Article

Ideal and Non-ideal Deliberation: The Problem of Equivocation

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Abstract

I distinguish between ideal and non-ideal deliberation. I outline the relevance of both ideal and non-ideal theorising to show their respective roles and importance. This helps me to demonstrate that neither of them should be downplayed, confused with the other, or substituted. Although it appears more attractive to be an idealist than a non-idealist in a theoretical debate on social systems, I show that such a perception is practically inadequate. I then argue that when we deliberate, we presuppose either ideal or non-ideal deliberation. I demonstrate that it is consistent to stick to one deliberative presupposition in the same context, and I show that shifting from one deliberative presupposition to another in the same argument or context, is equivocation. I demonstrate how this kind of equivocation confuses and derails the debate. As a case study, I focus on the debate about consensual democracy in Africa. I seek in this essay to contribute lessons regarding the relationship between ideal and non-ideal theorising to the global project of deliberative democracy.

Keywords: deliberation; consensus; political philosophy; deliberative democracy; consensus democracy

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Introduction

I argue that there is such a thing as ideal and non-ideal deliberation. I outline features one would expect in ideal deliberation (respect, honesty, and willingness to reach agreements) and argue that deliberation in the real world could be evaluated according to the extent it exhibits these features. The greatest challenge with these features (especially with honesty) is that they are moral in nature, and the decision to exhibit them is a second-order decision that participants in a deliberation would need to make. Deliberative democracy has not yet developed a moral dimension, but this is not my focus here. What I seek to show in this paper is that when we discuss deliberation, we presuppose either ideal or non-ideal deliberation, depending on the features we attribute to deliberation. I show that the non-explicit nature of our deliberative presuppositions produces a number of problems that derail debates about deliberation. I outline the problems—downplaying the non-ideal, treating the ideal as if it has become the real, and, most of all, equivocating between the ideal and the non-ideal. I also outline the consequences of these problematic approaches, and I use the debate on consensus democracy in Africa as a case study.

I have divided this essay into seven sections. In section one, I distinguish between ideal and non-ideal deliberation and explain that we presuppose either of these when we deliberate on deliberation. I explain that ideal deliberation is one in which participants have made a second-order decision to be morally forthright in being respectful, honest and willing to reach agreements. The moral nature of this decision is a challenge to deliberative democracy. However, in spite of this challenge, the ideals are valuable because pursuing them could cause positive changes in society, even though they (ideals) may not necessarily be achieved.

In section two, I argue that ideals are not very fact sensitive, and, therefore, offer little practical guidance on how to achieve them (ideals). To obtain the sorts of information necessary for beginning a journey toward ideals, we need non-ideal theories, which give us information about the real-world obstacles to achieving ideals. Armed with such information, we design social institutions to guide human behaviour toward achieving ideals by, for instance, rewarding compliance and discouraging non-compliance. For this reason, idealists ultimately need to come to terms with the criticisms of non-idealists (or realists). The idealists and non-idealists need to understand that their positions are not diametrically opposed, but complementary in the project of designing and pursuing ideals. Idealists need to understand that non-idealists have concerns that should be tackled if ideals are to be pursued, and non-idealists need to understand that ideals are not necessarily meant to be perfectly achieved, but serve to cause change of some degree or the other in the real world, in the direction of the ideal. I apply this analysis to the debate about consensual democracy in Africa and show how the proponents of consensual democracy are idealists, while the critics are non-idealists. I suggest that the relationship between the idealist and non-idealist consensus scholars will be more productive if they begin to understand the two camps as sharing a complementary

relationship. In particular, the realisation that Kwasi Wiredu's proposal for consensual democracy need not necessarily be achieved according to his exact specifications, could galvanise the debate or, at least, save it from immobility.

My discussions in sections one and two prepare me for the point I wish to make in section three: when we discuss deliberation, we presuppose either ideal or non-ideal deliberation. A discussion about deliberation featuring qualities such as respect, honesty, willingness to agreement, presupposes ideal deliberation, whereas a discussion about deliberation featuring power politics, domination, lack of honesty, and difficulty in reaching consensus presupposes non-ideal deliberation. The problem has been that these presuppositions are not made explicit, and two or more people discussing deliberation based on different presuppositions would continue to be at loggerheads unless they understand they are working with differences in presupposition and, in addition, understand that the different levels in the quality of deliberation being presupposed, are supposed to complement each other in the project of designing and pursuing ideal deliberation. I argue that while those who presuppose deliberation as an ideal activity need to listen to the concerns of those who presuppose non-ideal deliberation, those presupposing non-ideal deliberation need to be helpful rather than dismissive of ideal deliberation.

In section four I argue that it is equivocation for the same debate participant to shift from one deliberative presupposition to another within the same context in order to score political points. For a case study, I focus on Bernard Matolino's rejection of my argument that domination exists in deliberation, and Matolino's own argument that domination exists in deliberation in his (Matolino's) criticism of Kwasi Wiredu.

In section five I outline another equivocation: Matolino's rejection of my argument that people's values and interests play roles in deliberation, and Matolino's own argument that people's values and interests play roles in deliberation, when he criticises Wiredu's consensus proposal on the same issues.

In section six, I explain why equivocation is unhelpful to a debate. I point out that deliberating on deliberation—without explicit awareness of our deliberative presuppositions—generates a number of problems. One of them is to be unduly attracted to ideal theory and to adopt a disposition of disapproval toward non-ideal theory. Even more detrimental would be to deny or undermine non-ideal theory. I explain that denying non-ideal theory can involve treating ideal theory as if it has become the real world: indeed, substituting the ideal for the non-ideal. Most detrimental of all is to equivocate between ideal and non-ideal conceptions of deliberation in the same debate, argument or context.

