DELIBERATION IN ANCIENT GREEK ASSEMBLIES

DANIELA CAMMACK

WHEN AN ANCIENT GREEK δῆμος (“people,” “assembly”) deliberated, what did it do?¹ On one view, it engaged in a form of public conversation along the lines theorized by contemporary deliberative democrats; on another, a small number of active citizens debated before a much larger, more passive audience. Both accounts represent deliberation as an external, speech-centered activity rather than an internal, thought-centered one. The democratic ideal, it is suggested, was at least occasional participation in public speech.

This article questions that interpretation. A study of βουλεύομαι, “deliberate,” and related terms from Homer to Aristotle reveals three models of deliberation: internal, dialogical, and another that I shall call “audience,” in which a deliberating audience came to a decision after hearing advice. Assembly deliberation was almost always represented as audience deliberation. The δῆμος, or listening mass, deliberated (ἐβουλεύετο), that is, came to a decision about an action in its power, while those who spoke before it advised (συνεβούλευσε). Citizens did not fall short of a democratic ideal when they did not speak publicly. To the contrary, the δῆμος was expected to exercise its authority through internal reflection, culminating in a vote.

This argument has profound implications for our conceptualization of ancient Greek democracy and its differences from its modern counterpart. A common criticism of modern representative democracy is that ordinary citizens play too small a part in it, their role typically being limited to voting in periodic elections. Ancient Greek democracy has been represented as more inclusive at least in part because ordinary citizens shaped policy through public speech. This article suggests that that view is based on a misinterpretation. The mass of citizens...
shaped policy by deciding it, not by speaking publicly. The most significant difference between ancient and modern democracy concerns the scope of mass decision-making power, not the mode of mass participation in politics. Then, as now, the crucial mode of participation was the vote.

**DELIBERATION AS CONVERSATION AND AS ORATORY**

Deliberation (τὸ βουλευόμαι)² by large groups of citizens was commonplace in ancient Greece. Aristotle defined a citizen as “one who has the right to participate in deliberative [βουλευτικής] or judicial office” (Pol. 1275b20) and associated these functions particularly with the multitude: “Over what matters ought the freemen and mass of citizens to have authority? ... It is not safe for them to participate in the highest offices ... It remains then for them to share in deliberation [τὸ βουλευόμαι] and judging” (1281b24–31). The Athenian, Spartan, Syracusan, and other assemblies were frequently the subjects of βουλευόμαι,³ and dēmos, “people” or “assembly,” also regularly governed this verb.⁴

What activity did βουλευόμαι imply? It could indicate internal reflection, as it often does in Aristotle’s ethical writings. “A doctor does not deliberate [βουλευόμαι] whether to restore to health,” but rather how to do it, a task typically completed alone (Eth. Nic. 1112b). It could also indicate dialogue, as in Herodotus’ account of the seven Persians who conspired to kill the Magian pretender to the throne (3.71–84), or in Socrates’ comment to Callicles in the Gorgias, “I once overheard you [pl.] deliberating [ὑμῶν βουλευόμενον] how far you ought to practice wisdom” (487c).

Deliberation in ancient Greek assemblies is usually interpreted dialogically. In T. A. Sinclair’s translation of Aristotle’s Politics, τὸ βουλευόμενον περὶ τῶν κοινών (“the element that deliberates on public affairs”) is that which “discusses everything of common importance” (1297b40). K. J. Maidment’s Andocides recalls how after the loss of Athens’ fleet in 405, “you discussed [ἐξ]βουλευόσασθε] ways and means of reuniting the city,” while Douglas MacDowell rendered this line “you had a discussion about unity” (1.73). C. D. Adams’ Aeschines cites a motion restricting “the dēmos’ discussion [βουλευόμενον] of peace” to particular days, and another specifying that “the dēmos should discuss [βουλευόσασθα] an alliance” (2.109–10). J. H. Vince’s Demosthenes berates his audience for “not discussing [βουλευόμαι] any question at your leisure, but waiting until you’re already losing” (10.29), while Jeremy Trevett’s comments on “the great public interest of the matters you are discussing [ὑμῶν βουλευόμενον]” (8.1).

The translation “debate” has a similar effect.⁵ Like “deliberate,” “debate” may suggest either internal reflection or public speech, but in political contexts

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2. οἱ βουλευόμενος, but that appears only in Aristotle and is seemingly distinguished from τὸ βουλευόμαι at Eth. Nic. 1113a and Eth. End. 1226b. τὸ βουλευόμαι, “good counsel,” may also be translated “deliberation,” but since I am specifically interested in the action denoted by βουλευόμαι as opposed to its outcome in the hands of a capable practitioner, it will not be explored here.

3. E.g., Ar. Eccl. 474–75; Lys. 510–14; Hdt. 7.144; Thuc. 1.36, 71–86, 3.36–44, 4.84, 118, 6.36; Xen. Hell. 5.3.8, 6.5.49; IG I 140; IG II 1.1.

4. E.g., Xen. [Ath. pol.] 1.16; Aeschin. 2.60, 67, 109–10, 3.67, 142; Dem. 18.74, 165; Arist. Pol. 1298b20–30; Din. 1.90; Theophr. 26.1; IG I 34; IG II 1.337.

the latter is likely to be assumed. The representation of assembly speech as “de-
liberative rhetoric” or “deliberative oratory,” and its exponents as “deliberative
speakers” or “deliberative orators,” as in many translations of Aristotle’s Rhet-
oric, equally implies a communicative conceptualization of deliberation.

Ancient Greek politics has long been specially associated with speech. John
Stuart Mill, in 1856, described Athenian democracy as a “government of bound-
less publicity and freedom of speech,” a characteristic he deemed “more prac-
tically important than even the political franchise.”

Hannah Arendt called the polis “the most talkative of all bodies politic,” while
Moses Finley defined politics itself, as discovered by the ancient Greeks, as “the art of reaching decisions by public discussion” and noted that isēgoria, the equal right to speak in the assembly, was “sometimes employed by Greek writers as a synonym for ‘de-
mocracy.’”

Recent interest in deliberative democracy, spurred in part by the writings of
Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, has brought this interpretation into sharper
focus. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, citing Politics 1281b (discussed
below), call Aristotle the “first major theorist to defend the “deliberative ideal,”
defined as a process in which “through the give-and-take of argument,” citizens
“learn from one another, come to recognize their individual and collective mis-
takes, and develop new views and policies that are more widely justifi-
able.”

Jon Elster—citing the same passage of Aristotle along with Pericles’ defense
of logos, “speech,” “discussion,” or “verbal reason” at Thucydides 2.40—agrees
that “the idea of deliberative democracy and its practical implementation . . .
came into being in Athens in the fifth century BC.”

David Held represented Athenian public deliberation in explicitly Habermasian terms as “free and unre-
stricted discourse” governed by the “force of the better argument.” Ryan Balot
suggests that “classical Athenian democrats believed that every Athenian had
something potentially important to contribute to public discourse.” They thus
aimed at “true democratic deliberation,” a “public conversation” in which “ideas
are floated freely, objections and dissent are confidently and respectfully aired,
further revisions and refinement of different opinions can take place, and a

6. Arist. Rh. 1354b, 1358b–62a, 1359b, 1369b, 1377b, 1413b, 1415b trans. Roberts, Freese, Cooper, Lawson-
Tancred, Kennedy, Waterfield/Yunis; Lys. 14.45 trans. Lamb; Dem. 19.15, 22.48 trans. Vince; Aeschin. 1.1, 2.56
trans. Adams; Din. 2.15 trans. Burt.
9. Finley 1985, 13–14. He added “and then of obeying those decisions as a necessary condition of civilized
social existence.”
Prt. 319b–d, 322d–23a; Dem. 15.18, 20.105–6; Aeschin. 3.20; Lewis 1971; Miller 2001; Monoson 2000, 56–
11. Habermas 1985; 1989; Rawls 1999. Other landmark writings on deliberative democracy include:
Benhabib 1996; Cohen 1989; Dryzek 2000; Elster 1998; Gutmann and Thompson 1996; 2004; Manin 1987;
Mansbridge et al. 2012. On the diversity of conceptions of deliberative democracy (all of which, however, as-
sume a speech-centered conceptualization of deliberation), see Bächtiger et al. 2010. This paragraph echoes the
opening paragraph of Cammack 2020.
collectively supported decision issues in the end.”

More recently, Mirko Canevaro has argued that the Athenian assembly employed “deliberative procedures and institutions meant to foster debate, exchange of points of view and ideas, and reasoned arguments, and geared towards reaching, ultimately, consensus.”

This interpretation is not free of difficulty. A major problem is the number of citizens involved. With a capacity of some six or eight thousand attendees during most of the Classical period, the Athenian assembly-place on the Pnyx was one of the largest venues, but even smaller ones held several thousand citizens. As has often been observed, genuine conversation was in these conditions impossible. In Josiah Ober’s words, “if even one in a hundred citizens chose to exercise his isēgoria at any given meeting, the volume of debate that would precede the vote would cause the system to founder.” Yet meetings lasted no more than a few hours. Evidently only a tiny fraction of assembly-goers spoke at any given session; the rest simply listened and voted. How should we interpret this situation?

One possibility is to deploy the idea of a conversation over time. Though only a small number of citizens spoke at any one meeting, over the years it may have been possible to hear from many more. This suggestion finds support in Mogens Hansen’s estimate that some 700–1400 citizens acted as “occasional rhētōres” in Athens in 355–322, in addition to the ten or twenty citizens who spoke regularly at any given time. It is also supported by Robin Osborne’s observation that in the inscriptive record of the late fifth century, “the men who get up in the Assembly and successfully persuade their fellow citizens to amend the decisions they are taking are, in the large majority of cases, otherwise unknown to us,” which, he suggests, shows that the “practical business of getting their fellow citizens to get the details right was widely shared.” Yet the numbers involved remain very small. 700–1400 “occasional rhētōres” amounts to only 2–5% of the Athenian citizen population, while we know the names of only sixteen fifth-century amenders.

