

**Rationality and Deliberative Democracy:
A Constructive Critique of John Dryzek**

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— DRAFT, April 2009 —

— **NOT FOR CITATION** —

— Comments and criticisms welcome —

Abstract: John Dryzek's justification of deliberative democracy rests on a critique of instrumental rationality and a defence of Habermas's idea of communicative rationality. I question each stage of Dryzek's argument. He defines instrumental rationality broadly but only criticises narrow applications of it. He conflates communicative rationality with Habermas's idea of 'discourse' – the real driving force of Dryzek's democratic theory. I suggest that Dryzek drops his overstated criticisms of instrumental rationality and his mis-stated account of communicative rationality; he could focus more on different models of politics than different models of rationality. His argument can be that deliberative democracy is a better means to better ends. That makes Dryzek's position more powerful and more positive, and clarifies issues for further research.

Keywords: communicative rationality, critical theory, deliberative democracy, democracy, Habermas, instrumental rationality.

This paper is a constructive critique of John Dryzek, a prominent exponent of Habermas and an influential deliberative democrat. Using Habermas's ideas, Dryzek attacks elitist politics and defends deliberative policymaking by citizens. This argument is very important: too often, we treat 'public policy' as something done *for* but not *by* the public.

However, Dryzek's account of rationality weakens his case. He links elitist politics to instrumental rationality, and deliberative democracy to 'communicative rationality'. I show that his critique of instrumental rationality is overstated, that his defence of communicative rationality is mis-stated, and that his justification of deliberative democracy should be restated.

Instead of trying to show that different model of politics are based on different types of rationality, Dryzek could accept instrumental rationality's place in deliberative democracy. Indeed, he can defend deliberative democracy as being more instrumentally rational than elitist politics. That makes Dryzek's argument more powerful and more positive, and clarifies issues for further research. My paper is thus both critical and constructive. I aim to be 'creative and enabling, not just chastening and constraining', in Dryzek's words (1996, 10).

My argument runs as follows. After explaining Dryzek's importance, I examine his strategy of criticising instrumental rationality (the ability to choose good means to ends) and defending communicative rationality (the rationality of sincere discussion, roughly). I suggest that Dryzek's criticisms of instrumental rationality are overstated: although he defines instrumental rationality broadly, he always criticises narrow applications or conceptions of it. Dryzek actually needs instrumental rationality as much as anyone.

I then address communicative rationality. This idea of Habermas's is not normative enough for Dryzek's democratic purposes. Communicative rationality is only mildly normative; it is about understanding more than legitimacy. To justify deliberative democracy, Dryzek needs Habermas's idea of 'discourse', which Dryzek confuses with communicative rationality.

This requires Dryzek to alter his justification of deliberative democracy. Because the different types of rationality apply in *both* elitist and deliberative democracy, there are no straight lines from a theory of rationality to a model of politics. Dryzek's normative conclusions need not change but his justification should become more empirical: the different rationalities, he can argue, are simply more prominent in deliberative democracy.

I conclude by suggesting that Dryzek focuses more on different models of politics than different models of rationality. His argument can be that deliberative democracy is a better means to better ends. This is a powerful position. In short, a modified account of rationality strengthens rather than weakens Dryzek's democratic theory.

Note that I talk of 'elitist' politics (which is not Dryzek's term) as shorthand for the model of politics which he criticises – administrative, technocratic, hierarchical, competitive, dominated by bureaucrats and politicians, and driven by self-interest. For ease of argument I talk of an elitist/deliberative dichotomy, but reality is obviously more complex. [See Appendix A for 'discursive' democracy.] And I follow Dryzek in sidestepping Habermas's distinction between strategic and instrumental rationality, and in talking about both simply as 'instrumental'.

Finally, two points need emphasising if I am to avoid misinterpretation. First, we must distinguish narrow and broad notions of instrumental rationality. For example, one way of reading Dryzek is that he attacks instrumental rationality because he wants people to control their own destinies rather than being governed by economic incentives. This, though, is not a criticism of instrumental rationality as Dryzek himself defines it – broadly. It is a criticism of a *narrower*, Frankfurt-School notion of instrumental rationality. If that is how some readers want to define instrumental rationality, they should also say whether they reject the broader notion, as defined by Dryzek and many social scientists. That task is much harder. (I explain this point in more detail below.)

Second, I should emphasise what I am *not* saying about rationality and norms. I am not denouncing arguments like the one cited above – Dryzek’s opposition to a world dominated by economics – but I do deny that instrumental rationality is to blame. I am not pretending that well-rounded moral or political theories can make do with instrumental rationality alone, merely that it deserves much more support than Dryzek and many critical theorists give it. I am not rejecting Dryzek’s normative conclusions, merely the way he derives these conclusions from his account of rationality. In short, if one is trying to defend deliberative democracy, this is not the way to do it.

Why Dryzek?

Dryzek is important in his own right and as an influential exponent of Habermas. Even before Habermas championed deliberative democracy in *Between Facts and Norms*, Dryzek’s book *Discursive Democracy* (1990a) had used Habermasian ideas to produce one of the earliest extensive accounts of deliberative democracy. This book, and Dryzek’s well-known paper on public choice theory (1992), are his most important critiques of instrumental rationality. His later works, especially *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond* (2000) and *Deliberative Global Politics* (2006a), remain concerned about instrumental rationality, and again draw on Habermas inventively, especially as regards environmental policy and global democracy. But these latter books are less Habermasian, perhaps reflecting his ‘lament’ at Habermas’s ‘defection’ from radical to liberal (2000, 8, 27; see also Dryzek 2001).

This helps to explain Dryzek’s importance. Not only is he one of the core deliberative democrats (Warren, 1996, 46), but his shunning of liberal, state-centred deliberative democracy distinguishes him from most other core deliberative democrats – including Habermas (Chambers 2003, 310; Fung, 2005, 416). Dryzek has also addressed more concrete

questions of institutional design than Habermas and most of Habermas's followers (Blaug 1997, 114-5), and rationality is crucial here (Dryzek 1990a, 29-56).

Rationality is thus central to Dryzek's significance, putting him at the forefront of three key shifts in democratic theory: from aggregative to deliberative democracy (one of the most striking developments in political theory in the last 25 years); from elitist to radical politics; and from abstract to concrete, practical democratic theory. (See Chambers 2003 for these shifts.)

Dryzek has had considerable impact across politics more widely. His book *Discursive Democracy* was as much about public policy as political theory, and he remains influential in public policy (Gottweis, 2006, 472-3). He is one of the best known representatives of postpositivist public policy (deLeon, 2006, 51). The arguments discussed here have had some effect on rational choice, social choice and public choice theorists (Mackie, 2005, 7).

