-awareness and compassion, the practice of holistic thinking is critical to deliberative democracy. In a Buddhist view, holistic thinking means to recognize that *prima facie* opposing ideas and values are not fixed opposites; they are complementary, and assist us with a comprehensive understanding (Max-Neef, 2005). What we intend to acknowledge are the limits of attaching to dualistic thinking in intersubjective interaction. Though dualistic thinking can be powerful, particularly in motivating people such as in a nationalist cause, the fixation on absolutes of right or wrong, good or bad, are detrimental to individual and social well-being (Olafson, 2010). Binary thinking frames humanity into categories with rigid boundaries, and tends to underpin asymmetric and confrontational relations between categorized groups of people. Identity and nationalist politics follow this course of process.

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<sup>8</sup> Personal correspondence with integral psychologist Joseph Dillard.

Holistic thinking is the acknowledgement of the ultimate interminable conflict in any view claiming complete and absolute status. The recognition of the fundamental interdependent relationship of opposing or *prima facie* antithetical views, values, and interests empowers citizens to enact non-attachment or openness. The knowledge of the ultimate unreality of any view, value, or norm as complete, allows citizens to peel away, layer after layer, their fundamentally insubstantial assumption they tend to cling to and to reach a state of unknowing (openness) (Saybrook Graduate School & Tirado, 2008). The state of the recognition of unknowing, rather than a negative state, is liberating as immeasurable and as the aforementioned creative springboard for possibilities for new ideas and visions (F. Dallmayr, 2014).

The transcendence of the attachment to dualistic thought with the recognition of the interdependent nature of any form of opposing or antithetical views and values empowers us to hold multiplex and complementary both/and thinking in approaching challenges we face. Developing holistic thinking is the enhancement of the capacity for synthetic thinking and for appreciating the diversity of values and perspectives as difference is not a static absence of identity but the dynamic presence of conditions for mutual contribution to co-creating something new with no closure (Hershock, 2012). To practice non-positional engagement or non-reliance on all fixed perspectives as complete within themselves, empowers citizens to transcend narrow self-interest and individual perspectives and to work towards the common good. Sharpening holistic thinking faculties with non-attachment would empower citizens to know that it is impossible to draw a complete line that judges who is absolutely right or wrong in the middle of the diversity of values, norms, and interests; and this fosters cooperation, compromise, and the ability and openness to seek solutions that benefit the broader society. With holistic thinking and a non-attached mind-state, citizens enact any form of cooperation and compromise as provisional and improvisational according to different necessities; but at the same time, become open to deconstruction of any form of provisional solution to engage an unending process of adaptation and innovation as an integral pragmatism to meet reality and contingencies.

#### **4-4. Deliberative democracy as a self-transformative process with no closure**

As discussed, the key component for deliberative democracy is the shared public space. This sphere is an open place. It is a place for potentiality in the commonweal – an open-ended process to make room for a different or *not-yet world* without necessary closure (F. Dallmayr, 2019). To participate in such seemingly uncertain and yet open, generative inter-subjective space necessitates the enhancement of the ability of individual citizens to acknowledge and hold multiple perspectives and discourses in mind without attaching to any of them as absolute. In a Buddhist view, such ability can be honed through the practice of reflective self-awareness, a compassionate mind, and a holistic way of thinking. The Buddhist model of internally empowered human beings can create and resonate with the maturity of the intersubjective public sphere.

In a Buddhist view, deliberative democracy is to be understood and enacted as a continuous self-transformative process of intersubjective interaction in public space with no end point. Democracy is a transformative learning and decision-making that requires citizens having different and opposing views, values, or visions to embark on the ongoing transformation in terms of their self-definition and their self-centering to appreciate the demands of otherness (F. R. Dallmayr, 2001). The point of deliberative democracy is not just to reach a bland consensus or uniformity of values, views, or interests. Deliberative democracy is not towards a predetermined product but a continuous process that meets the constant openness towards reality and of all participants to new learning experiences, new boundary explorations, and the committed sharpening of ethical sensibilities capable of fostering the common good that is new to all of them (F. Dallmayr, 2020). Ideally, it would be such micro-changes or even micro-revolutions occurring continually rather than overall revolutions due to systems essentially becoming stuck or fixed and breaking down. Hence the philosophical view from Buddhism can be conceptualized as living structure, integral, and one of radical openness.

The internally empowered, relational nonfixed-self and an open process of public deliberation can contribute to creating an ongoing learning process in which any form of subject for deliberation and participants who deliberate undergo a formative and perhaps transformative experience. What happens in the deliberation is not a mechanical operation whereby fixed inquirers pursue and reach a pre-established goal or interest, but a dynamic process in which people engaged in deliberation themselves are challenged and transformed, leading to the recognition of untapped human potential for what might seem to be infinite creativity in service of collective decision-making (F. Dallmayr, 2010). What emerges in deliberative democracy as transformative process would be philosophical avenues that cannot be confined within the binaries of appropriation and alienation and of total consensus and radical rejection (F. Dallmayr, 2014).