The article concludes with a discussion on the implications of equivocating the roles of the ideal and the non-ideal.

Distinguishing between Ideal and Non-ideal Deliberation

I distinguish between ideal and non-ideal deliberation. Ideal deliberation is one whose participants are: 1) respectful to the views of others; 2) sincere or honest in their intentions; and 3) willing to reach agreements and even consensus. Deliberation in the real world could be evaluated according to how many of these features it exhibits, and non-ideal deliberation would be one where one, two or all three of these features are in short supply. Feature 1 (respect) is the most popular expectation for good deliberation (see Gutman and Thompson 1990, 76–78; Steenbergen et al. 2003; Steiner et al. 2004). Participants in deliberation are required to show respect for both the arguments of other participants and for other participants as persons. However, it would be misleading to think that all expressions of respect are expressions of honesty. Veteran politicians and advanced criminals are proficient in using a façade of respect to subtly advance the most dishonest political or personal schemes. It does not get better with business magnates. In general, powerful people rarely show disrespect, but powerful people are frequently dishonest. Respect is crucial for gaining power (whatever kind of power), but honesty is not. Indeed, there is such a thing as selective dishonesty (being truthful in many non-significant matters in order to give an appearance of overall truthfulness, but being subtly dishonest in really crucial matters). There is, therefore, such a thing as respectful but subtly dishonest deliberation. And it is, in my view and life experience, the greatest threat to equity and justice within and outside deliberation.

Honesty is a moral decision, and moral decisions require moral agents. In the context of deliberation, decisions to be honest are second-order decisions to pay more allegiance to ordinary decisions that will help the wider society, than to decisions whose epistemic quality is diluted by the influence of personal interests. Respect and agreement reaching are also moral decisions, but these kinds of moral decisions are easier to make because they are capable of serving strategic selfish goals. A group that desires to collude can deliberate respectfully about the collusion, and reach consensus decisions to collude. Such a group is being dishonest. The importance of feature 2 (honesty) to deliberation makes deliberative democracy a moral project. But morality has not really been seen as a responsibility of research on deliberation, in large part because the only thing researchers could tell deliberative participants is, “please be moral.” Deliberative theorists may map out the requirements of ideal deliberation and some deliberative participants choose freely not to follow those requirements. The challenge of the moral dimension of deliberation to the goals of deliberation is not a feature that deliberative theorists would be happy about, because people enjoy autonomy in reaching their moral decisions, and we can only implore but not compel people to be morally upright. Theorising has so far shown significant powerlessness in improving deliberative morality. We may design institutions that bring people together to deliberate toward reaching agreements. This is like taking a horse to a stream. We may make all kinds of policies encouraging participants to be honest and willing to reach agreements in the interest of the common good. This is like lobbying the horse to drink from the stream,

but getting participants in deliberation to be honest faces the same challenge as getting the horse to drink water.

This pessimistic note about the challenge of morality is not to discourage studies and research in deliberation. After all, we can formulate a range of policies attaching rewards for sincerity and punishment for insincerity, and people take rewards and punishments seriously. The reason for the pessimistic note is to underscore the extent of the chasm still existing between ideal and real-world deliberation. Some real-world deliberations come close to ideal deliberation. However, the problem in the world today is that much of real-world deliberation is not ideal deliberation. If I should conjecture which feature of ideal deliberation is in the shortest supply, I would suggest that it is honesty, rather than respect. This is because respect is mostly a problem in times of conflict, but dishonesty thrives in peaceful, respectful and congenial deliberation.

Despite the difficulty of attaining ideal deliberation in many real-world deliberative scenarios, ideal deliberation still has its value. The value of ideal deliberation is that it shows how problematic real-world deliberation is, and thereby, shows how long our journey is to ideal deliberation. This kind of awareness is psychologically helpful, even to those who are insincere in deliberation. Moral wrongdoing is much more under some control in the presence of ideals compared to their absence. The journey of deliberative democracy is, therefore, a journey toward ideal deliberation *en masse.*

Designing Social Institutions to Pursue Deliberative Ideals

I have remarked that ideals derive their value from showing us just how much "behind" we are in the real world. But ideals offer little *practical* guidance, for which we need to turn to non-ideal theories. Also, ideals do not necessarily have to be achieved in the strict sense, but their value is to bring some degree of improvement on the non-ideal. To begin a journey to the ideal, however, we must take stock of all the weaknesses in the non-ideal, so we begin to muse about how to deal with them (weaknesses) one after the other. To do this, we design social institutions that help us to advance the non-ideal world toward the ideal. In every field of social and political theory, there are the idealists and the realists. Proponents of one ideal or the other sooner or later need to come to terms with the criticisms of realists. The problem with most of these debates is that idealists and realists do not understand that their positions are not diametrically opposed, and they should actually work together to help improve society toward the ideal. Idealists need to understand that realists have valid concerns about the prospects of achieving ideal outcomes, whereas realists need to understand that ideals can serve as a touchstone and agent for positive change, even if such change is relatively limited in nature.

