

## ***Deliberation Online: An Impediment Against Fundamentalism Offline?***

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### **Abstract**

The opposition between fundamentalism and deliberative democracy is basic to the argument of this article. In the following we shall take our point of departure in a procedural understanding of fundamentalism that enables us to see how different substantive values might turn out to be fundamentalist. Any form of communication that obstructs possible change of preferences might be fundamentalist. The decisive criterion is thus not to point out particular forms of communication as fundamentalist or deliberative per se; the decisive criterion is how the communication works.

Based on our procedural understanding of fundamentalism we move on to argue in favour of a value pluralism that is basic to deliberative democracy. This pluralism is then contrasted to both fundamentalism and relativism. In order to establish value pluralism there is a need for judgment of particular norms and values – as opposed to merely understanding of the differences. Hence, it is argued that value pluralism requires substantive judgment of the differences. The arguments partly draw upon Jürgen Habermas' idea of unconstrained discourse and Charles Taylor's discussion of politics of recognition, along with Immanuel Kant's concept of reflective judgment, or enlarged thought, in his third critique. In order to make legitimate judgments of particular norms and values we need to judge from the perspective of everyone else.

The latter part of the article discusses how online contexts of communication contribute to global communication and deliberative democracy. Online polling, blogs and storytelling are forms of communication that may, under certain circumstances, make substantial contributions. James Fishkin's idea of deliberative polling online and Robert Cavalier's PICOLA project are discussed. In concluding it is argued that the virtual realities that are available online might be even more important than the democratic procedures per se in realising more enlarged thought and global democracy worldwide. Hence, global communication online might, under certain circumstances, work as an impediment against fundamentalist knowledge offline.

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**Keywords**

Deliberate democracy, procedural fundamentalism, reflective judgment, online polling.

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## Introduction

Fundamentalism as applied in media is often used as a label of certain kinds of behaviour that is internally linked to religion. Standard cases of reference are, among others, Moslem reactions towards ironic cartoons in Western media of the prophet Mohammed; religious minorities who refuse to subordinate to the majority culture of society, eg the request to be free to exercise religious practises without interruption from the majority society; terrorist actions in the name of the religious conviction that harm done towards Moslem religious culture should be revenged (like September 11).

Many people relate fundamentalism to religion, in particular Islam, as a contrast to Western, democratic and liberal values. Against this background it is possible to establish a cultural division line between fundamentalist and democratic values, based on the degree to which religion is considered to be turned into politics or not. This is unlucky because we get loss of an important point that I shall argue for: also Western liberal 'values' might appear as highly fundamentalist. So how should we delineate fundamentalism? I shall argue that fundamentalism ought to be conceived of in procedural terms. The focus is then shifted from specific (substantive) values to the way values are being treated. Whether we are presented with a morally problematic kind of fundamentalism depends on whether there is an argumentative disclosure for counter-arguments. We might thus ask: is it possible to argue against a particular cultural norm? Is it open to revision? Can it be refuted? A negative answer to these questions points in the direction of what is here defined as procedural fundamentalism. Such fundamentalism does not allow for counter-arguments, revision or refusal of contested norms. This is exactly the reason why it is relevant to criticise a fundamentalist position.

In several other contexts I have distinguished between legitimate and illegitimate paternalism based on procedural criteria for defining paternalism (Thorseth 1999:75-80). We shall have a brief look at paternalism as it relates to fundamentalism in a certain sense. Paternalism means enforcement against someone's freedom for the benefit of that individual, and it might on many occasions be morally legitimate. Parents' upbringing and education of their own children is an obvious case in question. Not every kind of parental upbringing is, however, an example of *paternalistic* enforcement. This is the case when it is contested whether the practice in question actually is for the benefit of the child. Forced marriage is a case that fits in here. Some instances of forced marriage are obviously fundamentalist, which should not be confused with the institution of arranged marriages as such, as arranged marriages are embraced by many Moslem women because they believe it is for their own best interests. In these cases it cannot be claimed that the institution of arranged marriage is paternalist, either, because it is not connected to enforcement. Arranged marriage as such is neither fundamentalist nor paternalist. Still, this norm is often associated with fundamentalist religious values. This is both unlucky and unwarranted.

The procedural relation between fundamentalism and paternalism underlies the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate paternalism. The latter implies that those who exercise paternalism are not receptive to counter-arguments, hence, they behave in a fundamentalist way. Such procedural paternalism is here defined as illegitimate paternalism, and it creates problems in modern, multicultural societies. The problem is often a consequence of migration which tends to create and also require change of religious values. Migration is not, however, the only reason why this problem arises. Cultural changes within most modern societies often lead to contests about many traditional norms and practises. This, in its turn requires of many people that they have to undertake profound choices with respect to questions of belief and religious belonging. Such choices do not only concern relations of belonging. Borders are moved or changed due to migration. The orthodox Moslem suddenly belongs to a different society when she is in Norway as

compared to the countryside back home in Pakistan. In order to act autonomously it is a precondition that one is a member of the society by which one is surrounded. Freedom of religion requires a real possibility of choice of faith, but also a possibility to criticise, revise or sometimes even to give up one's former religious belief. Fundamentalism might be expressed by way of attempts to hinder this possibility. If such fundamentalism is paternalist it is by the same token also illegitimate.