17. The meeting-place in fifth-century Argos held around 2500; Mantinea and Acragas, both 3000; Megalopolis, 6000. Robinson 2011, 13–14, 37–38, 42–43, 95, 229.
21. Hansen 1989, 93–127. Ober (1989, 107–9) suggests a greater number of regular speakers, but that entails a rapid decrease in the number of occasional ones (Hansen 1989, 124). An arguably more significant problem is that rhētōr could indicate either (a) a citizen who spoke publicly or (b) a citizen who sponsored a decree but did not speak in its support—and as Hansen (1989, 97) has argued, this group may have been quite large. I hope to pursue this point elsewhere.
23. Osborne (2010, 6, n. 12) lists the names of proposers of amendments to fifth-century decrees published in IG I1 1–228: “Antibios (8), Euphemos (11), Lysanias (32, an interested party), Hestiaios (35), Arkhestratos (40), Phantokles (46, an interested party), Skopas (63), P . . . kritos (68), Arkhestratos (72, also the proposer of the primary decree), Eukrates (76), Diodokles, Eudikos (102), Antikhares (110), Arkhe . . . (125), Klesophos and his fellow prytaneis (127, the proposers of the primary decree), Phrasmon (228).” If the Arkhestratos in 40 is the same as that in 72 (and/or the “Arkhe . . .” in 125) then we have, in fact, only fourteen or fifteen fifth-century amenders—two of whom were also the sponsors of the primary decree, making the distribution of activity look still less widely shared.
An alternative to the “conversational” model is an “oratorical” one, advanced by many scholars, including Hansen and Osborne. As presented by Gary Remer, the conversational model of deliberation is suited to informal settings (Cicero observed that conversation, *sermo*, “finds its natural place in social gatherings, in informal discussions, and in intercourse with friends; it should also seek admission at dinners”); it is characterized by equal or at least very extensive participation, “so that as many voices as possible are heard in the debate”; and it proceeds according to the “force of the better argument” among essentially cooperative interlocutors.24 By contrast, the oratorical model appears in formal settings (Cicero described oratory, *contentio*, as “the kind of discourse to be employed in pleadings in court and speeches in popular assemblies and in the senate”); speaker and audience are “not identical, as in conversation, but distinct,” in that “a few are speakers, the majority are listeners”; and orators are not cooperative but “agonistic,” aiming (again in Cicero’s words) to “prove one’s own case and demolish the adversary’s.”25

The oratorical interpretation of deliberation in ancient Greek assemblies certainly seems plausible. As Hansen argues, there was no “exchange of views” in the Athenian assembly, only “debate,” that is, a “series of speeches of varying length” dominated by “a small group of half- or fully-professional orators.”26 These debates were inherently agonistic, in that speakers aimed to persuade the audience to vote as they advised, against the arguments of their rivals. As Elster notes, speakers did not even necessarily address one another. They might talk “about each other—to point out weaknesses in their opponents’ characters or arguments—but not to each other,” a procedure quite different from what most deliberative democrats have in mind.27 Professional training would moreover seem to have been required by the acoustical challenges of some venues, such as the fifth-century Pnyx. The reconstruction of Christopher Lyle Johnstone suggests that even in the best conditions, “it is doubtful whether even half of the 5000 present could regularly understand what speakers were saying.”28 Yet even after the Pnyx was rebuilt at the end of the fifth century, the Athenians continued to elect a secretary to read proposals and other documents aloud to the crowd.29 The election process cannot have been necessitated by uneven levels of literacy, since other positions requiring literacy in that period were filled by lot.30 Rather, it must have been sufficiently audible speech that was in short supply.

The oratorical interpretation needs clarification, however. Who deliberated when orators orated? The question arises because whereas the conversational model envisages all assembly-goers performing a single activity—deliberation interpreted as group discussion, whether or not all members of the group

29. Arist. [*Ath. pol.*] 54.5; Dem. 19.70.
actually speak—the oratorical model distinguishes between two sets of actions, performed by two distinct groups: public speaking by a small number of orators, internal consideration by a much larger audience. Who deliberated on this picture—orators, audience, or both?

It is widely assumed that it was above all those who spoke who deliberated. Referring to Aristotle’s accounts of deliberative rhetoric in the *Rhetoric* and of the political significance of *logos* in *Politics* 1, Bernard Yack argues that “political deliberation necessarily involves speech and argument because it involves the sharing of our reasoning.” 31 Bernard Manin, too, has interpreted deliberation primarily as participation in speech: “When we collectively deliberate, we ad-duce arguments to support our position, trying to persuade others that we have the better case.” 32 He quotes Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.2, in support of this view: “Deliberation (sumbouleuein) 33 consists in arguing for or against something.”

Importantly, Manin makes room in his account for the “deliberation within” that “follows, and is shaped by, exposure to external argument.” 35 Yet internal deliberation remains secondary to the communicative kind. Properly “solitary deliberation,” he writes, “without the input and stimulation of others,” would “presumably not have led to an internal deliberation of the same quality.” 36

The most influential voice in this context is that of Mogens Hansen, and although his account of the classical Athenian assembly is not couched in the language of deliberation, it clearly advances a speech-centered conceptualization of political activity. Hansen portrays a “spectrum” of political participation in which the least active citizens did not participate, the most active spoke and proposed motions, and those who only listened and voted stood somewhere in the middle. 37 “Ideally,” Hansen argues, citing *Protagoras* 319d, “the sum of active citizens”—that is, public speakers—“was equal to the whole body of citizens”; indeed, “the democratic ideology implied that it was a moral duty” to address one’s fellow citizens “from time to time.” 38 He freely admits that the “ideal never matched the reality,” but he attributes this to the “gap between the constitution and how it works” common to societies of all periods. 39 Unlike some interpreters, Hansen does not represent those who only listened and voted in mass political contexts as wholly “passive.” 40 But he certainly represents them as more passive, and therefore as less perfect citizens, than those who spoke, and this characterization has been widely followed. 41

Both the conversational and the oratorical models of assembly deliberation thus assume a speech-centered interpretation of deliberation. This corresponds to a wider tendency to treat the application of the term “deliberation” to inward cogitation as an extension of its communicative meaning. That interpretation

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32. Manin 2005, 17. Manin’s views have since evolved: his new position is noted in n. 129 below.
33. *Sic:* to be discussed below.
was implied in 1933, when Edward Boucher Stevens defined internal deliberation as “a kind of inner conversation of a mind with itself.” Similarly, Robert Goodin has suggested that “deliberation within” is “perhaps invariably modeled upon, and thus parasitic upon, our interpersonal experiences of discussion and debate.” Richard Mulgan writes that it was “standard Greek usage” for “the verb ‘to deliberate’ (bouleuesthai)” to be used “both of collective political debate and, by metaphorical extension, of individual deliberation, ‘taking one’s own counsel,’ as it were by a form of inner consultation.” βουλεύομαι, these authors agree, originally indicated speech: its application to thought was an extension of the discursive paradigm, not the other way around.

THE DISJUNCTION BETWEEN ΒΟΥΛΕΥΟΜΑI AND SPEECH

Plausible as this interpretation seems, it is surprisingly difficult to find examples of βουλεύομαι unambiguously indicating speech. It is not impossible, and a selection of such cases will be discussed below. But the evidence mentioned so far falls into three categories. First, cases where βουλεύομαι is typically interpreted as denoting speech, but closer inspection suggests otherwise. Second, cases where speech is certainly indicated and “deliberative” or “deliberation” appear in translation, but βουλεύομαι does not appear in the original. Third, cases believed to suggest the idealization of wide participation in public speech, but where other interpretations are possible, even likely.

Aristotle’s support for deliberation by the multitude at Politics 1281b falls into the first category. Drawing an analogy with the superiority of collectively provided dinners over those provided at a single man’s expense, he suggested that some multitudes can contribute more of a certain politically salient thing than can a small number of men or a single man. This thing has often been interpreted as diverse speech, but as I have argued elsewhere, that reading must be mistaken, since the specific tasks that Aristotle assigns to the multitude are deciding elections, audits, and trials, none of which involved speech-making by the decision-makers. Elections took place in assemblies but without accompanying debate, while audits and trials were, across Hellas, decided by panels of judges who, Aristotle tells us, were banned from discussing matters among themselves (κοινολογῶνται, Pol. 1268b15). Most significant, Aristotle remarks that his argument “would also apply to animals,” which proves that speech played no part in it (1281b20–82a16). Logos, “speech” or “verbal reason,” was precisely what Aristotle thought distinguished human beings from

42. Stevens 1933, 104.
44. Mulgan 1999, 195.
46. Cammack 2013a; Lane 2013, citing Pol. 1281b30–35, 1282a6–14, 1282a25–35, 1286a25–28. Lane argues that the deliberation and judging performed by Aristotle’s multitude are restricted to those involved in elections and audits. This is possible, though not necessary (as Lane notes, p. 251). In my view, the passage picks up on the earlier discussion of ways of sharing in the constitution. A citizen may perform either a time-limited office (e.g., archon, treasurer, general) or an indefinite office (deliberating and judging without restriction). Once Aristotle has excluded common citizens from the highest, time-limited offices, “it remains [λείπεται] then for them to share in deliberation and judging,” without restriction (Pol. 1281b31).
other animals. Consequently, it cannot have been the politically salient thing he had in mind. *Aretē*, “virtue” or “excellence”—the focus of Aristotle’s analysis earlier in *Politics* 3 and a term that he often applied to animals other than humans—aggregated and even amplified in collective action, seems a more plausible candidate.