In Africa, we have the debate about fashioning a democracy by consensus inspired by the consensus political systems of some traditional African societies. The context of this debate is the perceived adversarial and exclusionary nature of majoritarian democracy. Proponents of a consensual sort of democracy in African states (such as Kwasi Wiredu,

Edward Wamala, and Joe Teffo) argue that modern African states can do what traditional societies did in reaching decisions by consensus (Wamala 2004; Wiredu 1996; Teffo 2004). It is natural for proponents of an idea to be idealists: they need to be, since they are in fact proposing an ideal. They may receive responses from other idealists and from realists. Naturally, the idealists would support Wiredu's proposal of democracy by consensus, and the realists would point out obstacles to the practical success of a democracy in which consensus decisions are supposed to be reached. Critics such as Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (1997; 2000), I (Ani 2014a; 2014b; 2018a; 2018b; 2019), Ademola Kazeem Fayemi (2010), and Kibujjo Kalumba (2015) are realists. Eze (2000) makes three points (among others). First, he doubts that Wiredu's proposed consensus could work seamlessly without inequalities among deliberative participants. Second, Eze argues that human interests are not as similar or identical as Wiredu presented. Eze's third argument is that moments of difference are as important to democracy as moments of consensus. Fayemi (2010) has argued that operationalising consensus democracy could undermine human rights. I (Ani 2014b) have argued that consensus decisions could aim for decisions of inclusive value at the expense of the epistemic value of the decisions. I (Ani 2014b) have also demonstrated, with examples, three kinds of social conformity that a consensus task-order may induce: conformity to dominant players; to the majority; and to group-centrism. To counter these social conformities, I have proposed the role of a devil's advocate in deliberation, to counter the mistaken assumptions in majority opinions. In response to Wiredu's suggestion that we should agree in actions without necessarily agreeing in notions, I (Ani 2014a) have argued that interests and values play stronger roles in deliberation than Wiredu may have thought. Kalumba (2015) has pointed out that the unanimity requirement is too high a moral requirement.

Of these critics, I (Ani 2014a) have suggested techniques for improving non-ideal deliberation (operationalising the devil's advocate). These suggestions were meant to be constructive, since I noticed that although both idealists and realists have been insightful in pointing out the ideals and the real-world problems, the relationship between the idealists and the realists has not been broadly harnessed for more productive research. This productive harnessing, however, is not my primary focus in this paper. I consider it more urgent to deal with the problem of equivocating between the ideal and the non-ideal, especially when the equivocation can be attributed to the same scholar. I am particularly concerned about the kind of equivocation that introduces confusion into the debate, reducing productivity and future prospects. But let me first deal with my introductory remarks.

Wiredu (2011, 1061–1062) proposes a democracy without parties in which people "put their heads together" for the good of society. This is clearly idealistic, as it presupposes the "people" putting their heads together have only the interests of the wider society at heart. Considering the level of greed exhibited by today's politicians, Wiredu's suggestion requires a moral revolution to be practicable. Such a proposal is, therefore, a currently impracticable ideal. But even if we cannot strictly achieve an ideal, striving

toward an ideal could by itself bring about certain desirable changes in society. In the course of striving to make some reality of Wiredu's proposal, we are more likely to end up transforming the constitution of an African country into a coalition multiparty democracy rather than a polity without political parties in which the unelected few rule by meeting and taking consensual decisions. The former would be a balance of consensus and accountability, the latter would be achieving consensus at the cost of institutionalised accountability. The reason I think that operationalising Wiredu's proposal would end up in coalition democracy is that abrogating parties in the absence of a moral revolution would be to deliver a polity into the hands of an unelected group consisting of members who are likely to be vulnerable to the present moral ills of our societies (chiefly greed, selfishness). As I have argued, practising consensus democracy according to Wiredu's specifications requires a moral revolution. Until such a revolution, we can only run a system hedged with checks here and there. I am by these remarks not evaluating Wiredu's proposal, I am only seeking to establish that his proposal is clearly idealistic.

Deliberating by Presupposing Ideal or Non-ideal Deliberation

From the foregoing, it is clear that discussing ideal deliberation is not the same as discussing "real-world" or non-ideal deliberation. Usually, in a discussion about deliberation, some participants may be discussing deliberation based on ideal deliberation, while others may be discussing it based on non-ideal deliberation. Those discussing deliberation based on ideal deliberation would inevitably be discussing deliberation as a morally upright activity in which participants are sincere, respectful, and disposed to common agreements. Those discussing deliberation on a presupposition of non-ideal deliberation would be discussing deliberation according to the features it exhibits today in our societies. Such features include power politics, the use of dishonest tricks, and the inability to reach common agreements. While those discussing deliberation with a presupposition of ideal deliberation are enthralled by the notion of a perfect deliberation (akin to Plato's world of Forms), those discussing deliberation with a presupposition of non-ideal deliberation are concerned about the problems bedevilling deliberation in the real world. The two categories of discussants are not employing the same terms of reference in their deliberation on deliberation.

I therefore submit that when we deliberate about deliberation, we presuppose either ideal or non-ideal deliberation, depending on the features (or their lack) that we attribute to deliberation. I would call this *deliberative presupposition*. If a person discusses deliberation that features respect, honesty and consensual consciousness, such a person presupposes ideal deliberation, and a person discussing deliberation lacking in any of these features presupposes non-ideal deliberation. The role of deliberative presupposition in deliberating about deliberation is a yawning gap in the literature.

Although we presuppose either ideal or non-ideal deliberation, we do not *explicitly* specify this presupposition in our discussions about deliberation. The unspoken nature of this presupposition is problematic if, for instance, two participants in a debate

regarding deliberation are contributing to the debate based on different deliberative presuppositions. Assuming that in a deliberation on deliberation, participant A argues that deliberation has the capacity to resolve disputes and produce a lot of consensus agreements—it means she presupposes ideal deliberation. If participant B responds by pointing out that deliberation does not have such a high capacity to resolve dispute, and that deliberation only benefits the dominant players and undermines the freedom of less powerful participants, then B presupposes non-ideal deliberation. Since A presupposes ideal deliberation (or since the sights of A are fixed on ideal deliberation), she would deem B to be unnecessarily pessimistic about deliberation, and she would not be very patient with B's objections. In turn, B would not be impressed with what she sees as A's unrealistic optimism about deliberation. The reason for this disagreement is that the deliberative presuppositions of A and B are producing these difficulties from behind the scenes undetected.