Dryzek has even been influential outside of politics, especially in planning studies, where he has helped to stimulate the surprisingly large literature inspired by Habermas and critical theory (see Lauria and Wagner, 2006). I cannot gauge Dryzek's exact impact here, but many planning theorists echo the errors criticised in this paper.¹ With certain modifications, my arguments apply to these writers too – as well as to critical theorists in fields such as international relations (Risse 2004, 294-300), management studies (Alvesson and Deetz 2000, 90-3), and philosophy of social science (Potter 2000, 113-4, 238). While Dryzek is my primary focus, then, my criticisms have wider resonance.

So, Dryzek's arguments need challenging. We should correct his misportrayal of Habermas and his misrepresentation of instrumental rationality, for three reasons: because of his particular importance to deliberative democratic theory; because of his significance in

¹ [Reference omitted.]

political theory, in politics more widely, and outside of politics; and because some of his errors are also made by other critical theorists.

The critique of instrumental rationality

Dryzek's basic strategy is to contrast instrumental and communicative rationality, criticise instrumental rationality, and defend communicative rationality. But Dryzek's criticisms of instrumental rationality, I suggest, are based on a fallacy. He defines instrumental rationality broadly, but then criticises narrow applications of it – choices of bad means, or the pursuit of bad ends. Dryzek is right to make these important criticisms. But we can still defend instrumental rationality without committing such errors.

I will briefly expand on this. Dryzek usually contrasts two types of rationality only, for example in discussing Habermas on modernity's 'two sorts of reason' – instrumental and communicative.² The instrumental/communicative distinction, writes Dryzek (1992, 400), is 'central' for Habermas. Of course, Dryzek never says that there are only two types of rationality, and sometimes discusses more (e.g. 1990a, 9). But Dryzek usually implies that the main options are instrumental and communicative rationality; and by criticising instrumental rationality, Dryzek points us towards communicative rationality.

At least nine times, Dryzek defines instrumental rationality broadly: 'the capacity to devise, select and effect good means to clarified and consistent ends'.³ This is fairly standard (Elster 1983, 1-15). Dryzek's error is that after defining instrumental rationality broadly, he usually criticises *narrow* conceptions or applications of instrumental rationality. I will

² Dryzek, 1992, 406-7. See also 1987, 200-5; 1990a, 3-21; 1992, 400-1, 406-9; 1994, 160-5; 1995, 111-5; 1998, 589-90; 2000, 21-2.

³ Dryzek, 1992, 400; 1996, 93; 1997, 164; 1998, 589; 2000, 22; 2006a, 113. For slightly different definitions, see 1987, 200; 1990a, 3-4; 1994, 172.

consider three such criticisms: instrumental rationality is (a) anti-democratic, (b) bad at dealing with complex problems, and (c) misused by some social choice theorists. Dryzek is quite right to criticise these *particular* conceptions or applications of instrumental rationality. But I cannot emphasise strongly enough that none of these criticisms follow from Dryzek's own definition of instrumental rationality.

Instrumental rationality as anti-democratic

Dryzek states that instrumental rationality 'represses individuals' and is 'antidemocratic ... insofar as bureaucratization entails the concentration of political power', since instrumental rationality provides 'justification and organizing principles for bureaucracy' (1990a, 4-5). Dryzek is presenting a form of Weberian syllogism: bureaucracy is the epitome of instrumental rationality; bureaucracy is anti-democratic; therefore instrumental rationality is anti-democratic.

But consider again Dryzek's own definition of instrumental rationality. Defined broadly, instrumental rationality cannot be the basic problem. Instrumental rationality is not inherently antidemocratic or repressive. There is nothing antidemocratic and repressive about seeking good means to ends unless the chosen means or ends are antidemocratic and repressive. Instrumental rationality can serve democratic and non-repressive purposes, or anti-democratic and repressive purposes. The problem, rather, is when bureaucracies serve anti-democratic ends and choose repressive means.

Yet this is a criticism of bureaucracy, not instrumental rationality. Dryzek can legitimately say that bureaucratic decision-making, whose guiding principle is instrumental rationality, violates political equality and may infringe citizen interests. This criticises some applications of instrumental rationality without the unnecessary overstatement that instrumental rationality 'represses individuals'. It is true that some *applications* of

instrumental rationality – some means or some ends – repress individuals. It is quite another thing to say that *instrumental rationality* does so.

It is not surprising, then, that Dryzek himself uses instrumental rationality in a non-repressive way, asking whether bureaucracies are ‘the best means for dealing with any given level of complexity’ (2006a, 141). If the answer is ‘no’, we should seek better means. Otherwise we are not instrumentally rational.

Dryzek lets his opponents off the hook here. Some instrumental rationalists are overly tied to bureaucracy, seeing it as the purest embodiment of instrumental rationality. Dryzek can accuse them of inconsistency: if they really want instrumental rationality, and if bureaucracy is not always a good means, they should look beyond bureaucracy.

My suggestions thus strengthen, not weaken, Dryzek’s argument. By diluting his critique of instrumental rationality, Dryzek can make the same normative arguments – criticising bureaucracy, defending deliberative politics – and without trying to rebut something which he, like all of us, needs. He gets extra critical bite too, by accusing some instrumental rationalists of failing to meet its requirements.

Complexity

Dryzek’s narrow view of instrumental rationality is most explicit in his important account of complexity:

Instrumental rationality – and the political institutions in which it is manifested – is ineffective when confronted with complex social problems. Instrumental rationality goes hand in hand with an analytic sensibility, the idea that complex phenomena are best understood through intelligent disaggregation into their component parts. These parts should then be apprehended – and any problematic aspects of them resolved instrumentally – in piecemeal fashion. ... *For the sake of brevity I shall often use*

'instrumental rationality' as short-hand for 'instrumental-analytic rationality.' (Dryzek 1990a, 5-6, 222, emphasis altered; see too 1990a, 57-76; 2006a, 140-2).

This rightly questions the capacity of traditional decision-making bodies to tackle complex problems. Many writers are too optimistic about human abilities and neglect the boundedness of our instrumental rationality. Every politician should read Dryzek, Hayek, Lindblom or Simon, and ask how well elitist methods solve complex problems. Dryzek encourages us to consider deliberative alternatives: more holistic, less disaggregative methods could improve problem-solving.