βουλεύομαι is also distinguished from speech in Thucydides. In Book 1, the Corcyraean envoy addresses the Athenian ἰδεμος thus: “If anyone thinks that what we have suggested is indeed expedient, but fears that if he yields he will be breaking off the truce, let him consider that . . . he is deliberating [βουλεύομενος] upon the interests, not so much of Corcyra, as of Athens” (1.36, trans. Smith). Both the singular verb and the speaker’s assumption that each listener is deliberating at the very moment he is speaking suggest an internal conceptualization of deliberation. Athenagoras of Syracuse implies the same thing when he argues that “You, if you deliberate well [εὖ βουλεύ̣νθε], will examine [σκοπο̣ν̣τες] and form your estimate [λογιεί̣σθε] of what is probable not from what these men report but from your estimate of what shrewd men of experience are likely to do,” and that “while the rich make the best guardians of property, the wise make the best counselors and the many, having listened, judge the best” (6.36, 39). Both the identification of βουλεύομαι with “examining” and “forming your estimate” and its differentiation from offering counsel suggest internal deliberation.

Another example of internal deliberation appears in Demosthenes 19 and Aeschines 2, a pair of speeches occasioned by Demosthenes’ indictment of Aeschines in 343 for treason relating to an embassy to Philip of Macedon that had taken place three years earlier. Upon the embassy’s return to Athens, two assemblies had been held, and the case turned, in part, on what had happened there. According to Demosthenes, at the first meeting Aeschines had spoken against the proposed peace settlement, but at the second had switched sides and supported it (19.13–14). According to Aeschines, however, he could not have spoken at the second meeting, for it had comprised only a series of votes. He asked the secretary to read aloud the decree of Demosthenes setting up the meetings, which had directed that “in the first of the two meetings whoever wishes can offer advice [συμβουλεύ̣νθε], but that in the second, the presidents shall put the matter to the vote, without giving an opportunity for debate [λόγο̣ν]” (2.65). βουλεύομαι denoted the activity of the ἰδεμος at both meetings. Demosthenes referred to “the two assemblies at which you deliberated [ἐβουλεύ̣σεθε] about the peace” (19.13), while a witness for Aeschines cited the meeting “when the ἰδεμος was deliberating [ἐβουλεύ̣σε] on the subject of the alliance with Philip . . . when no opportunity was given to address the people [ὅμημορ̣εί̣ν] but the decrees . . . were being put to the vote” (2.67; cf. 70). The two-meeting procedure may have been relatively uncommon, but Hansen has argued convincingly that the Athenians often put proposals to the vote without any debate at all, through the process known as *procheirontonia*.

Evidently, deliberation by the ἰδεμος did not have to involve public speech.

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50. Cammack 2013a. See also Smith 2018.
The second category of evidence adduced in support of the speech-centered interpretation of βουλευόμαι comprises cases where speech is indicated and “deliberative” or “deliberation” appear in translation, but βουλευόμαι does not appear. An important example is “deliberative rhetoric,” the traditional name of the first type of persuasive speech discussed in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (1.3, 4). This term appears in the first English version of the text, Thomas Hobbes’ précis, *A Briefe of the Art of Rhetoric* (1637), and in the translations of R. C. Jebb (1909), W. Rhys Roberts (1924), J. H. Freese (1926), Lane Cooper (1932), George Kennedy (1991), Hugh Lawson-Tancred (1991), and Robin Waterfield and Harvey Yunis (2018), as well as in the writings of many recent commentators.52 By analogy with ἀρχηγος βουλευτική, “deliberative office” (*Pol.* 1275b20), ζίδον βουλευτικόν, “deliberative animal” (*Hist. an.* 488b25), and φαντασία βουλευτική, “deliberative imagination” (*De an.* 434a7), one might expect “deliberative rhetoric” to translate ῥητορική βουλευτική, but that phrase is not attested.53 Instead, Aristotle uses terms derived from either δημηγορέω, “address the δῆμος” (cf. Aeschin. 2.67, quoted above) or συμβουλέω, “advise” or “counsel” (cf. Aeschin. 2.65, quoted above). At *Rhetoric* 1354b, for example, he refers to τὰ δημηγορικά and ἡ δημηγορία, perhaps best rendered “public speeches” and “public rhetoric,” respectively, while at 1358b, the relevant adjective is συμβουλευτικός, “advisory.”

Describing “advisory” or “public” speech as “deliberative” need not, strictly speaking, imply a speech-centered interpretation of deliberation. It could possibly signify rhetoric intended to assist listeners in their internal deliberations, and it may be that that is what some translators had in mind. However, that interpretation is less plausible for “deliberative speaker” or “deliberative orator,” common renderings of ὃ συμβουλεύον, “adviser,” and ὃ δημηγορός, “public speaker” (*Rhet.* 1358b). A “deliberative speaker” surely deliberates; yet Aristotle never used βουλευόμαι of orators. When introducing the topics that arise for discussion in assemblies, for instance, he referred to those “about which all men deliberate and those who advise speak publicly” (περὶ ὧν βουλεύονται πάντες καὶ περὶ ὧν ἀγορεύσιν οἱ συμβουλεύοντες, 1359b20).54 Speakers and deliberators are here distinct, but the distinction often disappears in translation. Hobbes titled the relevant chapter “the subject of deliberatives; and the abilities that are required of him that will deliberate of business of state,” where the latter unambiguously referred to a speaker. Freese has topics “about which all men deliberate and deliberative orators harangue”; Roberts, those “on which all men deliberate and on which deliberative speakers make speeches”; Kennedy, those “on which people deliberate and on which deliberative orators give advice in public”; Lawson-Tancred, those “of deliberation, and those most often discussed by deliberative speakers.” Such renderings strongly suggest that “all men” and “speakers” are engaged in a single activity, but there is no basis for that reading in the Greek, and significant confusion may result. We have already encountered


53. *TLG* search to within fifteen words, last accessed April 24, 2018.

one example: Manin’s quotation of Aristotle as saying that “Deliberation (sum-bouleuein) means arguing for or against something.” But while συμβουλεύειν does indeed mean “arguing for or against something,” it is different from deliberation (τὸ βουλεύεσθαι), which is the object of Manin’s interest in the rest of the article.

The third category of evidence concerns participation in public speech. Pericles’ funeral oration is often cited (Thuc. 2.40):

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\text{ἐνι τε τοῖς αὐτοῖς οἶκειον ἁμα καὶ πολιτικῶν ἐπιμέλεια, καὶ ἕτερος πρὸς ἔργα τετραμέμνοις τὰ πολιτικὰ μὴ ἐνδεικτικὸς γνώναι: μόνοι γάρ τὸν τε μηδὲν τὸντε μετέχονται οὐκ ἀπράγματα, ἀλλ᾽ ἄρχειν νομίζωμεν, καὶ οἱ αὐτοὶ ἤτοι κρίνομεν γε ἢ ἐνθυμοῦμεθα ὀρθῶς τὰ πράγματα, οὐ τοῖς λόγοις τοῖς ἔργοις βλάβην ἤγομενοι, ἀλλὰ μὴ προδίδωσθείνη μᾶλλον λόγῳ πρότερον ἢ ἐπὶ ἀ δεῖ ἔργα ἔλθειν.}
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Our public men have, besides politics, their private affairs to attend to, and our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters; for, unlike any other nation, we regard the citizen who takes no part in these duties not as unambitious but as useless, and we are able to judge proposals even if we cannot originate them; instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all. (Trans. Smith)

Elster represents this passage (in this rendering) as a positive view of “decision making by discussion among free and equal citizens.” But the distinction Pericles draws between public men who originate proposals and ordinary citizens who judge them suggests that, like Athenagoras of Syracuse, he did not expect ordinary citizens to speak publicly. What is celebrated here is the Athenian custom of “being instructed” (προδιδαχθήναι) by speeches prior to taking action, a process characterized by internal thought on the part of the decision-makers. Hobbes, in his 1629 translation, brought this out clearly: “We likewise weigh what we undertake and apprehend it perfectly in our minds, not accounting words for a hindrance of action but that it is rather a hindrance to action to come to it without instruction of words before.” The Athenian multitude, on this representation, did not engage in public speech but rather envisaged and adopted proposals on the basis of advice.

Protagoras 319d is also significant. “When the Athenians have to decide [βουλεύσασθαι] something to do with the administration of the polis,” Socrates argues, “the man who rises to advise [συμβουλεύειν] them . . . could equally well be a carpenter, a bronzesmith, a shoemaker, a merchant, a shipowner, rich or poor, well-born or lowly.” As we know from other evidence, anyone who wished could indeed speak publicly at Athens; Socrates implies that anyone did. But Plato’s well-known hostility to democracy raises the possibility that this sketch may be a caricature or a reductio ad absurdum. Even if, as Peter Rhodes has argued, what Socrates describes “cannot be totally unlike what actually

\[55.\text{Manin 2005, 15.}\\
56.\text{The same conflation of συμβουλεύειν and deliberation appears in Hourcade 2015.}\\
57.\text{Elster 1999, 1–2.}\\
58.\text{E.g., Xen. [Ath. pol.] 1.2.}\\
59.\text{Cf. Cammack 2015.}\]
happened,” Plato’s dialogues are not a fully reliable guide to either democratic ideology or practice.60

The Athenian orators, as both Ober and Hansen have emphasized, are a better bet.61 Hansen quotes Aeschines 3.220.62

> ἐπιτιμᾶς δὲ μοι, εἰ μὴ συνεξῆς, ἀλλὰ διαλείπεις, πρὸς τὸν δὴμον προζέρχομαι, καὶ τὴν ἀξίουσιν ταύτην οὐλα λανθάνειν μεταφέρον ὅσον ἐκ δημοκρατίας, ἀλλ᾽ ἐξ ἐτέρας πολιτείας.