Meanwhile, the assumption in such a debate may be that the two participants are discussing the same type of deliberation. Due to this erroneous assumption, the disagreement about what deliberation can or cannot do, may remain intractable. In such cases, a way forward appears only if it is first clarified that the types of deliberation presupposed are not the same, and second that both the ideal and the non-ideal are useful in discussing each other. Earlier, I have argued that although the purpose of discussing ideal deliberation is to improve real deliberation, ideal theorists would need to show some respect to the concerns of realists, because citing ideal deliberation is of no practical value if we ignore the problems of real deliberation. Instead of A dismissing the concerns of B, it is more productive of A to ask B (and other participants if any) what we can do to reduce the power politics, inequality, division in deliberation, and any other problems with deliberation that B has cited. B also has some issues to consider regarding her approach. I contend that the rationale for B's citation of the problems of non-ideal deliberation should not be to dismiss ideal deliberation, but to stimulate discussions and research about how to minimise the real-world problems. Citing problems with deliberation is appropriate, but advancing conclusions such as "good deliberation is impossible" is unduly pessimistic.[1]

Equivocating between Deliberative Presuppositions

Now I can proceed with what really concerns me in this essay. It is okay for A to enunciate the good qualities of deliberation because she has ideal deliberation in mind, and it is okay for B to express worries about the real chances of these good qualities because she has non-ideal conditions in mind. But imagine that A tries to belittle B for

1 Ideal deliberation is actually impossible. All deliberation is measured according to how close it approximates to ideal deliberation. If a realist says: "Ideal deliberation is impossible" she is correct (and I have made the same argument). If a deliberation is close enough to the ideal, we can say the deliberation was fairly good. So, I am using "good" in the sense that we can say a deliberation was good, even though it was not exactly ideal deliberation.

being "unpatriotic" in order to get B to abandon her worries about problems with deliberation. This amounts to using nationalistic sentiments or moral high-handedness to stifle the contribution of B. This approach undermines the ability of the debate about deliberation to yield results that will improve deliberation. I will argue in due course that Bernard Matolino, Helen Lauer, and Martin Ajei favour this approach.

Let us keep in mind that when A chides B for citing certain undesirable features of sub-optimal deliberation, A is doing so from the platform of ideal deliberation. But let us assume that when someone else (say, C) is proposing a quality of ideal deliberation, A decides to criticise the proposal from the standpoint of non-ideal deliberation. So, in one instance, A defends some qualities of ideal deliberation because A is trying to put down a critic, and in another instance, A denies the qualities of good deliberation because A wishes to do the criticising. To put down a critic, A presupposes ideal deliberation, but to criticise a proposal, A changes his deliberative presupposition to the non-ideal. This means that A equivocates between two deliberative presuppositions. If this equivocation occurs *in the same context*, then it is a trick. I show that Matolino adopts this approach to the debate about consensual deliberation in Africa. At this point, I need to clarify that I am writing this essay to weed the debate of these kinds of tricks, explain what the relationship between the ideal and the non-ideal should be, and pave the way forward for more productive engagement.

Equivocating on the Problem of Domination in Deliberation

In this section I am exposing two tricks: A presenting B in a debate as being unpatriotic simply because of B's position (including accusing B of a position more extreme than her true position), and A turning around to subtly appropriate the same position she has accused B of.

Kwasi Wiredu proposes a democracy by consensus, inspired by the consensus political system of the Akan of Africa, as an alternative to the majoritarian multiparty democracy many African countries inherited from their colonial masters. Wiredu (2011, 1059–1060) argues that the imported system of politics is adversarial, aggressive, divisive and not suitable for the ethnic configuration in Africa. Wiredu notes that the relationship between ruling and opposition political parties is usually unhealthy, and we need to take a refreshing look at the consensual systems of democracy practised by many traditional African societies. Wiredu uses the traditional political system of his people, the Ashanti, as a case study. He narrates that the Ashanti use consensus in their decision making at all levels of their traditional government. Wiredu then proceeds to describe Ashanti deliberation in a manner that presupposes ideal deliberation. He admits that the king of the Ashanti has a lot of religious authority, because the king is seen as a link between the living and the departed ancestors (Wiredu 1996, 185). Wiredu argues that this gives the king the status of a constitutional monarch (by which Wiredu seems to have meant an unelected ruler). However, Wiredu argues that unlike a constitutional monarch, the Ashanti king does not rely on any supposed divine inspiration, but only on the intrinsic persuasiveness of his ideas during deliberation with members of his royal council

(Wiredu 1996, 185). This suggests that the king does not seek to dominate during his council meetings. Wiredu's description presents Ashanti royal deliberation as a rationalistic exercise devoid of power play.

Another idea Wiredu deploys in support of consensual democracy is that such a democracy provides a better representation of people's interests. Wiredu distinguishes between formal and substantive representation. He complains that majority voting:

> … deprives the minority of the right of representation in the decision in question. Two concepts of representation are involved in these considerations. There is the representation of a given constituency in council, and there is the representation of the will of a representative in the making of a given decision. Let us call the first formal and the second substantive representation. It is obvious, then, that you can have formal representation without its substantive correlate. Yet the formal is desired for the sake of the substantive. (Wiredu 1996, 186)

If we can have both formal and substantive representation, it means we have "maximal" representation. Wiredu proposes consensus as a better way of ensuring substantive representation. This means that Wiredu presents consensus as a better system of decision making in regards to maximal representation. Before I proceed to Wiredu's critics, it is pertinent to remark that in arguing that consensus ensures a representation of the will of the minority, Wiredu presupposes consensus *in an ideal deliberation*. A non-ideal consensus may be a product of the will of the majority or the most powerful, particularly when the minority or less powerful have little practical choice than to go with the will of their greater-numbered or more powerful counterparts. There is no guarantee that consensus *in practice* will ensure the representation of everyone's will in a consensus decision. For this reason, we can see Wiredu as presupposing ideal deliberation in his proposal.