Again, though, instrumental rationality itself is not the problem. Dryzek is only criticising one type of instrumental rationality, not instrumental rationality as he had originally defined it. Note first his admission that by 'instrumental rationality' he actually means something narrower, an *instrumental-analytic* type of rationality which uses disaggregative, piecemeal methods. This raises the question of whether we should worry about forms of instrumental rationality which use non-disaggregative, holistic methods. And Dryzek clearly sees holistic methods as superior when facing complex social problems. Therefore, by definition – indeed, by Dryzek's own definition – *he cannot be criticising instrumental rationality itself, merely one application of it.*

Dryzek glosses over this in writing that instrumental rationality 'goes hand in hand' with a disaggregative approach. Does this imply a necessary relationship, with instrumental rationality committing us to a disaggregative approach? Or is it simply the case that instrumental rationalists often happen to take disaggregative approaches in practice? In one place Dryzek implies a necessary connection: instrumental rationality '*requires* breaking such [complex] problems down into simpler components' (2005, 84; emphasis added). I prefer a softer stance. There is no reason why seeking the best means to an end requires a disaggregative approach. Indeed, when disaggregative approaches are bad at tackling

complexity, they are not instrumentally rational (unless all other ways are worse). If we knew that holistic approaches are better at solving complex social problems, we would not be instrumentally rational to advocate disaggregation. Deliberative democracy may be instrumentally rational – a better means to our ends.

Dryzek again invokes instrumental rationality like this, asking whether bureaucracies are ‘the best means for dealing with any given level of complexity’, as noted above, and suggesting that discursive democracy ‘contains means for coping with highly complex social problems’ (2006a, 141; 1996, 146). If discursive democracy is better than bureaucracy in this respect, instrumental rationality requires the former, other things being equal.

Dryzek misses an opportunity here too. He could argue that instrumental rationalists with disaggregative approaches use bad means to reach their ends. If these writers really are instrumentally rational, they must consider alternatives. So, Dryzek’s criticism would be sharper if he stuck to his original, broad definition of instrumental rationality, and censured writers who simply assume that instrumental rationality requires disaggregative approaches. Logically, the problem cannot be instrumental rationality, merely one particular application of it whose prevalence Dryzek legitimately queries.

Public/social choice theory

A different kind of criticism appears in Dryzek’s (1992) important critique of the Virginia and Rochester schools of public/social choice theory, associated especially with James Buchanan and William Riker, respectively (compare Dryzek and List, 2003). Dryzek attacks these writers’ parched and pessimistic models of politics.

For most Virginia theorists ‘it is self-interest ... that does the bulk of the damage’. Their gloomy conclusions about politics reflect their assumption of egoistic ends, ‘not ... the simple fact of the instrumental nature of this pursuit’ (1992, 406). Dryzek is not claiming that instrumental rationality is inherently egoistic, a view he rightly rejects elsewhere (2000, 32;

Dryzek and List, 2003, 3). Indeed, his criticism seems to be that Virginia theorists err by assuming self-interest, *not* instrumental rationality. Instrumental rationality aimed at ends based on collective interests would produce more palatable models of politics. That is a viable criticism of much Virginian public choice theory (one exception being Brennan and Hamlin 2000, 6-10).

But Dryzek does not make the equivalent distinction when criticising Rochester social choice theorists. Here, ‘instrumental rationality and non-cognitivism do the damage’. Non-cognitivism means that values and preferences are not rationally assessable. Dryzek’s point is that even if individuals sought common rather than selfish interests, we would still get the paradoxes and voting cycles which Rikerians see as inherent to democracy. Rochester theorists should stop assuming non-cognitivism, otherwise political actors ‘cannot escape these problems by subjecting their preferences to rational scrutiny and possible adjustment in the interests of determinate collective choices’ (1992, 406).

It is not clear why Dryzek criticises Rochester theorists for assuming non-cognitivism *and* instrumental rationality, rather than non-cognitivism alone. If the problem for Virginia theorists is that self-interest corrupts instrumental rationality, then the problem for Rochester theorists is that non-cognitivism stupefies it. In neither case is instrumental rationality itself the problem. Instrumental rationality produces good or bad effects depending on what it is tied to.

Dryzek’s argument still has force: politics does not have to be as Buchanan or Riker depict it. Preferences and values can be non-egoistic and can change rationally. Nonetheless, Dryzek’s criticisms involve what instrumental rationality is linked to, not instrumental rationality itself. That is indeed his main message in his 1992 paper, I think. But unwary readers may read him as attacking instrumental rationality itself, not only because of the argument just cited but also because he starts the paper by criticising ‘instrumental

rationalization’, an empirical thesis about the rise of instrumental rationality (1992, 399-400).

[See Appendix B.]

Summary

Dryzek defines instrumental rationality broadly, as the ability to choose good means to ends. But his criticisms involve narrow applications of it (bureaucracy, disaggregative approaches) or the ideas some people tie it to (self-interest, non-cognitivism). These arguments, while crucially important, should not make us reject instrumental rationality. The same applies to a criticism which I have left out for reasons of space: the domination of instrumental rationality, as alleged by Adorno and Horkheimer, and as some readings of Habermas’s system/lifeworld argument suggest [Appendix B].⁴ I would add that many critics and adherents of instrumental rationality are wrong to suppose that instrumental rationality must involve purely technical/efficiency-based means.⁵

Of course, Dryzek does not reject instrumental rationality entirely. He grudgingly accepts ‘flirting with instrumental rationality (which, when all is said and done, is often unavoidable)’ (1994, 169). But he wants it restricted to ‘a subordinate domain’ (1990a, 14, 9, 218). This is too dismissive. He is more accurate in writing that ‘instrumental and communicative attitudes can coexist; the choice is seldom a matter of one or the other but rather of the proportions in which the two shall be combined’ (1990a, 20-1). More comments in this vein would help.

Dryzek’s criticisms will be stronger, not weaker, if he avoids targeting instrumental rationality itself, distinguishes between appropriate and inappropriate applications, and

⁴ [Reference omitted.]

⁵ [Reference omitted.]

reproaches writers who claim to want good means to ends but simply presuppose elitist politics. This powerful argument is obscured by Dryzek's current position.

Is communicative rationality normative enough?

I now turn from instrumental to communicative rationality. After explaining what communicative rationality means, I show that it does not adequately support Dryzek's democratic theory.