> επιτιμᾷς δέ μοι, εἰ μὴ συνεξῆς, ἀλλ᾽ ὁ δυναστεῖον δημητροίεν, ἐν δὲ ταῖς δημοκρατίαις ὁ βουλόμενος, καὶ ὅταν αὐτῷ δοκῇ, καὶ τὸ μὲν διὰ χρόνου λέγειν σημεῖον ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τῶν καὶρᾶν καὶ τοῦ συμφέροντος ἀνδρὸς πολιτεομένου, τὸ δὲ μηδὲμάν παραλείπειν ἡμέραν ἐργαζομένου καὶ μισθαρνοῦντος.

And you blame me if I come before the people, not constantly, but only at intervals. And you imagine that your hearers fail to detect you in thus making a demand which is no outgrowth of democracy, but borrowed from another constitution. For in oligarchies it is not he who wishes, but he who is in authority, that addresses the people; whereas in democracies he speaks who chooses, and whenever it seems to him good. And the fact that a man speaks only at intervals marks him as a man who takes part in politics because of the call of the hour, and for the common good; whereas to leave no day without its speech, is the mark of a man who is making a trade of it, and talking for pay. (Trans. Adams)

According to Hansen, this passage “well presents” the “Athenian ideal” of “diffusion of political activity and avoidance of professionalism,” and he cites no other sources either here or elsewhere in defense of that claim.63 Yet while Aeschines certainly depicts occasional public speaking in a positive light, he contrasts it not with failure ever to speak, but with speaking incessantly. “He who wishes” should come forward because of the “call of the hour,” rather than “leave no day without its speech.” Pace Hansen, we cannot infer from this that public speaking was regarded as a “moral duty” for all citizens.64

Moreover, Aeschines was not here merely sketching an ideal but defending himself against a specific attack from Demosthenes, and that attack reveals a significantly different conceptualization of ideal political behavior (18.307–8).

> οὔδε γ᾽ ἡσυχίαν ἦσαν ἄδικον καὶ ὑπολογοῦν, ὃ σὸ ποιεῖσθαι πολλάκις. ἔστι γὰρ, ἔστιν ἡσυχία δικαία καὶ συμφέρουσα τῇ πόλει, ἣν οἱ πολλοὶ τῶν πολίτων ὑμεῖς ἀπόλεως ἄγετε. ἀλλ᾽ οὐ τούτουν ὑπολοῦσ᾽ ἔγει τὴν ἡσυχίαν, πολλοὶ γε καὶ δε, ἀλλ᾽ ἀποκαλύπτεις ὅτι αὐτοῦ δόξη τῆς πολιτείας (πολλάκις δὲ δοκεῖ), φυλάττει πηλίκ᾽ ἐπιστήθης μετοχί τυποῦ λέγοντος ἢ παρὰ τῆς τύχης τι συμβέβηκεν ἢ ἄλλο τὸ διάκολον γέγονεν (πολλὰ δὲ τάνθρωποι): εἰτ᾽ ἐπὶ τούτου τῷ καυρῷ ῥήτορον ἐξαιρέσθη ἢς ἔγειτον πολλαῖς ἡσυχία ἢ ἱσχύς, καὶ περικοσμητικῷ καὶ συνειλογῷ ρήματι καὶ λόγῳς συνειρέει τούτῳ σαφῶς καὶ ἀπευθεῖτο, ὅτι πολλάκις ὑμῶν ἐστιν ἀγαθοῦ κτήθησαν ὑποστῆναι, συμφορᾶν δὲ τῷ τυχόντων τῶν πολιτῶν καὶ κοινῆν αἰσχύνην.

Nor was it his duty to hold his peace dishonestly and deceptively, as you [Aeschines] so often do. There is, indeed, a silence that is honest and beneficial to the city, such as is observed in all simplicity by the majority of you citizens. Not such, but far, far different is the silence of Aeschines. Withdrawing himself from public life whenever he thinks fit—and that

60. Rhodes 2016, 251.
64. Hansen 1999, 267.
is very frequently—he lies in wait for the time when you will be weary of the incessant speaker, or when some unlucky reverse has befallen you, or any of those vexations that are so frequent in the life of mortal men; and then, seizing the occasion, he breaks silence and the orator reappears like a sudden squall, with his voice in fine training; he strings together the words and the phrases that he has accumulated, emphatically and without a pause; but, alas, they are all useless, they serve no good purpose, they are directed to the injury of this or that citizen, and to the discredit of the whole community. (Trans. Vince)

Hansen takes account of this passage by observing, correctly, that “the orators found no fault with the fact that many Athenians never addressed their fellow citizens.”65 But Demosthenes goes further than that. He implies that there are not one but two ideal citizens at Athens: the ideal rhētōr and the ideal man of the mass.66 Most men are not expected to speak, and their silence is both “honest” and “beneficial” to the polis. But expectations differ for those who do come forward. They should not speak incessantly—thus far Aeschines and Demosthenes agree. But neither should they stay silent, carp, or criticize fruitlessly. Rather, they should put their rhetorical skills to good use, which meant proposing and leading actions: Demosthenes mentions alliances, expeditions, embassies, and domestic and foreign projects (18.311). On this interpretation, democratic ideology demanded not occasional public speech from all, but useful speech-making by some and honest silence from most. The more than four-fifths of the audience that voted with Demosthenes on this occasion presumably accepted this.

The evidence that βουλέσθαι implied public speech is thus surprisingly weak, warranting a more comprehensive investigation. How was this term defined by contemporaries? Was internal deliberation really as prominent as the foregoing analysis suggests? What other models of deliberation were available, and how far do they illuminate the activities of ancient Greek assembly-goers? The rest of this article seeks to answer these questions.

DEFINING TO ΒΟΥΛΕΥΕΣΘΑΙ

βουλέσθαι is formally defined in four extant texts: Plato’s Cratylus, the pseudo-Platonic Sisyphus, and Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics and Eudemian Ethics. The related βουλή also appears in the Platonic Definitions. Aristotle’s discussion is by far the most extensive and will accordingly be my main touchstone, but it is striking how little it conflicts with the Platonic accounts.

The most idiosyncratic (though not incongruous) definition appears in the Cratylus, where βουλέσθαι is associated with shooting (βολή) or “aiming at something” (τὸ ἐφίεσθαι, 420c). Specifically, Socrates argues that βουλή (“will” or “counsel”), βούλεσθαι (“to want” or “to wish”), and βουλέσθαι (“to deliberate”) “express the idea of shooting, just as ἄβουλία [“poor counsel”] . . . appears to be a failure to hit, as if a person did not shoot or hit that which he shot at or wished [ἐβουλέσθο] or planned [ἐβουλεύοντο] or desired [ἐφίετο]” (420c, trans. Fowler). Exactly what βουλέσθαι aims at is suggested

66. Cf. Manin 1997, 16 n. 17: “The process of self-selection that . . . limited the number of speakers actually received explicit recognition . . . in the ideology of the first comer, ho boulomenos denoted anyone wishing to come forward to make a proposal, not simply anyone” (italics original).
elsewhere. In the Definitions, βουλή is glossed as σκέψις περὶ τῶν μελλόντων ποὺς συμφέρει, “consideration of what will be beneficial in the future” (414a), while in the Sisyphus, τὸ εὖ βουλέωσθαι, “deliberating well,” is described first as “a kind of seeking to discover the best actions to use for oneself [τὰ βέλτιττα εξερεύνη τινα εκατῶι διαπράξασθαι], though without knowing them clearly, but this being some form of thought [ἐν νοήσει]” (388b); and then as “seeking after the best means to use for oneself for one’s own benefit,” specifically “as concerns practical matters” (τῶν πραγμάτων, 389b).

Putting these claims together, βουλέωσθαι seems to imply the consideration and selection, in thought in the first instance, of possibly beneficial future actions. This is also the kernel of Aristotle’s account.67 τὸ βουλεύεσθαι, as represented by Aristotle, was typically internal; it meant coming to a decision about a course of action within one’s own power; and it was a two-stage process, involving first considering, then deciding. Moreover, while it could be performed by groups, Aristotle never explained precisely how.

That Aristotle took deliberation, typically, to be internal is easily shown. Nearly all his exemplars are single men—a doctor, a general, a gymnastic trainer, an orator, a Lacedaemonian, a prudent man, Pericles.68 Indeed, such is his focus on individual deliberation in his ethical writings that this, rather than deliberation in general, has sometimes been identified as his immediate object of interest.69 That goes too far, since groups do appear in his analysis: in the Nicomachean Ethics, for example, he observes that “all particular divisions of men deliberate [βουλεύονται] about things attainable by their own actions” (1112b37), while in the Eudemian Ethics he states that “we do not deliberate [βουλεύομεθα] on affairs in India,” where “we” presumably refers to Greek communities rather than to single men (1226a28). Yet even when others are involved, internal deliberation is represented as paradigmatic. As Aristotle notes, and as will be discussed further below, when deliberating we sometimes “bring in advisers [συμβούλους δὲ παραλαμβάνομεν], distrusting our own capacity to think things through [διαγνώναι]” (Eth. Nic. 1112b10).