Let me now begin my outlining of equivocation. Responding to Wiredu, I have argued that the king's religious authority plays its own role during deliberation, independently of the king's choice (Ani 2014b, 349), and I have also pointed to the presence of domination in present-day deliberation. I have cited studies of American jury deliberations, which show that jury members with higher education, status and income talk more and are more likely to be seen as accurate (Sanders 1997, 11, cited in Ani 2014b, 350). So, while Wiredu presents deliberation as an ideal event, in which participants contribute purely logical ideas and do not seek to dominate one another, I have cited non-ideal deliberation in which some participants tend to dominate others.

Bernard Matolino has written a book in which he evaluates Wiredu's consensus proposal on two issues. His first point of evaluation is whether the interests of participants in a consensual deliberation will be represented in a consensus dispensation. His second point of evaluation is whether a consensus dispensation could protect individual freedom. Regarding his first point of evaluation, Matolino (2018, 113) takes the position that consensus will maximally represent people's interests. However, this

presupposes the absence of domination and, therefore, presupposes consensus in an ideal deliberation. I have discussed domination in deliberation (Ani 2014b). To counter the threat of domination, Matolino has responded to my work on domination by affirming Wiredu's arguments that participants in a deliberation do not dominate other participants (Matolino 2018, 107–112). Matolino agrees with me that some participants would be more persuasive, more rational, and more powerful than others. He writes: "Some individuals are more persuasive, more perceptive and more logical than others. Individuals, who have an intellectual endowment both naturally or by virtue of their education, are more likely to be listened to and believed" (Matolino 2018, 111). But Matolino argues that these dominant participants *will not* use their power to their advantage. He writes: "If knowledge is communally owned and is put to use for the sake of the benefit of all members of the community, there is *no reason* for anyone to choose to dominate others through manipulation of that knowledge" (Matolino 2018, 111) [own emphasis]. Notice that Matolino argues that dominant participants have (at the pain of repetition) "no reason" to dominate others. First, the idea that knowledge is communally owned, a condition for which Matolino says dominant participants will not dominate deliberation, is only in an ideal world. Second, whether knowledge is communally owned or not, the very idea that dominant participants in deliberation will not dominate presupposes ideal deliberation. Even were knowledge regarded as communally owned, as it was in the Soviet Union and still is in China, dominant participants would still need to dominate as they are still doing in those parts of the world. Indeed, the kind of deliberation Matolino presupposes is so ideal that it hardly occurs in the real world. Matolino marshals three reasons for his position. According to him, knowledge is communally owned (Matolino 2018, 112); experts in deliberation (those with superior knowledge) are themselves not exempt from interrogation (2018, 111); and experts in a deliberation will realise they need the expertise of other people in the future and they will also have the opportunity to examine others' expertise. But these reasons come across as mere rhetoric. As I mentioned, even if knowledge is communally owned, it does not prevent dominant participants in a deliberation from dominating; and experts would dominate by virtue of their superior knowledge of a subject matter—this is not just a matter of their choice. Nevertheless, it is not my primary objective to evaluate Matolino's reasons. I only seek to show that when Matolino wishes to defend Wiredu's proposal from my criticism, Matolino presupposes ideal deliberation; but when Matolino wishes to criticise Wiredu's proposal, he switches to a presupposition of non-ideal deliberation. I have just shown an instance where he defends Wiredu's proposal against my objections by defending Wiredu's presupposition of ideal deliberation.

Immediately after disagreeing with me, Matolino proceeds to evaluate Wiredu's consensual democracy in terms of its ability to protect individual freedom. Matolino notes that Wiredu's consensus depends on a communal ethos to work effectively (Matolino 2018: 120), and such kind of ethos undermines individual freedom. He writes:

> Wiredu conceives of African communities as radical formations. This sort of communitarian view emphasises the importance of the community over the individual. The individual's reality or proclivity necessarily has to be tailored, both metaphysically and politically, to satisfy the community's interests. Within this conception, if we go back to our question of individual freedom, it is easy to see that this system does not prioritise that type of freedom. (Matolino 2018, 119)

The summary of this evaluation is Matolino's charge that Wiredu's consensual democracy will undermine individual freedom. One notices at this point that Matolino has exchanged deliberative presuppositions: he has shifted from presupposing ideal deliberation to presupposing non-ideal deliberation. It is inconsistent for Matolino to argue (in his disagreement with me) that dominant participants will not dominate others in deliberation, and argue (in his evaluation of Wiredu) that individual interests will be undermined. The reason I say it is inconsistent is that if, as Matolino argues against me, dominant participants will not dominate others, individual interests will not be undermined. If, as Matolino argues against Wiredu, consensual democracy undermines individual interests, it means there is domination of some sort. But this is at the surface level. It is equivocation to presume ideal deliberation when disagreeing with me and, in the same breath, presume non-ideal deliberation in the movement from me to Wiredu. This amounts to shifting from one deliberative presupposition to another *in the same context* without indicating the shift.