Habermas repeatedly identifies rationality in general, and communicative rationality in particular, with the ability to give reasons or good reasons.⁶ For Habermas, a good communicative reason is one which is genuinely accepted as empirically true, subjectively sincere or normatively right. Habermas means that when we communicate we refer to one or more of three worlds: objective facts, personal feelings, and social norms. A discussion is communicatively rational to the extent that all communicators genuinely agree that propositions are, respectively, true, sincere and right. If one participant tries to get a proposition accepted non-genuinely, say by coercion or bribery, this is strategic not communicative rationality.⁷

In Habermas's first extended example of communicative rationality, an older worker tells a younger worker to buy him a drink (TCA2 121-3). (As we will see, this example, which I use extensively below, undermines Dryzek's account of communicative rationality.) The older worker makes implicit or explicit references to subjective feelings ('I'm thirsty'),

⁶ TCA1 9, 11, 15, 17, 22, 115-6; PMT 102; OPC 188, 220, 312; JA 52-3; BFN 119-20; TJ 94-5; see also Chambers (1996), 90-1, 101, 119, 132-3. (See end of article for abbreviations of Habermas's works.)

⁷ CES 1-5, 65-8; TCA1 38-9, 99-104, 285-7, 295-309; TCA2 120-6; MCCA 58, 133-7; AR 241-2, 291; JA 81; OPC 217-22, 293-301, 315-29.

empirical facts ('the shop is nearby'), and social norms ('I outrank you, so you should do what I say').

The normative claim is central for us. 'The informal group hierarchy of the workers on the construction site is the normative framework in which the one is allowed to tell the other to do something', writes Habermas (TCA2 121; emphasis removed). If the young worker is unaware of this norm, he may not see why the older worker is telling him to get a beer. 'I'm not thirsty', he may say. Once told that his own thirst is irrelevant, and that older workers can instruct younger ones, he has a 'Gestalt-switch', understanding the situation in the same way as the older worker (TCA2 122). Now he sees the norm and fully understands this part of the request. Communicative rationality applies to the extent that the two workers can understand and agree with these implicit or explicit claims about the worlds of facts, feelings and norms. My account here is standard and differs in only minor ways from that of writers like Simone Chambers (1996, 90-7, 119, 132-3).

Despite certain ambiguities in Dryzek's account of communicative rationality,⁸ there is no doubting its Habermasian nature. Dryzek repeatedly links communicative rationality to Habermas and describes it in undeniably Habermasian terms.⁹ But crucially, *communicative rationality as understood by Habermas is too narrow for Dryzek*.

To explain this, I address four of Dryzek's core democratic values. Like most deliberative democrats, he wants policymaking by citizens who are (i) autonomous and (ii) open-minded, focusing on (iii) common interests under (iv) inclusive conditions. Decision-makers should decide autonomously, free from deception, self-deception and domination.¹⁰

⁸ [Reference omitted.]

⁹ Dryzek 1990a, 14-15; 1992, 406-7; 1994, 165; 1996, 107-8; 1998, 589; 2000, 21-2; 2006b, 196.

¹⁰ Dryzek, 1990a, 14-15; 1993, 228; 1994, 165; 1996, 107-8; 2000, 22; 2006b, 196. Note that Dryzek talks of autonomy differently (2006a, 85).

Decision-makers should be open-minded and reflective, choosing according to the force of the better argument.¹¹ Generalizable interests, not self-interest, should drive discussion.¹² And there should be minimal barriers to participation by competent individuals or their randomly chosen representatives.¹³ (Dryzek's other prescriptions, like transnational governance, do not affect my argument.)

Unfortunately for Dryzek, communicative rationality as Habermas depicts it primarily involves understanding and agreement. It does not involve deliberation about disputed ends, or choices between them. When Habermas writes that communicative rationality includes the assumption that normative statements are 'valid', he means that (a) the norm applies to communicators, and (b) they accept it.¹⁴ In the building-site example, the older worker (a) has an informal right to instruct the young one (TCA2 121-2). If the young worker (b) accepts this hierarchical norm, he can understand the request, and communicative rationality is achieved in this respect.

So, communicative rationality is about accepting *claims* to truth, rightness and sincerity, not about whether something *is* true, right or sincere (TCA1 302; MCCA 58-9). The point of communicative rationality is 'to establish and renew interpersonal relations' (TCA1 308), not to *justify* them through argument. Its aim is the mutual 'recognition' of norms (MCCA 58), not their *defence*. 'We must distinguish between the social fact that a norm is intersubjectively recognized and its *worthiness* to be recognized. There may be good reasons to consider the validity claim raised in a socially accepted norm to be *unjustified*' (MCCA 61; emphasis added). (Note that my account largely sidesteps communicative

¹¹ Dryzek, 1990a, 15; 1992, 406-9; 1996, 146; 2000, 1-2, 21; 2006a, 84-7, 113-5.

¹² Dryzek, 1987, 212; 1990a, 54; 1992, 401, 408-11; 2000, 169.

¹³ Dryzek, 1990a, 15, 72-3; 1993, 228-9.

¹⁴ CES 3-4; TCA1 15-16, 88. I use 'norm' more loosely and broadly than Habermas, who talks also of value orientations, rules, institutions, conventions, habits and practices (TJ 103).

rationality's sociological function: coordinating actions and binding individuals as they recognise shared norms. See for example TCA2 86.)

Communicative rationality, then, is at most only mildly normative. Some communication is entirely non-normative (OPC 326-7), as with empirical validity-claims like 'it is raining now' (TCA1 313). And communicatively rational discussions which do involve norms merely justify claims according to *existing* norms, as with the construction worker who simply appealed to a pre-given norm. Deliberative democracy needs a stronger form of rationality – one which can question existing norms, and if necessary, change or replace them.

Discourse and communicative rationality

If communicative rationality does not settle disagreements about ends, what does? To answer this we must examine Habermas's idea of 'discourse'.¹⁵ We can think about the difference between communicative rationality and discourse as follows. Communicative rationality involves factual claims about norms, discourse involves normative claims about norms. Communicative rationality involves claims about which norms do apply, discourse involves claims about which norms should apply. Communicative rationality involves claims like 'older workers are allowed to tell younger workers what to do', discourse involves claims like 'older workers should be allowed to tell younger workers what to do'. (Discourse can also be about facts but for this paper I address normative discourse only, and deal primarily with moral rather than ethical discourse.) Communicative rationality involves understanding for the sake of action, whereas participants in discourse are 'relieved of the pressure of action' (TCA1 25; MCCA 87; BFN 228) as they try to work out what is right. My

¹⁵ TP 18-19; CES 4, 64, 209; TCA1 17-20, 42, 334; MCCA 59, 65-8, 86-94, 201-3; AR 227, 248-9; RC 272; JA 10-16, 51-3, 56-60; PF 111-2; BFN 228; TIO 44; TJ 102-9, 253-5.

account here is standard, following writers like Thomas McCarthy (1978, 288-92, 306-14, 323-7), Simone Chambers (1996, 95-101), Gordon Finlayson (2005, 323), and James Bohman and William Rehg (2007, section 3).