As Ruitenberg argues, what needs to be achieved in democracy is the transformation of antagonistic relations into agonistic ones (Ruitenberg, 2010). While antagonism is an ‘us and them’ relation in which two sides are enemies with no common ground, agonism is an ‘us as them’ relation in which those having different or opposing views and values recognize the mutual legitimacy though acknowledging that there may be no rational or apparent immediate solution to their problems (Buber, 2013). Disagreement must be fostered as a democratic capacity (Buber, 2013). However, in a Buddhist view, even agonistic relations need to be critiqued and transcended as they are confined to dualistic thought, with which citizens cannot fully embody *deliberative democracy as a mutually transformative process*. As long as citizens are within the purview of an agonistic framework (agonistic echo-chambers), they cannot be fully open to new possibilities, paradigms, and horizons of thought and therefore not fully open to others and humanity.

Though building agonistic relations at least to acknowledge the legitimacy of the other is important, as long as people stay in the agonistic position, they would fall into confinement within the dichotomous way of thinking and clinging to their own pre-established personal views, values, and interests. It could be that the issue of profound disagreement is realized after arguments and explanations have been exhausted and begun to be repeated. In any case, resolving the predicament refers to an engagement in an infinite sort of play in which the point is not necessarily winning a particular small argument, but enhancing the quality of ongoing experience for all participants to realize their potential for creativity and commonality to solve problems, to meet challenges, and to maintain society (Hershock, 2012). To embody such infinite play entails self-critique and transcendence of agonism and antagonism. In other words, deliberative democracy as a transformative process beyond but including agonistic relations means to enact democratic unity in diversity or *diversity as unity* different than fragmentation. For such a view of democratic process, the requirements are: to acknowledge shared humanity and the inherent dignity of all people; to respect differences or diversity of values, norms, and views; and engage mutual learning and self-transformation in terms of expanding the purview of the way of thinking and knowing.

A Buddhist view on deliberative democracy can be a political improvisation that is a destination-less practice worked out from the immediate, not toward anticipated or pre-determined ends but a situationally responsive and unknown in order to articulate newly shared aims and visions that can be developed through self-transformation with no closure. Therefore, we suggest call the addition as an integral pragmatism. Valuing diversity means valuing creativity in each, which implies relational transformation in the direction of unprecedented and yet meaningful and virtuosic capacities for mutually appreciative coordination (Hershock, 2012). Though going beyond agonistic relations is not easy, enacting deliberative democracy as a transformative process founded upon the relational self, the open public place with no closure, and practice of multiple abilities of mind including reflective self-awareness, compassion, non-attachment and holistic thinking, would allow citizens having different and opposing views and values, to experience the continuous co-creation of provisional solutions to any subjects deliberated upon. Finally, the constant co-production and deconstruction of solutions according to distinct conditions would eventually empower people to know, and trust, that engagement in an infinite relational transformation is one of the highest virtues of the political enterprise.

## Conclusion

This research has developed a critical appraisal of deliberative democracy from a Buddhist philosophical perspective. It may be that Buddhism can make a valuable contribution to the epistemological, ontological, and ethical foundations for deliberative democracy. Normally, in deliberative democracy, rationalism and the autonomous concept of self and society is placed

at the center of deliberation. However, multiple epistemologies including reflective self-awareness and holistic thinking by penetrating into an insight into different and opposing forms of views and values can enhance the dynamics of deliberative democracy. The recognition of the merits of enacting multiple epistemologies and limits of dualistic thinking allows us to make a perspectival shift from dualistic thought processes to either consensus or radical disagreement towards more nuanced understanding of problem solving that embraces generative and transformative processes.

The relational and open self that is not constrained by attachment to any view or value as complete will see the open nature of the public place as empowering us to make the space a deliberative, intersubjective interaction as a more creative and innovative process. An additional ethical foundation can be found in Buddhist compassion that acknowledges the equal humanity and dignity of all human beings and interdependent relations between those having different or opposing views, values, or norms. Compassion, as the ethical foundation for deliberative democracy underpins equal opportunity for knowledge creation in the open and dialogical public place. As an epistemological, ontological, and ethical contributor to deliberative democracy, Buddhist philosophical speculation and exploration can enrich the theory and practice of deliberative democracy that is understood as an inclusive and transformative process.

Such speculation is of a philosophical nature and might not make a practical contribution in the short term, however, complementing western deliberative democracy from a Buddhist philosophical perspective will help those who are interested in honing the quality and effectiveness of participation in democracy – whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist – to expand the purview of how people approach deliberative democracy. At first, it might sound odd to non-Buddhists, especially, those in the West, to unfold a critical appraisal of liberal democracy and suggestion for deliberative democracy in such a way, though many countries beyond the West and the non-West boundaries are employing democratic process and find ancient correspondence as well. We even go so far to say that democratic process is a more natural social process than other political processes of imposition. As most of the world's population now lives in cities, we think the *intercultural philosophical moment* might benefit from a Buddhist perspective in which different philosophies and cultures can learn from each other to ensure survival and enrich society by learning Buddhist philosophical insight into human internal aspects and experimentation in practical settings towards a more humane, just, equitable, and ecologically-oriented world.

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