What did this activity involve? According to Aristotle, we deliberate about “things from us and from action,” or, more elegantly, “practical matters within our power.”70 We do not deliberate about eternal things such as geometrical truths, regular things such as solstices, irregular things such as the weather, random things such as finding treasure, or anything else caused by nature, necessity, or chance (Eth. Nic. 1112a20–30). We deliberate only about outcomes attainable by human agency and not even most of those. A Lacedaemonian would not deliberate about the best political system for the Scythians, for Scythian government is not under his control (Eth. Nic. 1112a36). Equally, we do not deliberate about spelling, since how to spell a word correctly is not up to any one of us (Eth. 498).
Nic. 1112b1–4). Deliberation concerns only things within the power of the deliberator to effect, either via his own agency or via that of others under his direction (Eth. Nic. 1112b28). Its subject matter is limited because its purpose is limited. Deliberation decides the action of the deliberator. It is thus linked to both agency and choice. It presupposes that the deliberator is deciding between at least two courses of action, both of which, at least initially, strike him as possible to perform.71

This may seem a surprisingly narrow account. According to Aristotle, philosophical, historical, and scientific questions cannot be deliberated about, because they cannot be influenced by the actions of the deliberator. That is not to say that they cannot be considered, examined, contemplated, discussed, and so on. Ancient Greek, like English, recognized many kinds of intellectual activity. Among the terms Aristotle used to describe his characteristic occupation were θεωρέω, “theorize” or “contemplate,” σκέψτομαι, “consider,” and σκοπέω, “examine.”72 But βουλέουμαι he reserved for practical matters, excluding even the process of settling on an opinion (Eth. Nic. 1111b30–12a13; Eth. Eud. 1226a1–7). Though some form of imagination is common to all animals, he says in De anima, the deliberative (βουλευτική) imagination belongs only to those that decide whether to do this or that (434a7–9).

βουλέουμαι thus implied coming to a decision about an action within one’s power. Probably the best English rendering is “make up one’s mind,” since that not only preserves the emphasis on internal activity found in both Plato and Aristotle but also accords with the conventional translation of the related term μεταβουλεύομαι, “change one’s mind.”73 Importantly, this was a two-stage process. In English, both “come to a decision” and “make up one’s mind” are ambiguous: either the consideration performed prior to a decision or the final act of decision-making may be meant. There was less ambiguity about βουλέουμαι, because the stage reached was often revealed by tense.74 In the present tense, βουλέουμαι could denote either the entire deliberative process, that is, both considering and deciding, or the process of consideration alone, while in past tenses it implied “decide after consideration.”75

Aristotle, for instance, used the present participle when the deliberator was still making up his mind. “The deliberator [ὁ βουλευόμενος] always deliberates for the sake of something . . . he always has some aim in view” (Eth. Eud. 1227a6–7). The aorist (or another past tense) appeared once the decision had been made. Distinguishing between two forms of ἀκρασία, “weakness of

71. Eth. Eud. 1227a18–19; Eth. Nic. 1113a2–12. Nielsen (2011) denies that Aristotle thought deliberation involved choosing between alternative courses of action, but she does not discuss Rh. 1357a1: βουλευόμεθα δὲ περὶ τῶν φαινομένων ἐνδέχεσθαι ἑμφορτέρος ἔχειν (“we deliberate about things that seem to admit of issuing in two ways”).
73. The active voice μεταβουλεύω appears in Homer, but in classical sources, only the middle/passive μεταβουλέουμαι (TLG, last accessed October 14, 2018). The significance of this change in voice with respect to βουλέω is discussed in the next section.
74. Including in parts of speech that do not show tense in English, such as participles and infinitives. In such cases tense shows not time but aspect: progressive/repeated aspect by the present tense, simple aspect by the aorist, and completed aspect by the perfect.
75. LSJ.
“will” or “unrestraint,” Aristotle observed that “The weak, having come to a resolution [βουλεὐσάμενοι], on account of passion do not keep to what they decided [ἐβουλεύσαμεν]. The impetuous, on the other hand, on account of not making a resolution [τὸ μὴ βουλεύσασθαι], are led by passion throughout” (Eth. Nic. 1150b18). Neither the weak nor the impetuous, on this account, fail entirely to deliberate. The weak complete both parts of the process and form a decision, though they do not execute it, while the impetuous may begin but do not complete the process. And in Greek, the stage reached was shown simply by tense. There was no need to use another verb to specify the final act of decision-making, as there may be in English (see “making a resolution” in my translation above). Decision-making was intrinsic to βουλεύομαι.

This leads to a key point. The fact that βουλεύομαι denotes a two-stage process may hardly matter when the deliberator is one person, since both considering and deciding are internal and the transition between them may be virtually seamless. When the agent is a group, however, it matters quite a lot, because different processes will necessarily feature at each stage. “Considering” may involve internal thought, group discussion, or hearing speeches; “deciding” may involve voting or establishing a verbal consensus. And this poses a problem for those interested in the mechanics of group deliberation. βουλεύομαι tells us only that a decision is reached. If we want to know how, we need more information. What more can we glean from Aristotle?

As it turns out, surprisingly little. Groups certainly did deliberate, in both the Rhetoric and the Politics as well as in Aristotle’s ethical writings. We are told, for example, that decisions about war and peace, alliances, laws, and so on may be assigned to all citizens, to some, or to single officials, and that allowing all to deliberate (βουλεύσθαι) about everything was standard in democracies of Aristotle’s day (Pol. 1298a1–35; cf. 1318b22–30). Another line in the Politics provides a clue as to the mechanics of this process: “They will deliberate [βουλεύσονται] better when all are deliberating together [κοινῷ βουλευόμενοι], the dēmos with the notables and they when with the masses” (1298b20). We shall return to this line below. For now, we may simply note that Aristotle never directly addressed how, or even whether, group deliberation of this kind differed from the internal paradigm he presented in his dedicated account—a lacuna that may itself be significant.

**THE INTERNAL MODEL CONFIRMED**

While Aristotle left the details of group deliberation open, in other respects his account is as apt as one might wish. Every extant use of βουλεύομαι does indeed indicate coming to a decision about a course of action within the deliberator’s power. Moreover, the philosophical priority that both Plato and Aristotle accorded to internal deliberation is matched by its historical priority, in that every early use of βουλεύομαι denotes internal activity. Internal deliberation even comes first grammatically, in that what originally distinguished βουλεύομαι, “deliberate” (in the middle voice) from βουλεύω, “plan” or “advise” (in the active voice) was the fact that the subject of the verb was considering his or her own action, with emphasis on the “own.”
The earliest uses of βουλεύομαι all indicate decision-making by single agents. In the Iliad, Zeus is said to have gone back on a promise to Agamemnon and “determined upon [βουλέωσατο] cruel deceit” (2.114, 9.21). Theognis tells his reader “you should think [βουλέω] twice and thrice . . . for the headstrong man comes to grief” (633–34), while Semonides’ vicious “monkey” woman “ponders [βουλέσεται] only this, how to do the greatest harm she may” (Women 81–82). Later examples include Electra’s “Hear what I have determined [βεβούλευμαι] to accomplish!”; Oedipus’ “O Zeus, what have you decreed [βεβούλευσαι] for me?”; and Phaedra’s statement that she goes to die, but how “shall be my own devising” (βουλεύσομαι).76 In each case, a single person decides on an action within his or her power, and that usage remained common down to the end of the Classical era.77

Such uses are just what Aristotle leads us to expect. But something else emerges from our earliest texts that does not appear in his analysis. Internal decision-making was in the Archaic and early Classical period represented not only by βουλεύομαι, “deliberate,” but also by βουλεύω, “plan.” In Hesiod, Phocylides, and Pindar, in fact, only βουλεύω appears in this context, while in Homer and Aeschylus βουλεύομαι appears once, βουλεύω many times. In Sophocles and Euripides, βουλεύομαι and βουλεύω are used about equally for this purpose, while in the fourth century βουλεύομαι was by far the more common. What accounts for this change? The answer both confirms the association of βουλεύομαι with internal activity and lays the groundwork for a better understanding of collective political deliberation.

To begin with the grammatical issue: βουλεύω and βουλεύομαι are not different verbs but different voices of the same verb, the active and the middle, respectively. The textbook distinction between these voices is that the active “represents the subject performing the action of the verb,” while the middle “shows that the action is performed with special reference to the subject.”78 Specifically, according to Smyth, “as contrasted with the active, the middle lays stress on the conscious activity, bodily or mental participation, of the agent.” Heading Smyth’s examples are “βουλεύω, plan, and βουλεύομαι, deliberate.”79

Drawing on their earliest uses, we may elaborate on Smyth’s distinction. Though βουλεύω could show the subject planning—that is, designing and/or deciding80—his, her, or their own action, it could also indicate the making of a plan by someone other than the decision-maker, that is, the production or provision of advice. βουλεύομαι, by contrast, specified that the subject of the verb was the decision-maker. He, she, or they were engaged in forming their own will (βουλή).

77. Soph. El. 1046; OT 537, 1367; Ant. 772; Trach. 589; Phil. 1288; Eur. Supp. 248; IA 1102; Ba. 842–43; Phoenix. 735; Andr. 63, 1280; El. 269; Hipp. 900; Med. 567, 893; Orest. 637–38, 1131; Ar. Ran. 865; Eq. 88; Lys. 951; Pax 58, 106, 230; Hdt. 1.20, 79, 91, 116, 3.17, 119, 134, 153, 154, 5.35, 111, 6.3, 86; 7.10, 12, 13, 49; 8.100, 101, 9.12, 13, 14, 16; Thuc. 1.36, 2.64, 3.48, 5.8, 71, 6.12, 8.58; Antiph. 1.17; Andoc. 1.42, 145; Lys. 14.45; Xen. Hell. 1.30; Isae. 1.11, 20, 41, 43, 50, 2.1,15, 3.64, 7.33, 8.36, 10.16; Isoc. 1.34, 35, 2.2, 47, 51, 3.51, 9.41; Pl. Resp. 390b, L.1 309b, L.7 324a, 346d–47c; Aeschin. 1.64, 2.114, 3.81, 209; Dem. 21.74; Din. 2.24; Hyp. 6.15.
78. Smyth 1956, §§1703, 1713.
80. OED.
The flexibility of βουλέω is plain in Homer. Most often, the subject is a single person planning (or more negatively “plotting”) his or her own action, as in Phoenix’s report, “Then I hatched a plan [βουλέω] to slay him with the sharp sword” (II. 9.458).81 But plural subjects are also common. The Trojans wish to know “whether our foes are planning [βουλέωσι] flight,” so Dolon goes to Agamemnon’s ship, “where the chief men will be holding council” (βουλάς βουλεύειν, literally “planning plans,” II. 10.310–11.325).82 Here communication is certain, as it also is in Achilles’ lament for Patroclus, “Never more . . . will we sit apart from our friends and make plans together” (βουλάς . . . βουλεύσομεν, II. 23.77–78).83 Additionally, Nestor’s request that Agamemnon “follow whoever devises the wisest counsel [βουλέωση]” (II. 9.74–75) and Odysseus’ reference to a Phoenician who had given him “lying counsel” (βουλέωςας, Od. 14.295–97) suggest “advise,” that is, producing a plan for another rather than for oneself.84