## Part I

### Fundamentalism – A Procedural Approach

The Moslem fundamentalist, who wants to be recognised for her own non-argumentative behaviour towards contested norms, renders herself guilty of inconsistency. This is because the claim to non-interference already presupposes argumentative participation. The struggle for recognition of fundamentalist behaviour (for instance, the banning of Western values) is equivalent to demanding respect for criticising these values. Refusal to state one's reasons for withdrawal from discourse, while still claiming a right to be respected for oppressive behaviour towards group members, is an example of non-argumentative fundamentalism. Such fundamentalism is characterised by *argumentative closure*, as opposed to practical discourse which is associated with argumentative disclosure (Habermas 1990). The morally relevant distinction between argumentative closure and disclosure is *procedural*. Fundamentalism as described above might be present within any form of life, characterised by a refusal to engage in critical reflection of any particular form of life that has become contested. This is also an argument against the belief that enforced argumentation is just another kind of fundamentalism.

#### *'Traditional' and 'modern' fundamentalism: Introductory examples*

##### (i) Fundamentalism as rational behaviour

According to Karl-Otto Apel, the increasing fundamentalism within Islam might be considered a reaction towards the fear of negative influence from the West (Thorseth 1994:6). In his opinion this is a normal reaction towards much of the bad rhetoric that most people hear about the West. As a result, religion is turned into an argument against Western, secular influence. This might be reflected either in refusal to argue or in preventing others within their own group from arguing about contested norms. Fundamentalism in this case consists in a refusal to argue about (contested) religious norms.

The problem that I want to emphasise is that the fundamentalist refuses to argue even if the contested norm in question has been exposed to public opinion, by being contested within the public sphere. The important question is whether it ought to make a difference if the contested norm in question is about religion as compared to democratic values. I shall argue that global democracy ought to be preferred to competing systems of communication. In order to do so it is necessary to draw a demarcation line between the communicative procedures of fundamentalism as opposed to democracy. In the following we shall have a brief look at some examples of procedural fundamentalism.

##### (ii) Fundamentalism and essentialism

Essentialism is mainly linked to identity. Essentialism is an example of fundamentalism because it is regarded as if certain norms and values were beyond revision, for whatever reason (for instance, the aim of preservation of a particular

form of life). Thus, essentialism becomes one among several kinds of fundamentalism, as there are other kinds of fundamentalism which do not particularly relate to identity. The main characteristic of the essentialist fundamentalist, then, is the belief in some non-dialogical or static identity, often attached to ethnicity. The Indian parents who arrange their daughters' marriages (against the daughter's will) fit into this category. The same holds true for the 'modern' nationalist who wants to preserve a white Swedish majority of a future Sweden, as well. A third example is one that is discussed by K. Anthony Appiah (1994:154-5). It concerns the Afro-American nationalists who claim recognition for a particular black identity that they want to preserve, while not recognising that this very identity is made up within the white majority. People who react negatively towards Samis who enter MacDonald's dressed in traditional Sami clothes might also fit into this category of essentialism. The common denominator in all these examples is the non-argumentative conceptualisation of some particular (group) identity, regarded to be beyond revision and critical reflection.

### (iii) 'Fundamentalism in disguise'

The fundamentalists in (i) and (ii) might be considered to be 'overt' fundamentalists, i.e. they do not pretend to behave in a non-fundamentalist way; they act more or less strategically in order to realise some particular goal. A different kind of fundamentalist is the one who objects to fundamentalism (i) and (ii), while withdrawing some of her own beliefs from critical reflection. The dogmatic Western feminist who criticises the Moslem fundamentalist might be a case in question, if she does not allow any critical objection towards feminism from the fundamentalist Moslem. There are two points I want to make in connection with this example: (1) the feminist and the Moslem are both fundamentalists about some particular values. (2) They both behave non-argumentatively about some values they take to be beyond criticism. Another example demonstrating this scenario was a world conference among female activists discussing prostitution. None of the prostitutes who were present were allowed to engage in the discussion, probably because it was thought that they might propose ideas in favour of prostitution.<sup>1</sup> The unwillingness to accept African women's objections to accusations about being oppressed is another case in question.

A common denominator in these examples is the subordination of all arguments under one perspective, along with the raising of some particular norm or perspective that is taken to be beyond critical reflection or dialogical argumentation. The 'modern' fundamentalism does not differ from 'traditional' religious fundamentalism as far as structural or procedural characteristics are concerned. Still, the 'modern' fundamentalist pretends to be non-fundamentalist and thus rational, as opposed to 'traditional' fundamentalists. This is why I describe the 'modern' fundamentalist as a 'fundamentalist in disguise'. In order to identify the morally relevant features of fundamentalism, I think it is important to realise that fundamentalism and rationality are not the essential opposites in characterising the difference between the Moslem and feminist fundamentalists in the preceding example.

These instances of fundamentalism demonstrate several interesting differences. For my purpose it is, however, the common denominators that are of main concern: First, there is the subordination of all criticism under one perspective, and second there is the withdrawal of some particular norm (religion, belief system, ideology etc.) from critical reflection.