Discourse starts when there is a *'lack of a normative consensus'* (TJ 356). In discourse, the issue is also what the norm should be – *'the rightness of ... a norm itself'* (TCA1 334) – regardless of what the current norm is. Habermas recognises that communicative action is *'precarious'* and can easily turn into discourse (BFN 21; OPC 236), as *'participants continue their communicative action in a reflexive attitude'* (MCCA 67; emphasis added). But he is at pains to emphasise the *'strict distinction'* between unreflective communicative action and reflective discourse (RC 235) and insists that *'we can't equate communicative action with argumentation'* (PF 111).

So, communicative rationality necessarily entails the *'anticipation and presupposition'* of discourse (TP 19; CES 3-4; MCCA 88; PF 111-2). When someone makes a validity claim, she presupposes that she may have to justify or *'redeem'* that claim in discourse (MCCA 58-9). But just because A can lead to B does not mean A *is* B. Similarly, discourse includes communicative rationality: for example, participants in a free-speech discourse might discuss whether certain expressions offend them, subjectively. But just because B includes A does not mean that B *is* A.

In discourse, the requirements for rationality are far stricter than in simple communicative action. *'Valid statements [in discourse] must admit of justification by appeal to reasons that could convince anyone irrespective of time or place'*, writes Habermas (JA 52). This requires inclusiveness, equal opportunity for communication, sincerity and non-coercion – assumptions that should motivate participants even when they know that not all assumptions are met (TJ 106-7; TIO 44). This produces such principles as the

universalization principle: roughly, in moral discourse everyone affected should accept a norm.¹⁶

Discourse and 'discursive' democracy

What does this mean for Dryzek's democratic theory? *Autonomy* is the only one of Dryzek's four core democratic values which follows from communicative rationality. An individual must genuinely agree with what is decided. If the older worker coerces the younger one to get a beer, this is strategic interaction not communicative action (OPC 218, 221-2).

Open-mindedness only has a limited role in communicative rationality. Communicators must be open to Gestalt-switches: if the young worker cannot recognise the background norm, communicative agreement is impossible. But Dryzek's deliberative democracy requires a stronger form of open-mindedness – opinions shifting according to the force of the better argument. Dryzek wants us to discuss the pros and cons of issues, rather than simply accepting or rejecting current norms on the basis of 'cultural taken-for-grantedness'.¹⁷

Common interests are not a necessary part of communicative rationality. In the building-site example, the main interest is the older worker's, and the younger worker has a subsidiary interest in fitting in. These are not common interests, though. Indeed, lifeworld norms can be patriarchal and repressive (Fraser, 1995, 24, 35-6; see also Dryzek, 1992, 401). Moral discourse, with its universalization principle, would not permit patriarchal repression, yet communicative rationality does. Dryzek says that communicative rationality 'can pertain to the generation of normative judgments' (1990a, 14). But communicative rationality does

¹⁶ RC 256-7; MCCA 65-8, 86-93; JA 32-3; TIO 42; TJ 104.

¹⁷ RC 272; see also TCA 335, PDM 298, MCCA 135.

not itself generate norms: it confirms or rejects existing norms. Dryzek states that in communicative rationality, a norm can be justified ‘on the grounds that its adoption by all individuals would produce felicitous consequences’ (1990a, 14-15). But this is part of discourse, not communicative rationality itself.

Inclusion is not required by communicative rationality either. If the older worker had asked the young one to get beer for all workers on the building site, the young worker would not need to discuss this with each worker to understand what was required. Dryzek suggests that communicative rationality requires inclusion (1990a, 15). But only discourse requires this. Dryzek is closer to the mark in writing that ‘[c]ommunicatively rationalized *discourse* requires ... that there be no barriers to competent participation’ (1990a, 72; emphasis added). But communicative rationality need not be mentioned here.

In sum, communicative rationality is primarily about understanding and agreement, with at most only a mild type of normative justification. And even the understanding involved in communicative rationality is too narrow for Dryzek. He states that communicative rationality involves ‘the reflective understanding of competent actors’ (1990a, 14). But for Habermas, reflection comes in discourse, not necessarily in communicative rationality. It is incidental to communicative rationality whether someone who accepts oppressive lifeworld norms has reflected on their legitimacy – just as instrumental rationality can aim at repressive or non-repressive ends, as explained earlier. Ironically, Dryzek has recently advocated an ‘expansion of communicative rationality beyond Habermas’s own narrow and unnecessary emphasis on argument’ (2006b, 196). But the argument involved in communicative rationality is at most a simple yes/no affair as discussants raise validity claims about facts, feelings and norms; and these claims might only be implicit. Deep-seated argument belongs to discourse.

Dryzek thus appears to equate discursive and communicative rationality. He writes that the ‘precursor’ to communicative rationality is the ideal speech situation (1995, 104;

1990b, 102), but Habermas mostly restricts this to discourse.¹⁸ The same applies to ‘the ideal discursive community of communicative rationality’ (Dryzek 1994, 165), which actually belongs to discourse. Dryzek also writes that ‘[u]nder communicative rationality, the only power exercised is ... “the forceless force of the better argument” ’ (2000, 171), but again this involves discourse only. My account here is standard (for example McCarthy 1978, 306-10). Of course, Dryzek is hardly alone in blurring discourse and communicative rationality (for example Risse 2004 294-6). Indeed I too did this until recently.¹⁹

Discursive, communicative and instrumental rationality

I now return briefly to instrumental rationality, because Dryzek’s conflation of communicative rationality and discourse casts new light on his account of instrumental rationality.

First, Dryzek suggests that communicative rationality allows us to choose ends while instrumental rationality does not (1990a, 14, 115; see also 1987, 201). But instrumental rationality can help us choose ends. As Herbert Simon notes (1983, 7-8, 11), we can ask if proposed ends are good means to other ends that we value. Habermas accepts a similar view (TCA 170, 172; BFN 159-61, 180, 186-8; JA 2-3, 10-11, 63). Discourse ethics involves some instrumental considerations: we must ask if our goals are feasible and if they have undesirable knock-on consequences (Chambers, 1996, 90-1, 100, 188; Rehg 1994, 48-9, 239). So, instrumental rationality can have a small place when choosing ends. And as we just saw, communicative rationality plays no direct part in choosing disputed ends.