In other archaic texts, βουλέω indicates not only “plan,” “plot,” and “advise,” but also “conspire,” “deliberate,” and “consult.”85 These uses reappear in Aeschylus. βουλέω suggests “plan” in the exclamation of an Argive elder, “One who wants to act must first plan [βουλέωσαι] what action to take” (Ag. 1359); “advise” in Prometheus’ sad plaint, “I, though advising [βουλέων] for the best, could not persuade the Titans” (PV 206); and “decide” or “decreed” in Eteocles’ declaration, “If anyone fails to obey my authority, a vote of death will be decreed [βουλέσθαι]” (Sept. 198).86

βουλέωμαι, by contrast, appeared only when the subject was himself or herself the decision-maker, especially when conflict with others was involved. In the line from the Iliad quoted above, what will transpire is what Zeus has privately determined upon, as opposed to what he had, apparently, previously promised. Likewise, Theognis’ “think twice and thrice” and Semonides’ description of the “monkey” woman suggest private, even secretive, decision-making. Aeschylus’ sole use of the middle βουλέωμαι is also noteworthy here. When the chorus of maidens defies Eteocles, he tells them, in Sommerstein’s translation, not to “behave imprudently” (βουλεύουκακω̃ς, Sept. 223).87 “Behave” is far from a literal rendering of βουλέωμαι, but it aptly conveys the connection between thought and one’s own action that was essential to βουλέωμαι.

The association between βουλέωμαι and deciding one’s own action is further revealed by a significant decline in the relative frequency of the active βουλέω during the Classical period. In Homer, the proportion of active to total uses was 31/33 (0.94), and in the other archaic poets, 13/15 (0.87). But in Aeschylus it was 12/21 (0.57); in Sophocles, 16/25 (0.64); Euripides, 26/41 (0.63); Pseudo-Xenophon, 4/9 (0.44); Aristophanes, 6/22 (0.27); Herodotus, 23/135 (0.17); Antiphon, 5/15 (0.33); Andocides, 6/19 (0.32); Thucydides, 5/15 (0.33); Thucydides, 6/19 (0.32); Thucydides,

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85. Tyrt. frag. 4 in West IE; Theog. 69–72, 1050–51, 1088; Pind. Nem. 9.37; Phoc. in Orion Anth. i.22.
86. Cf. Ag. 1223, 1614, 1627, 1634; Eum. 696; Pers. 758; Sept. 200, 248; PV 206, 1031.
What accounts for this change is specialization over time. The early prominence of \( \text{βουλεύω} \) gave way to less frequent usage as some of its functions devolved to other terms. Most importantly, “deliberate,” that is, “come to a decision about one’s own action,” became the near-exclusive province of \( \text{βουλεύω} \). What had been a way of emphasizing the subject’s authority over an action gradually became standard usage whenever the proposed action was decided by the subject. \( \text{βουλεύω} \) still performed this function occasionally, especially when the meaning was closer to “plot” than to “plan.” But “plot” was soon taken over by \( \text{πιβουλεύω} \), literally “against-plan.” At the same time, “advise” began to be expressed more often by \( \text{συμβουλεύω} \), literally “with-plan,” while \( \text{βουλεύω} \) itself came to denote primarily the activity of formally constituted councils and councillors. Lysias’ speeches contain only one use of \( \text{βουλεύω} \) that does not indicate council activity, as do those of Demosthenes. Conversely, in Demosthenes, “come to a decision about an action,” expressing no negative intent, was always represented by \( \text{βουλεύω} \)—just as in Aristotle.

Demosthenes and Aristotle were contemporaries (384–322), so we need not be surprised that they used \( \text{βουλεύω} \) in the same way. But we should note how fully Aristotle’s analysis has been confirmed. Our earliest examples of \( \text{βουλεύω} \) suggest not only that it indicated internal deliberation, but that it emphasized the internality of the deliberation taking place. Later, just as Aristotle implies, \( \text{βουλεύω} \) became the standard way to denote coming to a decision about one’s own action. During the same period, however, we also find the first cases of \( \text{βουλεύω} \) used with a plural subject, some of which—unlike in Aristotle—definitely indicated speech.

88. TLG search, last accessed September 10, 2018.
89. Soph. OT 618, 1417; Ant. 1179; Eur. Ion 984; El. 618; Med. 874; Or. 773; Ar. Av. 637; Nub. 419; Exel. 505; pos. Pax 690; Hdt. 1.73, 117, 120, 3.84, 6.52, 130, 8.97, 100, 9.106; Thuc. 1.85, 97, 132, 2.6, 3.28, 4.15, 37, 41, 51, 74, 5.63, 87, 111, 116, 6.18, 91, 8.50; Lys. 3.42; Dem. 19.21; Arist. Met. 1013a.
90. Soph. Aj. 1055; El. 1001, 649; OT 606; Ant. 490; Trach. 807; Eur. Andr. 804; El. 27, 1012; Hec. 855, 870; Med. 37, 316, 401; Orest. 1089; Rhex. 862, 950; Hdt. 1.11, 210, 5.106, 6.61, 7.197, 9.110; Antiph. 1.26, 3.7, 6.16; Andoc. 1.95, 2.20; Aeschin. 2.115, 117; Dem. 19.21; Din. 1.30; Arist. Pol. 1310a10.
91. Aesch. Sept. 29; Soph. OT 618; Eur. Or. 1237; Hdt 1.24, 99, 183, 209, 210, 212, 319, 122, 134, 6.65, 137, 8.132; Ar. Eq. 894; Pax 404, 407; Thesm. 83, 335; Plut. 570, 1111; frequently thereafter.
92. \( \text{πιβουλεύω} \) suggests “advise” at Soph. Antiph. 267; Phil. 423; Eur. Hipp. 89; Rhex. 108; Thuc. 3.42, 4.68, 6.39, 8.76; Lys. 31.31, and seldom thereafter. \( \text{συμβουλεύω} \) appears in Soph. OT 1370; 57 times in Herodotus; Thuc. 1.65, 8.68; Ar. Nub. 475, 793–94, and frequently thereafter.
93. Usually in the senses “serve on a council” or “sit as a council,” sometimes “give advice as a council/councillor.” Possible attestations: Hdt. 6.57; Xen. [Ath. pol.] 1.9. Probable: Ar. Exel. 444; Eq. 774; Pax 690. Certain: Ant. 6.45; Andoc. 1.75; IG I² 105.30, 49; Lys. 26.10–11. Strikingly, \( \text{βουλεύω} \) was not conventionally used of councils in democracies. It appears only eight times with the Athenian \( \text{βουλή} \), all atypical for one reason or another. The discursive and decision-making activity of democratic councillors was normally represented by \( \text{συμβουλεύω} \) (first attested Hdt. 1.133), where the \( \text{προ-} \) presumably alluded to its preliminary status (cf. Arist. Pol. 1299b30–35). This point is discussed further in Cammack 2020; cf. Andrews 1954.
94. Lys. 3.42 (“plot”). Cf. 13.19, 20; 74, 16.8; 25.14; 26.10–11; 30.10, 22, 23; 31.2, 5, 14, 24, 26, 31–32, 34. Two other attestations are fragments, so the context is unclear.
95. Dem. 19.21 (“plot”). Cf. 18.25; 19.154, 286; 21.111; 22.5, 9, 12, 16, 36, 40; 47.44; 57.8; 59.3–4.
96. Dem. 4.33, 8.67, 18.235, 272, 19.226, 21.41, 74, 23.12, 27.4, 36.31, 50, 37.13, 47.71, 52.30, 61.34, 41, 56; Ex. 19.
The earliest examples of βουλεύομαι implying speech are mid-fifth century: “Have they actually decided [βεβούλευνται] to do this to me?” spoken by Sophocles’ Electra in reference to her mother Clytemnestra and stepfather Aegisthus (El. 385), and Aeneas’ comment to Hector in Euripides’ Rhesus, “if this signaling is a trap . . . we shall deliberate” (βουλευσόμεσθα, 129–30). In neither case is discussion explicitly attested, though it may be assumed.

Elsewhere, discussion is certain. Herodotus, for instance, used βουλεύομαι in reference to the first meeting of the seven Persians who conspired to kill the Magian pretender to the Persian throne—a meeting at which they explicitly “exchanged speeches” (ἐδίδοσαν σφίσι . . . λόγους, 3.71). The term reappears in the context of the “constitutional debate” said to have taken place a few days later (3.80).97 Thucydides used it in military situations, as in “the allies deliberated [ἐβουλεύοντο] which of the remaining places they should go against next—the Eleans urged Lepreon, the Mantineans Tegea, and the Argives and Athenians sided with the Mantineans,” and the discussions of Nikias, Alkibiades, and Demosthenes prior to the expedition to Sicily (6.25, 7.47).98 Dialogical deliberation also appears in Plato, as in Socrates’ comment to Callicles in the Gorgias (quoted above), “I once overheard you [pl.] debating [ὑμω̃ν βουλευομένων] how far you ought to practice wisdom” (487c), and in the Critias, where it is said that ten kings “took counsel [ἐβουλεύοντο] about common affairs” (119d), agreeing that “if anyone should attempt to overthrow any city . . . they should all lend aid, taking counsel in common” (κοινῇ . . . βουλευόμενοι, 120c–d).99 Similarly, Xenophon and Lysias used βουλεύομαι to describe the decision-making discussions of Athens’ Thirty Tyrants.100 Another example is supplied by Demosthenes: following a meeting of the assembly, “the envoys met and discussed [ἐβουλεύοντο] which of them should be left behind” (19.122, trans. Vince).