The context in which Matolino commits this error is that in which he examines Wiredu's consensual democracy for its ability to secure maximal representation, and second, for its ability to protect individual freedom. Matolino argues that there will be no domination in consensual democracy, and hence, people's interests will be maximally represented. It is in this context that Matolino cites and disagrees with me about domination in deliberation. Matolino moves on to argue that although consensual democracy secures maximal representation, it does not secure individual freedom. A simple question exposes the contradiction: how could consensus deliberation undermine individual freedom and at the same time secure maximal representation? This contradiction unveils the capacity of equivocation to confuse arguments. If deliberation is sincere, honest, and devoid of politics (by which I mean ideal deliberation), *both* maximal representation and individual freedom will be respected. But the contrary holds for a deliberation of insincerity and power politics (non-ideal deliberation). What is, therefore, appropriate, is to be consistent in deliberative presupposition within the context of an argument: either one is consistent in presupposing ideal deliberation or consistent in presupposing the non-ideal in the same context.

Equivocation regarding the Role of Value in Deliberation

In his proposal for consensual democracy, Wiredu has recommended a particular deliberative technique to facilitate deliberation toward consensus decisions, especially in the context of disagreement. The recommendation is that we could agree to a particular action without agreeing on our values or notions. He writes: "… where there

is a will to consensus, dialogue can lead to a willing suspension of disagreement, making possible agreed actions without necessarily agreed notions" (Wiredu 1996, 183).

In response, I have admitted that this action-centred and value-sidestepping instrument is "an effective component of a pluralist social and political order" (Ani 2014a, 318). But I also argue that there are issues where such a value-sidestepping instrument cannot work: "… a few issues can be so value-laden that it is impossible to keep *value* out of a group decision, and the only way to be value-neutral is to relinquish taking a group decision" (Ani 2014a, 313).

For these kinds of issues, I have cited an example in which the head of a department in a certain African university called a meeting in which he asked faculty members to consider whether the department should hire a certain graduate student as a teaching assistant. The candidate in question was a graduate student sent to an American university for further studies, and the American university provided evidence to the African university that the student had misappropriated scholarship funds given to him, to the extent that he was unable to pay crucial debts (Ani 2014a, 314). What the student failed to pay was so little compared to the totality of what he was given, that it was difficult for anyone not to feel disappointed and suspicious. The head of the department (subsequently the head) opined that he did not support recommending the candidate for the post of teaching assistant because the candidate had not shown a good moral profile. But some other faculty members disagreed and argued that the candidate was a young man, that no one knew what had happened to him, and that it should not be a strong case for denying him a position for which he had been preparing since his undergraduate studentship. Some other faculty members supported the head, arguing that employing the candidate meant making him a potential head of the university, with potential consequences.

This disagreement was eventually resolved by a suggestion that the department would recommend the candidate only if the candidate repaired his dented image at the university level. But since this meant convincing university officers that he was not as bad as they thought he might be, without the support of the department, I noted that such a task was difficult, especially as it had emerged that the candidate had even bought a car within the same period. I noted that the decision was in fact not a substantive decision on the candidate's employment: the decision was in reality a way of pushing away a decision to recommend or not recommend the candidate for employment, since only the department could make such a recommendation. I then traced the value map of this deliberation that made a substantive decision impossible, and my first consideration was ideology: conservatives who are more interested in the wellbeing of society than the wellbeing of individuals would see no reason why this candidate should be given a second opportunity to let society down (Ani 2014a, 314). Neo-liberals, who value individual over societal wellbeing, would be shocked that an individual's life prospect was so summarily sacrificed for societal wellbeing. Along religious lines, Christians would be disposed to giving the candidate a second chance, since biblical figures such

as David and St Paul did worse things and repented to be better and great people. But a Kantian deontologist would be shocked at such a consideration because an offense is not being met with appropriate punishment. A utilitarian would agree with a deontologist for a different reason: the wellbeing of the greatest number is more important than the wellbeing of a single person, especially considering such a person could become a vice chancellor.

I have observed that the final decision of the department was in fact "a relinquishing of this 'value struggle' by the department …" (Ani 2014a, 315). I also argued that apart from ideologies, desires also played roles, often in opposition to ideology. For example, most faculty members may have taken positions not simply based on their ideologies but also on their personal relationships with the candidate. Some may have loved to continue seeing him around, often in spite of their ideologies. I made a point that desire can possibly override ideology and ideology can also possibly override desire. I gave an example: "A Kantian deontologist who will like to see the candidate suffer for his offense might otherwise soft-pedal on the basis of a strong unofficial relationship with the candidate, just as a Kantian deontologist who has a close unofficial relationship with the candidate can otherwise decide that the Kantian deontologist principle of retributive justice should prevail over his personal relationship with the candidate" (Ani 2014a, 315). Due to this kind of intricate relationship between desire and ideology, I have noted that a known conservative faculty member surprisingly endorsed the candidate. I concluded from this case study that apart from ideologies, desires and interests also play a significant role in deliberation, and it is quite difficult to neglect people's interests (Ani 2014a, 315).

More importantly, I argued that it was impossible to reach a decision in this case (endorsing or not endorsing the candidate) without implicitly adopting one value system over another. My conclusion based on this case study was that "some issues might be so value laden as to fall beyond the agreed-action-without-agreed-notion procedural instrument" (Ani 2014a, 316). I also remarked that if a majority decision had been taken, then the minority would either have acquiesced their position in good faith or agreed on the surface to such a group decision, but continued to resent it in private. If the latter is the case, the minority could seek future opportunities to assert their position. If, for instance, the decision was *not* to endorse the candidate, those who dissented may have agreed formally to such a decision, but used their powers to endorse the candidate in future if they gained more power (Ani 2014a, 316). I noted that in increasingly cosmopolitan and pluralist societies, value-laden disagreements such as the departmental one would be many, and we may consider developing the habit of confronting and discussing values wherever we cannot avoid them. I offered insights about how to negotiate value-laden disagreements that I do not wish to enumerate here (Ani 2014a, 317–319).