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<sup>1</sup> Ringdal, Nils Johan, *Verdens vanskeligste yrke. De prstituertes verdenshistorie* (Oslo: Cappelen. 1997)

### **Fundamentalism in media: the Fadime case**

Fundamentalism might be conceived as suppression of challenges of particularity, as when a particular cultural practice or a story that is put forth with a claim to approval without questioning. To make this concrete, we shall take our point of departure in a particular story from the Nordic media. In January 2002 Swedish-Kurd Fadime was killed by her father in Sweden. The reason why she was killed was that she had a Swedish boyfriend. The murder was referred to in the media as a murder of honour, and it was seen as an expression of conflict over the cultural norm of forced marriage, a norm that is extensive in many Moslem societies. The murder and the debate following from it have necessitated a public reflection about a claim to participate in the public debate, and also about the practice to refer to immigrants in terms of representative groups. Immigrants are often conceived as groups in the light of ethnicity, culture and identity. Additionally, these 'groups' are considered to be represented by their leaders in accordance with Western, democratic principles. The contested practises of forced marriage and murder of honour do, however, separate the members within the minority societies just as well as separating minority groups and the society at large.

The murder of Fadime and the debate in Sweden and Norway following from it clearly demonstrate that Moslems in these two countries cannot and should not be defined on the basis of a uniform group concept. Fadime was killed by her father because she loved a Swedish man, and because she spoke her opinions of love and marriage openly in the media. She argued against arranged marriages, in favour of the right to choose a partner of one's own. We might formulate this case as a problem concerning the relation between the particular and the general, in cases where particular arguments are considered to be justified with respect to 'the others', whereas not looked upon as acceptable 'for us'. We may ask: what is it that appeals to general circumstances, and how do these appeals relate to something beyond the particular, something of universal scope?

We may further ask how to describe the case above, what description is the correct one? No matter how we describe it – as an act of murder of honour or something else – our description will on any occasion be a normative act. This is because we look for solutions to the problems that we raise. This act is either a murder of honour – Fadime's father wanted to rescue the family's honour – or it was about a sick man's misdeed as Fadime's sister Fidan claimed (Eriksen and Wadel 2002).

In describing this act as a murder of honour a particular appeal is thereby made to particular circumstances about a particular culture. As a result, the description might easily be exploited for both criticism, but also for justification of murder of honour, as was done by Shabana Rehman and the imams respectively, in the Norwegian debate succeeding this act.<sup>2</sup> Whether this particular description is used for criticism or justification, it will in both cases encourage segregation. To describe the same act as the misdeed of a sick man, as Fadime's family did, does not, however, appeal to culturally specific circumstances to the same extent as the concept 'murder of honour' does. The fact that some people commit sick acts because they do not function well in society might be affect anyone, and it is not necessarily related to ethnic or cultural status in particular. The appeal to culturally specific circumstances is part of the fundamentalism that is exercised in this case. The culturally specific appeal does not, however, necessarily imply a case of fundamentalism, provided that the specific appeal also includes a more general appeal that transcends the particular circumstances (Dryzek 2000:57-80).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Shabana Rehman – a Norwegian woman brought up in Norway by her Pakistani parents – is an eager discussant in Norwegian media on topics concerning multicultural affairs, in particular on religious suppression of women.

<sup>3</sup> Dryzek here discusses deliberation in view of two different tests: (i) communication that involves coercion should be excluded, and (ii) communication that cannot connect the particular to the general should be excluded.

If the act in question is considered as a sick person's misdeed, it is turned into something that calls for a more general appeal. By contrast, if the act is described in terms of a particular cultural or religious norm of a particular society cannot be defended by many. The justification by appeal to the particular endangers by mobilising disgust within the society at large. Further, I believe that the particular appeal, as an example of procedural fundamentalism, might enforce a kind of culture relativism that weakens minorities as well as the society at large. Ethical argumentation in a global world should instead strengthen minorities as well as majority. One means of contributing in this direction is to avoid particular appeals devoid of a universal component. A relativist defence of particular appeals is thus not available.

What we need to establish in order to avoid particular appeals being turned into fundamentalism, is to establish a link to a universal appeal that transcends what is embedded in the particular or culturally specific norm or practice. What we should aim at establishing is a mutual respect for each other's circumstances. Misdeeds as such transcend culturally embedded norms, whereas culturally defined misdeeds are embedded in particular cultures, and hence specific.

In this paper it is argued that we need to distinguish between different kinds of fundamentalism, the primary aim being to disconnect the conceptual linkage between religion and fundamentalism. Rather, our focus is to better understand the procedural features of fundamentalism. A distinction has been made between legitimate and illegitimate paternalism. Fundamentalism is here characterised in terms of procedural traits of communication rather than by its particular content, such that any values might appear to be fundamentalist, whether they relate to religion, gender, sex, ethnicity or others. The Fadime case illustrates how argumentation might be characterised as fundamentalist by making a particular appeal to something that cannot be shared by everyone.

### **Value pluralism and judgment**

The position we want to defend is a criticism of both procedural fundamentalism and relativism. Part of the problem about moral relativism is the envisaging of a normative position that is exempted from moral judgment. This is the case if we believe that we can coherently understand without judging, for instance practices that many people strongly disapprove of, like female mutilation or women being banned from education or employment outside the home, or ethnic cleansing. Rather than taking a relativist stance we should argue in favour of value pluralism. According to the latter:

- Conflicting goods might both be valuable.
- We should recognise and respect other cultures.
- Recognition requires substantive judgment and not only formal or epistemic judgment.