¹⁸ TP 19; LC 105-8; RC 235, 246, 272; TCA1 26, 42; MCCA 88, 202; PDM 323; JA 53, 57; PF 111-2; BFN 15-16, 161-2, 228, 322-3; TJ 86-7, 101-2, 105. There are exceptions: ST 36, 54; ASI 90; TCA2 1-2.

¹⁹ [Reference omitted.]

Second, Dryzek depicts instrumental rationality as conservative (2006a, 113). This connection is not necessary: we can seek means to conservative or radical ends. Now we see that communicative rationality can be conservative if communicators simply accept existing norms.

Third, Dryzek often depicts modernity in terms of just two types of reason, but evidently when we move from Habermas's sociological project to his political one, communicative rationality is not as important as discursive rationality, especially its ethical and moral subsets. These get most emphasis in Habermas's post-1990 writings, about which Dryzek says little (two exceptions being Dryzek 2001; 2005, 82, 87).

Fourth, it is not only communicative rationality which presupposes discourse: Habermas now implies this for *instrumental* rationality too, in his discussion of 'pragmatic' claims about means to ends (BFN 160, 163; JA 10-11). (On 'pragmatic reason' more generally, see JA 2-3; BFN 159-60; TIO 12-14, 25.) Habermas talks of discursive rationality binding the three other types of rationality – epistemic, teleological and communicative, which involve knowledge, action and speech, respectively (OPC 309). So, when we make instrumental/pragmatic/teleological claims about good means to ends, we imply that these claims can be justified discursively.

Oddly, most Habermas-influenced thinkers continue to talk as if instrumental rationality is opposed to communicative or discursive rationality. Habermas's early work certainly points in this direction.²⁰ But this reading of Habermas is now unjustified. It is time that critics of instrumental rationality, including Dryzek, recognised this.

Fifth, and most important, Dryzek portrays instrumental rationality as the rationality of elitist politics, and communicative rationality as the rationality of deliberative democracy. But instrumental rationality also applies in deliberative democracy: deliberative democracy

²⁰ [Reference omitted.]

may itself be a better means to reaching ends than elitist politics, I have argued, and in practice deliberative democracy is sometimes about choosing means not ends. Crucially, communicative rationality must apply in some elitist situations. Habermas insists that communicative rationality applies *whenever* two or more people communicate with the aim of reaching understanding and autonomous agreement, as Dryzek recognises (1990a, 37). Communicative rationality must thus apply in elitist politics where deliberators seek genuine agreement (which, clearly, they often do not). Communicative rationality's compatibility with hierarchy is evident in Habermas's examples of flight attendants and older workers giving orders to passengers and young workers respectively (TCA1 300-1; TCA2 121-3; see too Chambers, 1996, 95-6).

Dryzek's overstated critique of instrumental rationality thus weakens his defence of deliberative democracy, whether this is couched in terms of communicative rationality or, preferably, discourse. By criticising instrumental rationality so vigorously Dryzek understates its use in his own theory. And because his defence of communicative rationality is so closely linked to his critique of instrumental rationality, the latter's failure undermines the former. It would be safer to loosen the two parts of the argument, downplay communicative rationality, and make discourse central.

So what?

Does the previous section's critique matter? Am I making anything more than the purely semantic point that Dryzek has confused two terms?²¹ In one respect the answer is no: emphasising discourse will not change Dryzek's normative goals. He can still defend

²¹ [Reference omitted.]

autonomous, open-minded, inclusive deliberation aimed at common interests. If anything his position is stronger: now he can use terms which are truer to the original source, which support his preferred term ('discursive' democracy), and which have stronger theoretical foundations.

But in another respect the answer is yes: the substance of Dryzek's arguments should change. Dryzek implies that different ideas of rationality *necessarily* entail different models of politics. Instrumental-analytic rationality leads straight to elitist, bureaucratic politics, while communicative/discursive rationality requires inclusive deliberation. Since instrumental-analytic rationality is so flawed compared to its communicative/discursive counterpart, the answer must be deliberative democracy. Dryzek does not present his argument quite like this, but it captures the essence of his position – that there are direct, necessary links between ideas of rationality and models of democracy.

However, this justification does not fit the more nuanced account of rationality which I am presenting, for one simple but crucial reason: instrumental, communicative and discursive rationality almost certainly exist *in both elitist and deliberative politics*. We have already seen that instrumental rationality applies in deliberative democracy, not just elitist politics. We saw too that communicative rationality applies whenever two or more people communicate with the aim of reaching understanding and autonomous agreement; this can include elitist politics, not just deliberative democracy. And it follows that discourse too can apply in such situations, if two or more people disagree about some factual or normative claim and want genuine agreement. They must present arguments which *could* convince anyone irrespective of time or place, even if not all such people are included (JA 52).

Crucially, if each type of rationality can apply in both elitist and deliberative politics, Dryzek's justification will not work. He needs to argue instead that deliberative politics is more *likely* to see each type of rationality, and in higher amounts. On this view, deliberative democracy is more instrumentally rational, especially for complex problems; more

discursively rational, due to the greater likelihood of inclusion, open-mindedness and the pursuit of common interests; and more communicatively rational, because individuals are more likely to seek genuine understanding and agreement, rather than career-advancement or partisan point-scoring, say.

This argument is more empirical. It requires us to examine not only theoretical ideas about rationality and deliberative democracy but also the burgeoning empirical literature on the strengths and weaknesses of deliberative democracy in practice (Chambers 2003). Empirical arguments are riskier, of course: elitist politics will work better than deliberative politics in some situations. But the revised account of rationality offered here points inevitably to a more empirical defence of deliberative democracy.

So, there is no straight line between a model of rationality and a model of politics. Once we recognise the true nature of instrumental, communicative and discursive rationality, we need a different way of justifying Dryzek's normative goals.

Earlier, I noted that Dryzek's account of rationality put him at the forefront of three key shifts in democratic theory. My arguments here challenge him in each respect. First, his account of rationality does not adequately justify deliberative over aggregative democracy. The account in this paper should do so better. Second, his defence of radical over elitist politics is weakened by showing that elitism is not necessarily linked to instrumental rationality, nor radical politics to communicative/discursive rationality. Third, Dryzek's defence of deliberative democracy ultimately remains too abstract: a more grounded approach is still needed if we are to justify deliberative democracy's superiority in terms of instrumental, communicative and discursive rationality.