In two books, Matolino has denounced my argument about the role of values in deliberation:

> A consensus in action, only, is easier to attain than one that seeks consensus in ideology. Although Ani thinks that deciding on action is *always* informed by ideology, his study is not sufficiently exhaustive to show that all action is ideology based. Most importantly, Ani fails to show that practical political decision-making processes are *always* steeped in ideology. (Matolino 2018, 60–61) [own emphasis]

Again, Matolino writes: "Ani (2014b), for example, argues that the idea that there could be a possibility of arriving at a consensus about practical decisions to be taken without concomitant value is questionable. At length he offers examples that show that in various setups, people *always* decide in accord with their inherent commitments" (Matolino 2019, 74) [own emphasis]. A third observation from Matolino (2018, 109) is that "A third and final objection, again from Ani, points out that participants in such groups tend to be committed to certain values. Since they are not entirely non-committal, they are likely to push for, or go with those ideas that speak to their commitments."

Before I go into Matolino's equivocation, it is pertinent to remark that the first and second interpretations of my position are misinterpretations stretching my position to an extreme. I never argued that "deciding on action is *always* informed by ideology"; that "*all* action is ideology based"; or that "people *always* decide in accord with their inherent commitments" as Matolino writes. While Matolino accuses me of qualifying the role of value in deliberation as "always" and "all"; I use the qualifications "some"; "few"; "many" (depending on the depth of the role of value). I have written, "… *some* issues are so value-laden that a group decision cannot be value-neutral" (Ani 2014a, 311); "… a *few* issues can be so value-laden that it is impossible to keep value out of a group decision (Ani 2014a, 314); and "… *many* great social and political questions are likely to be value-laden" (Ani 2014a, 318). Matolino's third interpretation of my position is closer to being correct.

Having stated these misinterpretations, my broad point is that Matolino criticises me for arguing that people's values influence their positions in deliberation. Matolino appears from this criticism to believe that people's values *should not* influence their positions in deliberation. But such a view presupposes ideal deliberation, since it is only in such a deliberation that people could conceivably argue from positions not influenced by their values. The crucial point here is that Matolino, by this criticism, presupposes ideal deliberation. It is, therefore, surprising that Matolino switches from presupposing ideal deliberation to presupposing non-ideal deliberation when he sets out to criticise Wiredu's consensus proposal on the same question of values and interests. He argues that Wiredu's consensual democracy undermines people's divergent interests. Matolino states that people engaged in deliberation are influenced by their values:

> When people advance a particular position, that position probably represents what they value, and what they value will not go away simply because a contrary position has been adopted. The holders of the residue are likely to continue defending their position, even

> quietly. They will most likely seek future outlets to re-state or re-emphasize the merit of that residue. (Matolino 2018, 116)

This is a repetition of my argument about the role of values in deliberation. Matolino disagrees with Wiredu's argument that a decision to go to war is an example of agreeing to action without agreeing on values. To substantiate his disagreement, Matolino sets out to demonstrate that a decision to go to war is a value-laden decision. Matolino asks us to imagine a kingdom containing three sub-kingdoms, each presided over by a chieftaincy. This kingdom naturally desires to expand its land territory for agricultural and other purposes. Unfortunately, this inevitably brings it onto a war path with other kingdoms. One such kingdom is preparing to attack our kingdom over a certain disputed territory. The king of our kingdom calls two meetings to decide if we should go to war or not. The deliberation is marked by disagreement between two bodies of experts: the farmers and the warriors. The reason for the disagreement is that the farmers value the acquisition of the disputed land but the warriors are considering the cost of war casualties. Matolino writes: "The experts, the warriors, are rather hesitant to go to war. The other experts, the farmers, submit that the kingdom does not necessarily need the contested territory. However, they add, the territory might prove crucial to the future food security of the kingdom" (Matolino 2018, 117).

Matolino narrates that after deliberation, the decision is to go to war. The farmers plead that no blood should be spilled on the land in question, and the warriors promise to keep the war away from the desired land. Eventually, the war costs a lot of lives, and blood is spilled on the coveted land, placing some sort of curse on the land. The chief from whose kingdom most of the warriors originated, is in mourning. Matolino writes that the residue of differences that remains after the consensus decision to go to war is more significant than Wiredu proposed. According to him:

> In the foregoing example, those who were opposed to going to war had their reasons, and once those reasons materialise, they feel that they were wrongfully ignored, or outplayed. Those who feel aggrieved by the outcome of the war, which they were opposed to anyway, will carry on with that grievance into future discussion. (Matolino 2018, 118)

One may notice that this scenario is a reconstruction of my example. In place of my narrative of a head of department calling a meeting to discuss the suitability of a student for employment, this is a king calling for meetings to determine whether to militarise a conflict over a coveted piece of land. There is a decision in Matolino's example, which prioritises the value of one group over another, and Matolino argues that the consensually undercut group will continue to grieve into the future. But I have envisaged such a scenario, in which those who feel aggrieved by a hypothetical situation (in which the department decided not to recommend the candidate) will desire to work toward his employment in future if they acquire more power (Ani 2014a, 316).

Again, these repetitions are not my main point, which is that Matolino's repetition of my depiction of non-ideal deliberation provides the best quality evidence of a shift between deliberative presuppositions in the same debate or context—and the shift is not accompanied by an indication of the shift. If Matolino, in the same debate, disagrees with me about the influence of values in deliberation, Matolino should not be worried about such an influence in his reaction to Wiredu's proposal. If, on the other hand, Matolino thinks that people take their values seriously during deliberation, then Matolino should have agreed with my position. To dispense with this consistency is to confuse and derail the direction of the debate. Let me explain the technicality of the kind of derailment brought about by equivocation.