As an example of value pluralism, we could consistently hold both that 'community cohesion matters morally' which is more true of many Eastern societies than of Western societies, and at the same time we may hold that 'individual freedom matters morally' which comes closer to Western ideology than to Eastern ideology.<sup>4</sup> A basic requirement is, however, that there is a limit as to what should be tolerated. Among these are certainly any instances of abuses of human rights.

According to this interpretation of value pluralism we do not have to commit ourselves to moral relativism. While undertaking a substantive judgment we thereby show respect for those with whom we disagree, by being willing to get into

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<sup>4</sup> I owe this example to Levy (2002), chapter 8.



argumentation with them. The examples of contested practices mentioned above are objectionable from a human rights perspective, and it can hardly be argued that we show respect for the plurality of opinions if we just leave such examples unquestioned. The relativist solution would be to leave it exactly there, making an appeal to the claim that moral judgments are only relative to some standard of framework. The important and difficult question to be treated is whether it would be legitimate to interfere with such condemnable practices. If we choose not to interfere even if we strongly condemn human rights abuses, it is tantamount to stating that these acts are right because they are permissible by the moral standards of the people who perform them. This position is hard to defend in a world where we are continuously reminded that conflicting norms are not only relative to particular cultures; in fact, conflicting norms and moral conflicts prevail as much *within* as *between* cultures. This is essential to the question whether non-interference demonstrates recognition and respect.

Above it is indicated that interference is associated with substantive judgment as opposed to merely formal judgment, and hence it also demonstrates involvement with the individuals or culture in question. Non-interference is more closely linked to a policy of neutrality which should not necessarily be identified with recognition and respect. Abstaining from substantive judgment is dangerous because it leaves the floor open to fundamentalism.

It is important to the argument of this chapter to establish that global democracy runs contrary to any form of fundamentalism. This follows from the procedural criterion that has been discussed above. Additionally, it is equally important that global democracy implies judging as opposed to merely understanding. This is contained in the concept of value pluralism discussed above. A third criterion for excluding fundamentalism is that our judgments of different moral systems are not purely formal. This last criterion is inherent in the claim that purely formal judgments which are characteristic of moral relativism are insufficient with respect to value pluralism. A preliminary conclusion, then, is that global democracy would require a value pluralism that rules out some moral systems due to fundamentalism. Non-fundamentalist communication calls for intervention whenever basic human rights are jeopardised. The universal status of human rights is rooted in both a legal and a moral notion of value pluralism. The Kantian notions of humanity and enlarged thought are basic to our understanding of what legitimises a universal appeal of particular judgments. In the next paragraph we will explore the Kantian notion of reflective judgment.

### **Reflective judgment of the particular**

From the arguments above we will, as a start, highlight the following points:

- Putting all values on the same par shows disrespect for the differences, and it undermines value pluralism.
- Attributing significance to particular values is a dialogical enterprise that cannot be purely formal.
- Hence, value pluralism requires substantive judgment of the differences.

The standard by which we make moral judgments is not only substantive as opposed to purely formal. Additionally we also need a standard for criticising norms and practices that we find intolerable and dehumanising. Different solutions have been suggested, among them, some common standard of rationality that applies in particular to the public domain. John Rawls is an exponent of this solution, especially by his concept of 'the veil of ignorance' behind which people rationally choose the institutions that neither advantage nor disadvantage anyone (Rawls 1970). An obvious problem about such a solution is that it is deeply rooted in Western standards of rationality due, among other factors, to the strong weight

that is put on individual autonomy. In many Eastern countries collectivism is embraced to a large extent, and it is conceived as partly incompatible with Western individualism (Madsen and Strong 2003). Charles Taylor's position can be seen as a solution to the problem of reconciling differences among ethical systems:

The crucial idea is that people can bond not in spite of but because of difference. They can sense, that is, that their lives are narrower and less full alone than in association with each other. In this sense, the difference defines a complementarity (Taylor 2002 cited in Madsen and Strong 2003:11).

This does not preclude criticism of moral systems, instead, it requires, for the criticism to be valid, that it is predicated on a broad understanding of what the practices mean in their context (Madsen and Strong 2003:11). In order to have knowledge of the practices of alien cultures it is necessary to have access to the particular contexts in question. Online communication appears to be a valuable means of getting such access. The main reason why, is the unique possibility of this medium for communication worldwide (Coleman and Gøtze 2004; Fishkin 1997; Wheeler 2005; Thorseth 2006).

If we view pluralism in light of Taylor's politics of recognition, where identity is seen as fundamentally dialogically established and developed, any recognition will be dependent upon the dialogues that constitute the different identities. Following this line of thought, we may now see that judgments of others at the same time require participation by persons who undertake the judgments, due to the relationship which is thereby established to those we are judging. This way of reasoning is also reflected in Stanley Cavell's understanding of how we could criticise for instance the institution of slavery without dehumanising:

[W]hat a man who sees certain others as slaves is missing is not something about slaves exactly and not exactly about human beings. He is missing something about himself, or rather something about his connection with these people, his internal relation with them, so to speak (Cavell 1997:377, cited in Madsen and Strong 2003:13).