Conclusion: the rationalities of deliberative democracy

Dryzek has made important criticisms of theorists who focus overly on instrumental rationality, neglecting its communicative cousin. But he makes the equivalent error, lauding communicative rationality and underrating its instrumental cousin. Dryzek wants to ‘overturn’ instrumental rationality, and sees communicative rationality rising from ‘the ruins of instrumental rationality’ (1993, 214; 1990a, ix). By dropping these overstatements, and theorising the instrumental/communicative relationship differently, Dryzek can get new critical leverage over instrumental rationalists who choose bad means to their ends.

Deliberative democracy should be supported for improving, not avoiding, the application of instrumental rationality: deliberative democracy helps us choose not only better ends but also better means. This argument is about different models of politics, not different models of rationality. Rather than implying that different ideas of rationality necessarily imply different models of politics, Dryzek can defend deliberative democracy as a better way of manifesting instrumental, communicative and discursive rationality. This argument also clarifies the key issues for future research: what models of politics in general, and what particular institutions, procedures and individual dispositions, allow us to choose better means to better ends?

Dryzek’s argument can thus be this: deliberative democracy is a better means to better ends. That important position can be defended better and assessed more accurately with a different account of rationality. In short, communicative rationality has much less relevance to deliberative democracy than Dryzek suggests – and instrumental rationality has much more.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations of Habermas's work, with original German and translated English dates in brackets: **AR:** A Reply, in Honneth and Joas (ed), *Communicative Action* (1986/1991). **ASI:** *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews* (1978-84/1986). **BFN:** *Between Facts and Norms* (1992/1996). **CES:** *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1976/1979). **JA:** *Justification and Application* (1990-1, 1993). **LC:** *Legitimation Crisis* (1973/1976). **MCCA:** *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1983/1990). **OPC:** *On the Pragmatics of Communication* (various/1998). **PDM:** *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985/1987). **PF:** *The Past as Future* (1991/1994). **RC:** A reply to my critics, in Thompson and Held (ed), *Habermas: Critical Debates* (1982). **ST:** *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962/1989). **TCA:** *The Theory of Communicative Action* vols 1 and 2 (1981/1984, 1987). **TIO:** *The Inclusion of The Other* (1996/1998). **TJ:** *Truth and Justification* (1999/2003). **TP:** *Theory and Practice* (various/1974). **TRS:** *Toward a Rational Society* (1968/1971). In the text, references are given in chronological order where possible. (Some collections of essays have diverse dates.)

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APPENDIX A: ‘Deliberative’ or ‘discursive’ democracy?

This appendix, not intended for publication with the article, explains why I talk of ‘deliberative’ not ‘discursive’ democracy. Dryzek prefers the latter term for three reasons. Deliberation implies calm, reasoned argument; discourse may be more unruly. Deliberation can involve internal reflection; discourse must involve discussion. And discourse invokes the work of Foucault and Habermas.²²

I take the first point but I find the last two less relevant. Democrats who emphasise internal reflection still include discussion.²³ Other Habermasians use the term ‘deliberative’²⁴ and as my paper explains, ‘discursive’ is currently a risky term for Dryzek. But ultimately this issue is semantic. Depending on how precise we want to be, we could call Dryzek a democrat, a deliberative democrat, a discursive democrat, a green discursive democrat, or a green transnational discursive democrat. I will talk about deliberative democracy because my arguments apply to this as much as to its subsets. Whatever kind of deliberative democracy one is defending, Dryzek’s justification of it does not convince.

²² Dryzek (2000), pp. v-vi, 3.

²³ Robert Goodin (2003) *Reflective Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 171, 183, 192.

²⁴ For example James Bohman (1996), *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

APPENDIX B: other Frankfurt-School attacks on instrumental rationality

Dryzek's account of instrumental rationality derives partly from Adorno and Horkheimer, as well as Habermas's system/lifeworld distinction.²⁵ This appendix, not intended for publication with the article, briefly explains why we should sidestep Adorno and Horkheimer's conceptually and empirically lax critique, and why we must take care when reading Habermas's system/lifeworld theory.

Adorno and Horkheimer

Adorno and Horkheimer's thesis, roughly, was that the Enlightenment and modern society were not seeing the progress and emancipation promised by reason, but the increasing advance of an instrumental form of reason, which led to domination, authoritarianism, and the Enlightenment's self-destruction.

Adorno and Horkheimer do not offer a tenable critique of instrumental rationality. Consider the conceptual and empirical flaws in Horkheimer's book *The Eclipse of Reason*.²⁶ Conceptually, his account of rationality collapses several ideas into a false dichotomy between 'subjective' and 'objective' reason.²⁷ Empirically, he exaggerates the problem, moving for example from the plausible claim that reason is 'commonly regarded' as primarily subjective, to hyperinflated assertions about the 'complete transformation of the world into a world of means rather than of ends'.²⁸ Such exaggerations are hard to take

²⁵ See especially Dryzek 1990a pp. 4-5, 52, 145-6; 1992, pp. 399-400, 407; 2000, p. 22; 2005, p. 84.

²⁶ Max Horkheimer (1947) *Eclipse of Reason*. London and New York: Continuum.

²⁷ Horkheimer (1947), pp. 3-5.

²⁸ Horkheimer (1947), pp. 7, 69.

seriously. We have obviously not seen a total eclipse of reason and Horkheimer's analysis lacks the conceptual and empirical subtlety to tell us how partial the eclipse is.

The same applies to Horkheimer and Adorno's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*.²⁹ The authors' insights are overshadowed by overstatement; Habermas rightly rebukes the book's account of instrumental rationality for 'oversimplify[ing] its image of modernity so astoundingly' (PDM 112-3) and hence making 'a limited contribution' to empirical analysis of modern society (ASI 49). According to Horkheimer and Adorno, '[t]he whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry. ... Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies'. There has been, we are told, a 'restriction of thought to organization and administration.' Modern people have become 'exactly like one another through isolation in the forced united collectivity'.³⁰

This is fanciful. To describe such claims as a 'logical necessity'³¹ is to misunderstand logical necessity. The authors' epistemological strategy is less like Marxian deduction and more like Foucaultian argument by assertion and over-generalisation; Habermas rightly disavows Adorno's 'aphoristic mode of philosophizing' (ASI 49).

Horkheimer and Adorno also misrepresent some of the Enlightenment philosophers who they use as evidence for their assertions. In particular, they write that Hobbes 'decried the egotism of the self, acknowledged in so doing that society was the destructive principle, and denounced harmony'.³² There are many ways to describe this view of Hobbes, but 'accurate' is not one of them.

²⁹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1972). *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Allen Lane.

³⁰ Horkheimer and Adorno 1972, pp. 126, 36.