What can we say about these cases and others like them? To begin with, each involves small numbers of participants. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are two, the senior Trojans in Rhesus not many more, the Persian noblemen seven, the Athenian generals three, Callicles and friends four, the kings in the Critias ten, the Athenian oligarchs thirty, and the envoys in Demosthenes nine. The number of allies in the Thucydidean passage is unknown, but probably fell within this range.

Next, although βουλεύομαι in these examples certainly indicated discussion, so could other verbs. One, encountered above in Aristotle’s report of the ban on discussion among judges, was κοινολογέομαι, “speak together” (Pol. 1268b5–10; cf. Thuc. 8.63, 98). Others include δίδωμι αὐτοὺς λόγους, “give each other speeches,” as seen in Herodotus;101 ἀνακοινώ, “communicate,” found in Lysistrata’s demand, “get your allies’ heads together [ἀνακοινώσατε] and come

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98. Cf. 6.1, 46, 93, 7.1, 50, 8.8, 54; Xen. Hell. 2.1.6, 31, 6.4.15.
100. Xen. Hell. 2.3.13, with 3.27–50; Lys 12.25, 50.
to some decision [βουλεύσασθε];\textsuperscript{102} and διαλέγομαι, “discuss,” “argue,” or “confer,” source of the English “dialogue.” διαλέγομαι often appeared in philosophical contexts, and “dialectic” was conventionally contrasted with political speech, as in Plato’s \textit{Gorgias} and the opening of Aristotle’s \textit{Rhetoric}.\textsuperscript{103} A more political example appears in a decree quoted in Demosthenes’ speech “On the Crown,” which directed envoys to visit Philip of Macedon and “confer” (διαλέξονται) with him (18.164).\textsuperscript{104}

Another option was κοινόω, “make common” (middle κοινόωμαι, “make common to one another”). An important example appears in Aeschylus’ \textit{Agamemnon}.\textsuperscript{105} Hearing Agamemnon’s groans, the chorus of elders suspects he has been killed and, in Sommerstein’s translation, declares “Let us deliberate [κοινοσώμεθ᾽] and see if there might be any safe plan to follow” (1346–47). What happens next looks like ideal deliberative practice on the Habermasian model. A small number of speakers (between six and twelve) discuss what the group should do, responding to one another and giving reasons for their positions. Three proposals are advanced: to call for help, to apprehend the murderers on the spot, and to ascertain the facts before proceeding. The last secures general assent and the entire group acts accordingly. This is probably the best ancient Greek example of what many contemporary deliberative democrats mean by deliberation, but it is represented not by βουλεύομαι but by κοινόωμαι.\textsuperscript{106}

What distinguished cases where βουλεύομαι was used from those where it was not? The main difference is exactly what Aristotle leads us to expect. βουλεύομαι appeared only when what was reported was not merely discussion but specifically decision-making. Herodotus’ constitutional debate is commonly cited for its theoretical content, but the reported context was practical. The future government of the Persians lay in its participants’ hands, and after three speeches, a vote was held, with a majority favoring monarchy (3.83).\textsuperscript{107} The discussion of Callicles and friends also had a practical purpose: they were deciding what style of life to pursue (Grg. 487d). The allies’ and generals’ next steps, the ten kings’ policymaking, the oligarchs’ decrees, and the envoys’ plans also fall into this category. Conversely, when only discussion, not decision-making, was implied—as in the decree ordering the conference with Philip—a different verb was used.

Most significantly, when βουλεύομαι denoted group discussion, every member of the group took part in making the decision. This is clearest in Herodotus’ “constitutional debate,” since the speeches culminate in a formal vote. The

\textsuperscript{102} Ar. \textit{Lys.} 1176, trans. Lindsay. Cf. Xen. \textit{Hell.} 6.3.8; Isoc. 1.34, 5.19, 235, 12.235; Pl. \textit{Prt.} 314b, 349a; Aeschin. 2.64, 68.


\textsuperscript{104} Dem. 18.164, cf. 28, 73; Isoc. 2.46, 15.256; Aeschin. 2.18, 103.

\textsuperscript{105} Aesch. \textit{Ag.} 1347–71; cf. Cho. 673, 716–18; Ar. \textit{Nub.} 197; Thuc. 4.4.

\textsuperscript{106} The soldiers’ assembly at Thuc. 8.76–77, at which numerous speakers engage in mutual exhortation and encouragement, also bears comparison with the Habermasian model. However, again, βουλεύομαι does not appear.

\textsuperscript{107} The text seems to imply that only the four Persians who did not make speeches actually voted: “these three proposals having been set forth, the four of the seven men declared for the last” (γνωμή 

3 μὲν ὁδὲ τρεῖς αὐτὸ προσέκινε, οἱ δὲ τέσσερες τὸν ἐπά αὐτὸν προσέπνησαν τοῦτο). This suggests that speaking and voting may have been regarded as partly substitutable, in that speaking could be interpreted as a declaration of a vote. That interpretation will be discussed further below.
Thirty Tyrants, too, typically voted on their actions.\footnote{108} Majoritarianism is implied in the Thucydidean case: the Mantineans’ plan is adopted because it is supported by the Argives and Athenians, leaving the Eleans in a minority. How the kings in the \textit{Critias} reach their decisions is not specified, but we can assume that each attended the meeting not simply to air his opinion, but to take part in deciding policy.\footnote{109} The same seems true of Callicles and friends and the envoys in Demosthenes. The decisions they were making were ones in which all could be expected to have a say, not only through their voices but also through their votes.

\textbf{βουλεύομαι}, then, only represented group dialogue when everyone included in the grammatical subject of the verb was a decision-maker. As we have seen, the final decision could be taken by a vote; establishing a consensus verbally would also have been possible. Either way, the deliberative process culminated in the choice of an action for which the group as a whole would be responsible.

\textbf{Audience Deliberation: Decision-Making after Advice}

The third model of deliberation found in the ancient sources is a partial combination of the first two. It involved both decision-making and communication, but those who decided (that is, the grammatical subject of \textit{βουλεύομαι}) typically did not communicate their reasoning, while those who articulated reasons for or against a given course of action did not decide. This is the model of deliberation to which Aristotle referred when he observed that deliberators “sometimes bring in advisers [συμβούλους δὲ παραλαμβάνομεν], distrusting our own capacity to think things through [διαγνω̃ναι]” \textit{(Eth. Nic. 1112b10)}. I shall call this model “audience deliberation,” since deliberation is in these cases attributed to the decision-making audience as opposed to those who offered their views.

The simplest form of audience deliberation involved a single decision-maker and his advisers. A paradigmatic example is a monarch and counselors. The exiled Athenian tyrant Pisistratus “deliberated alongside his sons” \textit{(ἐβουλεύετο ἅμα τοῖς παῖσι, 1.61)}, the Milesian tyrant Aristagoras “deliberated with those of his faction” \textit{(ἐβουλεύετο ὑ̄μ̄ ὑ̄μ̄ τὸν στρατιώτανων, 5.36)}, and the Persian emperor Xerxes deliberated with those he summoned to assist him \textit{(ἐβουλεύετο ἅμα Περσέων τοὺς ἐπικλήτους, 8.101)}. Other examples include a father taking advice from his sons and a husband from his wife \textit{(Hdt. 2.107, 9.133)}. This form of deliberation also appears frequently in the writings of Isocrates, as in his address to Philip of Macedon \textit{(L5.18; cf. L1.5, 34–5, L2.51–2)}. In each case the decision-maker received input from others, but the use of \textit{βουλεύομαι} in the singular indicates that the final decision was his alone.

Two consecutive speeches in the Demosthenic corpus illustrate the difference between dialogical and audience deliberation. In “Against Olympiodorus,” two men swear to proceed by mutual agreement and take counsel together several
times before relations go sour. Here \textit{βουλεύομαι} appears in the plural and \textit{κοινῇ}, “in common,” is added for clarity. “Mutual agreement” is \textit{κοινῇ βουλεύομενοι}, and the two men’s discussions are represented by \textit{ἐβουλεύομεθα...κοινῇ}, “we came to a decision together” (Dem. 48.9, 10, 22, 28).\textsuperscript{110} This is a clear case of dialogical deliberation: joint decision-making through discussion. In “Against Evergus,” however, although discussion takes place, the decision, and thus the attribution of \textit{βουλεύομαι}, falls to one man only. The litigant “deliberated with my friends \textit{βουλεύομεθα μετὰ τὸν φίλον} as to what course of action I should pursue” (47.71).\textsuperscript{111} Vince offers the apt translation “I consulted with my friends.” The litigant sought his friends’ assistance: he wished to hear what they had to say. But crucially, the appearance of \textit{βουλεύομαι} in the singular reveals that his friends did not themselves deliberate. Though his friends addressed him, only the litigant deliberated, because only he decided: a clear case of audience deliberation.