The important point to draw from this, and which is also consistent with the remaining arguments above, is that value pluralism requires admission of a relationship with the others in relation to whom we define our identity. What is at stake is not so much how we judge different others, but rather how we could allow others to see us. Value pluralism is then envisaged as a system where the most important enterprise would be to gain recognition of oneself.

Now we would like to point out how this recognition of oneself links to Kant's concept of the moral law. In the second critique we find several formulations of the categorical imperative: to treat everyone else not merely as a means but also always as an end in herself, and to consider the humanity in every single person as equally worthy of the same kind of respect.<sup>5</sup> In Kant's third critique he speaks of reflective judgment or enlarged thought (Kant 1952 [1790]:§ 40). This concept contains a visualisation of how particular judgments gain legitimacy through a kind of universal appeal.

In Kant's conceptual scheme judgments are of two different kinds: either they are determinant, as when something particular is subsumed under universal laws, or, by contrast, '[i]f only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it,

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<sup>5</sup> 'Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means', (Kant 1981 [1785]:36).

then the judgment is simply *reflective*' (Kant 1952 [1790], Introduction IV: 18). The purpose of reflective judgment is not to determine anything; rather, it is to give itself a law. Hence, validity is gained through reflection of something particular as opposed to subsuming something under universal laws. This is partly because judgment, which is the topic of investigation in his third critique, is about empirical contingencies and not about universal laws of nature or final ends of freedom.<sup>6</sup> Kant's own focal point in his treatment of judgment is taste and the sublime, and applies first and foremost to the aesthetic domain, as distinguished from nature (pure reason) and freedom (practical reason). Hannah Arendt and Sheyla Benhabib have, however, extended the reflective judgment to the public and political faculties, as well (Arendt 1968; Benhabib 1992).

The validity of judgments depends on the judging, and it is not valid for those who do not judge. This point is made by Hanna Arendt, in emphasizing that the claim to validity presupposes communication between self and others. Hence, a judgment's claim to validity can never extend further than the public realm of those who are members of it (Arendt 1968:221). There are in particular two aspects concerning validity that should be noted here. One concerns the relation between the particular and the universal, whereas the other has to do with the public aspect of judgment. Any particular judgment is based in contingent and finite appeals that nevertheless may transcend the subjective conditions of the particular judgment. The potential for transcending the purely subjective condition is due to the communicative aspect of all judgments. Reflective judgment has to do with public – as opposed to private – use of reason.

The basic point is that communication rather than expression is required in public reason. Part of this claim on freedom to make public use of reason builds on the maxims of common understanding: (1) to think for oneself, (2) to think from the standpoint of everyone else, ie enlarged thought and (3) always to think consistently (Kant 1952 [1790] § 40:294). The first is the maxim of understanding; the second the maxim of judging, and the third the maxim of reason. All of these maxims of public reason are more profound than any other use of reason, and they are standards for reasoning for addressing 'the world at large' (O'Neill 1989:48).

In addressing the world at large reason accepts no external authority. It is this use of reason that is at work in judgment of particular situations, derived from the human capacity for reflective judgment. Thus, we see how reflective judgment and enlarged thinking in Kant is basic to any other form of communication. This is the important point to be drawn from his model for validation in the public faculty, and it is particularly interesting because it gives an account of how reflection of particular situations and conditions can make a claim to validity. This holds true as far as the appeals put forth address a universal audience. By contrast, addressing only a restricted audience cannot make claim to something which is universally communicable. Still, private uses of reason may be legitimate for certain purposes. The important point to be made is that '[t]here are no good reasons for tolerating any private uses of reason that damage public uses of reason' (O'Neill 1989:49).

Non-fundamentalist value pluralism has to steer the course between relativism on the one hand, and dogmatic fundamentalism conceived as private use of reason on the other. This position must demonstrate recognition of (substantive) differences, while also making an appeal to some moral claims that are non-relativistic ally true.

The distinction between formal and substantive judgment is of uttermost importance to the argument of this paper. What we want to establish is on the one hand that fundamentalism is defined on the basis of procedural rather than substantive criteria; on the other hand, we must also avoid relativism. Thus, relativism might turn out to be an example of fundamentalism by evading judgment

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<sup>6</sup> Judgment is one among three cognitive faculties, the other two being understanding and reason, the subject of the first and second of his critiques, respectively.

or substantive criticism. In a world of (multi)cultural conflicts we need to be able to distinguish between morally acceptable and morally unacceptable behaviour and moral systems. For this purpose, Kant's concepts of enlarged thought and public use of reason are helpful.

## Part II

### Online contexts of global communication

The approach to global communication is here closely linked to the idea of deliberative democracy. The global aspect is contained in the vision of communication that transcends borders of all kinds, not least geographical, whereas the deliberative aspect might best be conceived as direct communication aiming at qualifying and possibly changing arguments and opinions in the public domain. The outcome of deliberation might be a change of preferences and opinions, due to access of opposing views of the matters discussed. In the following paragraphs we shall have a brief look at some projects aiming at deliberation in the sense just described. Deliberation has on some occasions been carried out as a controlled trial ahead of elections, like the PICOLA project in the USA.<sup>7</sup> The theory underlying this project is labelled deliberative polling which has been developed by James Fishkin.<sup>8</sup> This issue of online polling is also discussed by Coleman & Gøtze (2004), and by Dag Elgesem (2005).