Implications of Equivocating the Roles of the Ideal and the Non-ideal

We may recall that in his evaluation of Wiredu's consensus proposal, Matolino argues that consensus secures maximal representation. On the strength of this conclusion, Matolino seeks to downplay or deny my argument that values play roles in people's participation in deliberation. First, to argue that consensus is capable of securing maximal representation, is to presuppose ideal deliberation. Second, to argue that consensus *actually* secures maximal representation, is to discuss ideal deliberation *as if* it were real-world deliberation. Moreover, to deny that values play roles in people's participation in deliberation (not minding Matolino's later reversal) is to deny the existence of the non-ideal. What it all means is that Matolino uses the ideal to deny the non-ideal.

Matolino is not alone in denying the non-ideal on the basis of the attraction of the ideal. The trend in African philosophy (which I seek to correct) is that ideal theorists seek to put down non-ideal theory as unnecessary and unpatriotic. In all her publications about consensus, the attitude of Helen Lauer to non-ideal theorising on consensus (theorising about the real-world obstacles to consensus) has been that of complete disapproval (read Ani and Etieyibo 2019; Lauer 2011a; 2011b). One could read her as arguing that we should only concentrate on ideal theory, in order to inspire people to ideal behaviour. Martin Ajei has also shown intolerance to non-ideal theorising (Ajei 2016). One could read Ajei as arguing that all that matters is that we focus on ideals emerging from reflecting on pre-colonial traditional practices, and Ajei attempts to put down non-ideal theorists such as Matolino (when Matolino chooses to go non-ideal) and I—no matter the genuineness of our concerns about non-ideal conditions in contemporary times. In his article, Ajei ignores the most potent of our concerns, and chooses to attack those concerns he deems it convenient to respond to. The bottom line is that the idealists have the habit of resisting and undermining the reality submitted by the non-idealists. I have had space in this article to highlight only Matolino's denials of non-ideal conditions.

Unlike Matolino, Lauer and Ajei do not equivocate between the ideal and non-ideal. They are simply idealists in consensus theory. The problem I identify in Lauer and Ajei is that they tend to deny the non-ideal. They, therefore, share with Matolino the error of denying the non-ideal when they are courting the ideal. In the Western Hemisphere,

there are also idealists who think that non-ideal conditions do not matter. Outside deliberation, in the subject of justice, G. A. Cohen thinks that the ideal of justice is all that matters for theorising about justice, and that non-ideal conditions do not matter. He writes that justice is "not something that the state, or, indeed, any other agent, is in a position to deliver" (Cohen 2003, 18). Cohen also argues that justice theories are not meant to tell us what we should do, but "what we should think even when what we should think makes no practical difference" (Cohen 2003, 243). More recent scholars such as Laura Valentini (2009, 335) have remarked that positions such as that of Cohen are the reasons why ideal theorising is falling out of favour (in the Hemisphere).

In all theoretical debates (not just in deliberative or consensus democracy), participants tend to think that it is more praiseworthy to advance the ideal than to soil or stain oneself with the non-ideal. If we are to take this seriously, then all of us would be idealists, and no one would be worried about real facts on the ground. The obvious inadequacy of such a scenario suggests that it is wrong to look down on non-ideal theorists. I have explained that the purpose of the ideal is to show us just how far behind we are in the real world. Ideals are usually not very fact-sensitive, otherwise they would not be ideals. Ideals do not by themselves contain significant information about the real world. For this reason, ideals offer little practical guidance, except the fact that they stand as ideals. If we need practical guidance on how to proceed in the real world toward ideals, we need to turn to non-ideal theories, which present the obstacles to achieving the ideals. It is only by taking stock of these obstacles, and thinking about how to overcome the obstacles, that we can begin our journey toward ideals. For example, if it so happens that domination could exist in deliberation, acknowledging the existence of such a possibility encourages participants in a debate or investigation to begin thinking about deliberative scenarios or techniques that could minimise either domination or its effects. So, when a theorist presents evidence of domination in real-world deliberation, frowning at such a presentation on the basis of ideal theory (on the basis of what humanity is encouraged to become) is unproductive to the project of pursuing and even designing ideals. What this means is that ideal and non-ideal theories have their respective values. They share a complementary relationship, each of them is necessary, and none of them can take the place of the other.

The upshot is that we can criticise non-ideal theory based on ideal theory, but it is wrong to deny the non-ideal based on the ideal. When we seek to deny the non-ideal on the basis of the ideal, what we are doing is to presume that the ideal is in fact the real, and then seek to replace the non-ideal with the ideal. This means that we are in fact substituting the ideal for the real. As an example, when Matolino objects to the observations that there is domination in deliberation or that values play roles in deliberation, he denies the non-ideal, and when he argues that consensus ensures adequate representation, he presupposes the ideal and then discusses the ideal as if it were the real. Since the real world boasts more of the non-ideal than the ideal, treating the ideal as if it were the real, and thereby pretending that the non-ideal does not exist,

is depriving ourselves of vital information about what goes on in the real world that would help in our project of advancing toward the ideal.

Conclusion

Such is the kind of confusion generated by the non-explicit nature of our deliberative presuppositions. If we are clear regarding our deliberative presuppositions, these confusions will not arise. It would be unwise to put down non-ideal theory on the basis of ideal theory. It would be unwise to treat ideal theory as if it has become the real world. But most of all, it could be clearly seen that equivocating between deliberative presuppositions in the same debate is unhelpful.

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