³¹ Horkheimer and Adorno 1972, p. 37.

³² Horkheimer and Adorno 1972, p. 90.

Horkheimer and Adorno's historical context, especially Nazism, helps to explain their pessimism, but it does not excuse their conceptual laxity and empirical overstatements. If they had been more conceptually and empirically careful, they simply could not have reached the same conclusions. Their philosophical breadth and depth deserves credit, but their attack on instrumental rationality has little to offer.

Habermas on system and lifeworld

For Habermas, system and lifeworld refer to two ways of integrating society: 'exchange and power mechanisms vs. consensus-forming mechanisms' respectively (AR 252). The 'lifeworld' is the stock of 'unproblematic, common, background convictions' (TCA2 125). 'Each lifeworld provides its members with a common store of cultural knowledge, socialization patterns, values, and norms' (PNC 152).³³ Without such shared understandings, communicative agreement is hard. Lifeworld values may be repressive, note (AR 254).

The 'system' has two parts: 'an economic system that is steered by labor, capital, and commodity markets,' and 'a bureaucratic system of public administration that has a monopoly on force and is thus steered by power' (PMT 193). The system needs lifeworlds for such things as a supply of loyal labour, while lifeworlds need the system for material reproduction (TCA2 319-21). However, the system has become dominant, increasingly 'colonizing' lifeworlds, leading to 'loss of meaning, anomie and personality disorders' (RC 281), 'the destruction of traditional forms of life,' 'disenchantment and alienation,' and the imposition of monetary incentives on non-monetary practices (TCA2 321, 330). There is an

³³ Jürgen Habermas (2001) *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*. Cambridge: Polity.

‘inversion of means and ends’ (AR 258). Getting money to stay alive turns into staying alive to get money, perhaps.

I do not see how we can blame means-ends rationality here. When the system colonizes lifeworlds, *the problem is ends not means*. Rather than our ends being set in lifeworlds, they are set in the system. Rather than choosing our own ends, we follow economic and bureaucratic ends. Rather than choosing other-minded, communal ends, we follow self-interested and utilitarian ends. The problem is not means-ends rationality but the ends which are pursued. The alleged domination of means-ends rationality is a symptom not a cause of these developments.

Unfortunately, Habermas’s flawed pre-1990 conceptual schema points towards means-ends rationality as the problem, as does some of his language. He invites misinterpretation by talking of the ‘instrumentalization of the lifeworld by systemic constraints,’ with everyday communication suffering ‘a forced adjustment to cognitive-instrumental action orientations’ – a ‘one-sided rationalization’ of the lifeworld involving a ‘shift to purposive-rational action orientations’ (TCA2 325-6). He refers to ‘the rationalization of the lifeworld’ as system imperatives ‘*instrumentalize* a communicatively structured lifeworld’ (TCA2 155, 187). He clearly implies that ‘the rationalization of action systems’ either involves means-ends (cognitive-instrumental) or communicative (moral-practical and aesthetic-expressive) rationality (TCA2 303). He bemoans ‘the rise to dominance of cognitive-instrumental aspects’ of rationality (ASI 91). Such language is especially common in a 1968 text which sees ‘the expansion of subsystems of purposive-rational action’ as a key part of ‘rationalization,’ describes a ‘confrontation’ between instrumental and communicative rationality, and states that ‘traditional structures are increasingly subordinated to conditions of instrumental or strategic rationality’ (TRS 96-8). Yet if ‘purposive-rational action orientations become self-sufficient’ when lifeworld ends are

‘uprooted’ in bureaucracies (TCA2 323), *the cause is not means-ends rationality itself, but the rise of bureaucratic ends.*

Habermas is more accurate in referring to ‘functional’ rationality, ‘economic and administrative rationality,’ and ‘system rationality, be it the market-mediated rationality of the medium of money or the organization-mediated rationality of the power medium’ (AR 258-60; see also RC 283; TCA2 321, 330). These terms, focusing on ends not means, are better than the confused and confusing term ‘instrumental rationality.’ My interpretation here follows that of Maeve Cooke.³⁴

Ultimately, what worries Habermas is the dominance of ‘a single fundamental form of rationality – instrumental, economic and administrative reason’ (ASI 69). But there must be non-economic and non-administrative forms of instrumental rationality too, and we should not criticize instrumental rationality in general just because of some deficient manifestations of it.

Dryzek, like Habermas, moves between instrumental rationality as cause and symptom. He misleadingly treats it as a cause when he talks of ‘triumphant instrumental rationality’ and ‘the progress of instrumental rationality’, but he rightly implies that it is a symptom when he discusses the rise of ‘system imperatives’ and ‘colonization by money and power’.³⁵ Most helpfully, he sometimes talks of the rise of *economic* rationality, an egoistic subset of instrumental rationality: ‘money and power’ colonise the lifeworld as people become ‘rational in the sense of their capacity to calculate in pursuit of their self-interest narrowly defined, and their politics becomes one of the pursuit of private desires’.³⁶

³⁴ Maeve Cooke (1994) *Language and Reason: A Study of Habermas’s Pragmatics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 145-6.

³⁵ Dryzek 1990a, p. 52.

³⁶ Dryzek 1996, pp. 11-13, 94.

Unfortunately, Dryzek then either equates economic and instrumental rationality or overlooks the difference.³⁷ Ultimately, it remains unclear if Dryzek sees the lifeworld being colonised by instrumental rationality, which cannot be the case, or by economic rationality, which is a plausible accusation but leaves instrumental rationality itself undamaged.

So, Dryzek's criticisms are important and serious, but they are seriously overstated if they are aimed at instrumental rationality. To the extent that we are seeing colonisation of the lifeworld, this is not about instrumental rationality as such but the sidelining of lifeworld ends by economic and political ends. Dryzek should, I suggest, avoid claims about 'an instrumentally rationalized world', the 'victory of instrumental rationality', or instrumental rationality having 'invaded and conquered realms where it does not belong, leading to the thorough scientization, bureaucratization, and commercialization of social life and politics'.³⁸

Dryzek is rightly worried about a world where people are reduced to making choices about means but not ends, a world where ends are largely set by other people or by markets. But this is not about instrumental rationality as Dryzek defines it. This is an economically rationalised world, a world which has seen the victory of economic rationality, a world where economic rationality has invaded and conquered areas where it does not belong. Economic rationality means means and ends; instrumental rationality means means.

³⁷ Dryzek 1996, pp. 93, 107-11.

³⁸ Dryzek 1990a, pp. 5, 145; Dryzek 2000, p. 22.