### Online deliberation and Democracy Unbound

My piece of work in the project *Democracy Unbound* partly deals with online communication, and the question of feasibility of global communication – or worldwide deliberation – across boundaries, across stereotypes of which fundamentalism is an example. My philosophical interest relates to public use of reason online. As yet, there are no conclusive reports supporting the assumptions that communication online moves in a more democratic and unbound direction. As we shall see, there are reports underpinning the democratic and borderless potential of this new technology (Wheeler: 2005) and Coleman and Gøtze: 2004)), but there are also reports of the opposite (Sunstein 2001). Rather than discussing these opposing reports in any detail, I shall focus on the kind of communication that is contrasted to fundamentalism. A main objective is to demonstrate why online communication might work as an impediment against procedural fundamentalism.

#### *Deliberative democracy*

There are different notions of democracy, some of which are more demanding than others, eg regarding the participation and influence of the citizens. Democracy might be representative or direct, and the scope may vary (local, national or federal, supranational, global). The most basic characteristic is, however, the plurality of voices upon which opinions and decisions are based. How should we make sure that policies pay attention to the plurality of parties concerned, and how should we safeguard the procedures at work? Within the *Democracy Unbound* project Robert Goodin (2007) has argued in favour of enfranchising all affected interests, while the psychologists in the project group, Henry Montgomery and Girts Dimdins have carried out an experimental study of egalitarian vs. proportional voting, claiming that proportional voting is preferable.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See <http://caae.phil.cmu.edu/picola/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> See <http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/>.

<sup>9</sup> See this volume.

The notion of deliberative democracy pays particular attention to the kind of communication involved. Deliberation relates to discursive democracy as discussed by John Dryzek (2001), and it is partly based upon Habermas' idea of practical discourse as we have seen. The ethical norm of a free and non-coerced mode of communication, free from both external and internal obstructions, is basic. A necessary prerequisite is a plurality of parties and opinions, and their accessibility. Further, the final arbiter is public reason itself which is the only legitimate authority in policy making. From this it follows that not only political decision makers, but any public opinion or decision should be exposed to open and critical debate. This is the normative basis for the argument of this paper.

## **Deliberative polling online**

### *Deliberative polling*

The core idea of deliberative polling is to contribute to a better-informed democracy. The method, as developed by Fishkin (1997), is to use television and public opinion in a new and constructive way. A random, representative sample is polled on the targeted issues. One among many examples is the national deliberative poll of the USA on health care and education. Results are also available from deliberative polling in different other countries around the world, among others, China, Greece, Italy and Northern Ireland.<sup>10</sup>

After the first baseline poll, members of the sample are invited to gather in some place in order to discuss the issues, together with competing experts and politicians. After the deliberations, the sample is again asked the original questions. The resulting changes in opinion represent the conclusions the public would reach, if people had opportunity to become more informed and more engaged by the issues.

### *Deliberative polling online*

The project Public Informed Citizen Online Assembly (PICOLA) has been developed by Robert Cavalier.<sup>11</sup> It takes its point of departure in the theory of deliberative polling as developed by Fishkin. PICOLA is primarily a tool for carrying out deliberative polling in online contexts. One objective of this software development is to create the next-generation of Computer Mediated Communication tools for online structured dialogue and deliberation. An audio/video synchronous environment is complemented with a multimedia asynchronous environment. A general gateway (the PICOLA) contains access to these communication environments as well as registration areas, background information, and surveys (polls). The PICOLA user interface allows for a dynamic multimedia participant environment. On the server side, secure user authentication and data storage/retrieval are provided. Real-time audio conferencing and certain peer-to-peer features are implemented using Flash Communication Server.

Mobile PICOLA extends the synchronous conversation module and the survey module. The former provides a true 'anytime/anywhere' capability to the deliberative poll; the latter allows for real time data input and analysis. And with

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<sup>10</sup> More information on the method and different trials are accessible at <http://cdd.stanford.edu/>.

<sup>11</sup> Visit Cavaliers homepage here <http://www.hss.cmu.edu/philosophy/faculty-cavalier.php>. More information of the PICOLA project is accessible here <http://caae.phil.cmu.edu/picola/index.html>

real-time data gathering, it becomes possible display the results of a deliberative poll at the end of the deliberation day, thereby allowing for stakeholders and others present to see and discuss the results as those results are being displayed. The interface relations made possible by this technology is of vital importance to the deliberative process, as it allows for synchronous conversation in real time. Thus, it appears to come very close to offline interface communication.

Several other reports on online deliberation are discussed by Coleman and Gøtze (2001). Some of their examples are drawn from trials of deliberation between local politicians and their electors. By and large a main conclusion seems to be that the dialogical and responding structure of communication is obtained between the parties involved. However, it seems to be a clear tendency that there is a decline in deliberation as soon as the period of the trial has ended. Besides, the scope of the experiments discussed is of limited/local scope, and thus they are not comparable to a global level of communication.

### **Blogs, storytelling and enlarged thought**

The communication going on in blogs has been characterized by the following hallmarks by Coleman and Gøtze:

A blog is a powerful way of telling stories that refer to, and make sense of, the documents and messages that we create and exchange in our professional and private lives. It is a simply designed and usable storytelling technology that could represent the next wave of grassroots knowledge and management implementations. Storytelling and blogs share one common ground: grassroots interaction (Coleman and Gøtze 2001:34).

The relation between storytelling and blogs is interesting to our discussion, not only because of its assumed grassroot interaction, but more importantly because storytelling links to reflective judgment and enlarged thought as displayed in Kant's third critique. The idea is that something particular – a story – is given, whereas the universal by which it is to be judged, is not given, it has to be found. This is how Kant characterises reflective judgment as something different from determinant judgment. The openness in the structure of reflective judgment is available through the particular.

If blogs are to promote reflective judgment some communicative requirements must prove to be present. The most important, according to the maxim of enlarged thought, is to think from the standpoint of everyone else, as we have seen. To the extent blogs promote such thought they support the claim of this paper that the internet may contribute positively to facilitate modes of communication that are associated with the particularity at work in reflective thinking.

Some critical voices have argued against this positive characteristic of blogs, mainly due to a democracy problem. This is because blogs run the risk of being turned into chaotic cacophony of voices, a claim put forth by the Swedish media ombudsman Yrsa Stenius.<sup>12</sup> Her main argument against blogs is that they lack the critical and structured kind of dialogues that are urgent if media is to work democratically, not least by preventing those in power to choose the problems to be raised. Against Stenius it might, however, be argued that the unstructured cacophony might qualify even better than structured debates in media because the dialogues in blogs are, to some extent, withdrawn from the power relations that are present in media.

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<sup>12</sup> This is a claim put forth by the Swedish media ombudsman Yrsa Stenius, referred in Lindgren, Lena. *Morgenbladet* June 8 -14, 2007.

Even if politicians are not in power in the media, journalists who belong to the media definitely are.

Another argument against the democratic potential of blogs could be that the storytelling going on there may not be democratically relevant, nor does it necessarily contribute to more enlarged thought. The important question to be raised is, however, what kind of topics should be regarded relevant for the sake of deliberative democracy. If we look at the questions that are raised in deliberative polls, they concern political and public questions about for instance health policies, traffic or tax regulations, and the like. The topics of some blogs concern similar issues, whereas others concern more private issues. Still, I believe the most important potential for blogs to promote enlarged thought is due to the possibility of telling particular stories to people who do not know for sure what exactly they look for when visiting the blog in question.

### **Virtual and possible judgment online**

When Kant talks about reflective judgment, it concerns possible rather than actual judgment. He introduces the concept *sensus communis*, a public sense and a critical faculty that takes account of the mode of representation in everyone else, and thereby avoiding the illusion that private and personal conditions are taken for objective. By weighing our judgments with the possible judgments of others, and by putting ourselves in the position of every one else, we are abstracting from the limitations which contingently affect our own estimate. The power of judgment rests on a potential agreement with others. Judgments derive their validity from this potential agreement. As Arendt has pointed out, judgment must liberate itself from the 'subjective private conditions' which naturally determine the outlook of each individual in his privacy and are legitimate as long as they are only privately held opinions, but are not fit to enter the market place, and lack all validity in the public realm (Arendt 1968:220).

A key to understand how this argument applies to virtual realities online is contained in the idea of *possible* judgment. The main reference being made is not to some actual context, but rather to something virtual, something it is *possible* for humans to imagine. Second Life is a virtual world online that seems interesting in this respect. Visitors set out creating characters, meeting, working and discussing in a virtual reality. Maybe the capability for imagining virtual scenarios is even more important than polling and blogs.

### **The problem of the public**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Dewey stated a concern about the problem of the public (Dewey 1927). Due to political complexity he pointed to a need for improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. He recognised in particular a need for a better informed public and also for legislators and policy makers to become better informed of the experiences of the public. Reflective judgment and enlarged thought based in Kant's third critique offers a theoretical framework for dealing with this problem. The liberation of our judgments from subjective private conditions is a necessary condition for weighing our judgments with the possible judgments of others, by putting ourselves in the position of every one else.

Kant does not offer a model for dealing with the cacophony of voices that Dewey worried about, but he does offer a model for transcending the private conditions of judgment by different people. On this background we may reformulate the problem

of the public in terms of a problem of how to make people overcome the limitations that contingently affect our own judgments.

The cacophony of voices need not be a problem; rather, we believe it is preferable for the public domain, not least because it is likely to contribute to more enlarged thought, of which the main point is to address a universal audience. New information technologies offer possibilities for a far more extended access to the cacophony of voices compared to any previous times. The main question, though, is what structures are required in order for the public to become better informed. Obviously, it does not suffice that there is a plurality of voices available. An important hypothesis of this chapter is that the mode of reflection is more important than the plurality of voices per se. The solution of the problem of the public is first to reformulate the problem: it is not a problem that there is a plurality of voices, nor is it a problem that the communication is not sufficiently structured. Rather, the problem is how to make people better informed of the limitations of their own judgments based on private subjective conditions.

We believe that internet communication of different kinds – polling, blogs, virtual realities like Second Life – contribute to improved conditions for reflective judgment due to the following experiences: (1) the public cannot avoid awareness of different tastes and judgments, from which it follows that (2) it becomes harder to ignore the differences of tastes and opinions of others. From this follows that (3) internet activities as mentioned above do have an impact on public reason. Still, there is a concern that lack of regulation or structure weakens democracy in the public domain. The main problem, related to blogs in particular, was that even if they are democratic, they often lack structures for discussion of community affairs, and hence there is a risk of a cacophony of voices. Against this conclusion we have argued that there is no proof that this very cacophony is a problem. We may even envisage a two step procedure towards more organised deliberation: the first step starts with increased awareness and openness of the public for instance by participating in blogs and virtual realities like Second Life. The next step may be to participate in more structured communication, for instance by online deliberative polling.

### **Substantive Judgment Online – Concluding Remarks**

Above we have emphasised the importance of substantive judgment and knowledge of particular circumstances in order to evade fundamentalism. Additionally, it is also a prerequisite that communication of the particular should contain some universal appeal in order to extend beyond the particular context. In this sense global democracy presupposes communicative constraints that are not purely formal. This has been discussed in view of Kant's concepts of reflective judgment and enlarged thought.

There are partly diverging reports on the question whether the internet enhances the kind of deliberative and democratic communication that has been contrasted to fundamentalism above. On the one hand there are reports on the problem of filtering and group polarisation, indicating that global communication online jeopardises democracy (Sunstein 2001). On the other hand there are also more optimistic reports emphasising the importance of global internet communication for the purposes of promoting democracy and empowerment (Wheeler 2005). Despite such diverging reports, the internet no doubt offers a venue for potentially more democratic and less fundamentalist communication between people of diverging opinions. Several experiments have been carried out for examining how people would deliberate in online polls.<sup>13</sup> Others have reported on equally positive results in cases of electronic set ups for online deliberation between politicians and their

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<sup>13</sup> Fishkin (1997) is a valuable reference for this point.



electors, but the problem has often been that the good results prevail only during the period of the trial, and thereafter a decline of activity has been reported (Coleman and Gøtze 2001).

In concluding I would like to put forth a hypothesis considering how the internet might work as impediment against fundamentalist knowledge. This hypothesis builds on the anticipation that the internet offers a unique possibility for knowledge of particular others across fundamentalist stereotypes. The individual encounters between people of very different backgrounds (religious, cultural, ethnic etc.) appear to help people see that conflicting norms and moral conflicts are equally prevalent within as well as between cultures. An even more adequate way of putting it would be that individuals meet individuals and particular stories rather than complex cultures.

Further, if the very encounter between differing individuals and circumstances matters more than the differences of the aggregated stereotypes, this matter of fact is perhaps more important than the particular content of the communication. This indicates that it is perhaps not the democratic 'content' of the conversations which matters most when it comes to the question of the feasibility of global democracy. Rather, I would suggest that the possibility of playing different roles and to put oneself in the position of others stimulates the capability of imagining counterfactual circumstances. In this perspective we might even consider the virtual reality that is offered online as even more valuable for people's possibility of accessing non-fundamentalist knowledge, as compared to knowledge of reasonable arguments about democratic behaviour. As an illustration of the kind of virtuality we have in mind, there are worlds like 'Second Life' where visitors set out creating characters, meeting, working and discussing in a virtual reality.<sup>14</sup> Maybe such acting can prove to be more stimulating for creativity and for the imaginative powers that might open people's minds to appreciate the plurality of forms of life.

Besides the global potential of reflective judgment due to virtuality, there is also another interesting way in which Second Life may be of vital importance to global democracy. Lately it has been reported that a virtual political strike has been started by Italian IBM employees in Second Life, based on a claim for a rise of income.<sup>15</sup> 9000 employees have urged the (nearly) 9 million inhabitants of this world to join the strike. This incident is interesting because the multinational giant IBM is one of the companies that have invested most in Second Life. It is, however, even more interesting with respect to the relation between the on- and offline worlds. The division line seems somehow to disappear when people act in the virtual, online world very much as if they had acted offline. The potential for political action offline seems obvious through this new communication technology tool.

We need more empirical research to inform us on how internet visitors judge the importance of visiting such virtual realities, and whether it has an impact on their opinion of global democracy. Meanwhile, I think there are sufficiently strong proofs that more people than ever have access to a plurality of virtual and actual different others thanks to the new technology offered by the internet. As yet, it is too early to know exactly how internet encounters between people affect offline behaviour. Public criticism of fundamentalism – e.g. the banning of the Mohammed cartoons recently – no doubt contributes to more diversity of opinions across and within particular groups. This example serves as a demonstration of how the new communication technology works on a global scale, reminding us that private use of reason is hard to maintain through the process of enlarging of thought in the public domain.

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<sup>14</sup> Second Life is a virtual 3D world that was established in 2003. This world is developed by its users who establish themselves by a so-called 'avatar', a virtual figure. The avatar is used for different purposes: communication, dancing, shopping, and even striking.

<sup>15</sup> Article by E. Løkeland-Stai in *Klassekampen* (Oslo, September 25, 2007:10).

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