What verb, if not \textit{βουλεύομαι}, represented the activity of those who spoke but did not decide? The answer is \textit{συμβουλεύω}, “advise,” or sometimes a synonym.\textsuperscript{112} While the speaker in “Against Evergus” deliberated, \textit{ἐβουλεύομην}, his friends advised, \textit{συμβουλεύοντων} (71). Xerxes asked Artemisia to “advise \textit{συμβουλεύσοι} me as to which of these things I shall best decide \textit{βουλευσάμενος} to do” (Hdt. 8.101), and Isocrates’ friends warned him, “You are about to send something offering counsel \textit{συμβουλεύσοντα} to Philip, a man who...surely believes that he more than anyone is able to take counsel \textit{βουλεύομαι} by himself!” (5.18).\textsuperscript{113}

That \textit{βουλεύομαι} and \textit{συμβουλεύω} often appeared together is no surprise. They represented complementary strands of a single advising/deciding dyad, both parts of which, as we saw above, had previously been expressed by \textit{βουλεύω}. Their connection is reinforced by the fact that the middle and passive forms of the Greek verb look the same. \textit{βουλεύομαι} could mean either “come to a decision” or “be advised.” The English equivalent is “take counsel”: one may take counsel either alone or more literally from others. \textit{βουλεύομαι} appears in the latter sense in Aeschylus’ Choephoroe: “Since we are not short of friends,” Clytemnestra announces, “we will take counsel” (βουλευσόμεσθα, 718).\textsuperscript{114} The mention of friends makes it clear that advice is expected. This situation could equally have been expressed by the middle voice of \textit{συμβουλεύω}, that is, \textit{συμβουλεύομαι}, “consult,” as seen in Herodotus. When Sesostris’ house is set on fire, “he at once consulted his wife” (συμβουλεύσσασα τῇ γυναικί), that is, “took advice from his wife” (2.107). Similarly, Masistes, in a moment of uncertainty, συμβουλευσάμενος τοῖς παισί, “consulted his children” (9.113).\textsuperscript{115} These cases are equivalent to that in “Against Evergus.” Though communication took place, the singular verb shows that Sesostris and Masistes

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{110} Cf. Lys. 13.24; Isoc. 17.7; Hyp. 3.12.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Cf. Thuc. 1.128; Isoc. 5.69, 12.233; Pl. Resp. 400b.
\item \textsuperscript{112} E.g., \textit{πείθω}, “persuade,” Thuc. 1.73; \textit{παραινέω}, “exhort, recommend, advise,” Hdt. 9.79; Isoc. 2.46, L.3.3.
\item \textsuperscript{114} A future middle used passively; cf. Ag. 844.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Cf. Ar. Nub. 457; Thuc. 8.68; Xen. Cyr. 2.1.7; Pl. Theag. 122a; Isoc. 9.44.
\end{itemize}
decided alone. They were the rulers in these contexts, their wives or children their counselors.

The same pattern appears in cases of what we may call participatory oligarchy, where a group of rulers takes advice from its subjects, except that here, the decision-maker is a collective body rather than a single person. The pseudo-Platonic *Sisyphus* opens with just this scenario. The previous day, the rulers of the Pharsalians had been deliberating (ἐβουλεύοντο), and had “compelled” Sisyphus to advise them (συμβουλεύειν σὺν αὐτοῖς ἢναγκαζόν με, 387c). That Sisyphus is not himself a deliberator is implied both by the βουλεύομαι/συμβουλέω dyad and by the report of compulsion, and confirmed by the following line: “Now with us Pharsalians it is a law to obey the rulers, should they order one of us to advise them” (ἀν κελεύωσι συμβουλεύειν τινὰ ἣμῶν αὐτοῖς, 387c). Another form of participatory oligarchy appears in Plato’s *Laws*: the elder guardians are to deliberate (βουλεύεσθαι) while the younger ones give advice (συμβουλίας, 964e–5a). Aristotle, too, mentions a form of oligarchy in which “the function of advising is given to all, but only the rulers deliberate” (τῆς συμβουλῆς μὲν μεταφέρονται πᾶσι, βουλεύσθαι δὲ τοὺς ἄρχοντας, *Pol.* 1298b28). If the deliberation of the rulers in these cases included discussion among themselves, then what is portrayed is a combination of dialogical and audience deliberation. If not, then the rulers engaged in audience deliberation alone.

Those who deliberated could of course ignore the advice they received. Referring to Xerxes’ desire to return home after the battle of Salamis, Herodotus wrote that in his opinion, “he would not have remained even if every man and woman had counseled [συνεβούλευον] him to do so” (8.103). Presumably those who offered counsel were influential often enough that they usually continued to make suggestions. But, lacking decision power themselves, they were only as influential as the deliberator allowed them to be.

**DELIBERATION IN ANCIENT GREEK ASSEMBLIES**

Three models of deliberation thus appear in the ancient Greek sources. Internal, in which one person makes up his or her mind alone; dialogical, in which a pair or a group comes to a joint decision through discussion; and audience, in which a decision-maker (either single or collective) comes to a decision after receiving advice. This tripartite classification is interesting in itself, since deliberation is not normally analyzed this way: rather, internal and dialogical deliberation alone are typically distinguished.\(^\text{116}\) How far did deliberation in ancient Greek assemblies, as represented in our texts, conform to any one of these models?

As discussed above, assembly deliberation has long been interpreted dialogically, although (as we saw) the evidence usually cited is weak. Nonetheless, one very important body of evidence does provide support, namely the use of βουλεύομαι in the first-person plural by assembly speakers with reference to themselves and their audience.

\(^{116}\) See, e.g., Goodin 2008.
In Thucydides, for example, the Spartan king Archidamus exHORTS the crowd thus: “Let us not, in so short a part of a day, decide on [βουλεύομαι] so many lives . . . but at our leisure” (1.85). The ephor Sthenelaides responds: “Let no one tell me that we ought to deliberate [ημᾶς . . . βουλεύομαι] only once we have been wronged” (1.86). Diodotus, addressing the Athenian assembly, says “We are deliberating [ημᾶς . . . βουλεύομαι] not about the present but about the future . . . we are not litigating with the Mytileneans . . . but deliberating [βουλεύομαι] about them” (3.44).117 Further cases appear among the orators. “We imagined . . . that with Boeotia on our side we could take on the whole world,” declared Andocides in 391, “but here we are considering [βουλεύομαι] how to keep fighting the Lacedaemonians now Boeotia is making peace” (3.25).118 Isocrates, writing in the person of the younger Archidamus, claimed that “Never . . . has so much has been at stake as in this question which we are now assembled to decide [βουλευόμεθα]” (6.7).119 Elsewhere, in his own person, he argued that “no good will come of the resolutions made so far . . . unless we determine [βουλευόμεθα] well on the rest” (8.15).120 Aeschines celebrated Athens’ lawgiver for laying down “the proper manner of deliberating [βουλεύομαι] . . . when we [ημᾶς] gather at meetings” (1.22), and praised attempts to maintain order lest “we not even be able to deliberate” (βουλεύεσθαι . . . ημᾶς, 1.33). And Demosthenes wrote, “Let us . . . make a plan [βουλευόμεθα] for dealing with these men” (17.17, cf. 9.7); “The really shocking thing is not that we deliberate [βουλευόμεθα] worse than our ancestors . . . but that we do it worse than all other men” (23.21); “Are we never to meet and deliberate [βουλευόμεθα]?” (24.99); and “You would rightly pay attention if anyone promised that in the matters we are considering [βουλευόμεθα] justice and expediency coincide” (Ex. 18).

How should we interpret this material? Two possibilities present themselves. One is that βουλεύομαι was in these cases intended dialogically. The speakers deliberated inasmuch as they spoke: accordingly the entire gathering, speakers and listeners alike, may be conceived as engaging in communicative decision-making, the speakers directly and the listeners more vicariously. The other is that βουλεύομαι here denotes not speech-making so much as the broader enterprise in which speakers and listeners are engaged, that is, coming to a decision about the proposal under consideration. On that interpretation, speakers did not deliberate inasmuch as they spoke, but inasmuch as they played some role in the policy-making process.

How may we choose between these interpretations? Final certainty is impossible, but several points support the latter. For one thing, although (as we saw above) several verbs other than βουλεύομαι—such as κοινολογέομαι, ἀνακοινώ, and διαλέγομαι—could denote discussion, none was ever used in conjunction with all assembly-goers. διαλέγομαι, “discuss,” is an important case in point. Though it often denoted the activity of orators, it never embraced

117. Cf. Thuc. 6.21, 23.
118. Cf. Andoc. 29.
120. Cf. Isoc. 8.18, 25, 57, 7.78.
their audiences, nor was dēmos ever the subject of this verb, but only its object. Yet if ἄριστος in the cases above implied discussion among speakers and listeners—as so many translators have suggested—we would surely expect to find cases where the audience was unambiguously represented as the subject of a verb meaning “discuss.”

For another thing, speakers’ use of the first-person plural to refer to themselves and their audience was inconsistent. In each case quoted above, the speaker had a special reason to emphasize his identification with his audience: he was discussing an external threat to the polis (Archidamus, Andocides, Demosthenes, Isocrates), distinguishing himself from a rival speaker (Sthenelaïdes, Diodotus, Demosthenes), or showing respect to a founding hero (Aeschines). But speakers also often used the first-person plural to refer to themselves and other speakers. Diodotus distinguished between “we who advise” and “you who give matters only brief consideration” (Thuc. 3.44), Demosthenes referred to “all of us who address you” (14.2) and Hypereides, addressing a panel of judges, referred to the assembly (dēmos) as “it” and those who spoke before it as “us” (5, cols. 28–29).

Most important, the cases cited above are, to the best of my knowledge, the only ones extant where assembly speakers are represented as deliberators. Every other time ἄριστος appears in connection with an assembly, the grammatical subject is the audience alone, while the actions of speakers are represented by another verb such as λέγω, “speak,” ὑμηροφέω, “address the dēmos” or “speak publicly,” or συμβουλεύω, “advise”—just as in the cases of audience deliberation presented above.

The association of deliberation with ancient Greek assembly audiences is easily established. In Thucydides, Cleon accuses his listeners (ὑμεῖς, “you”) of behaving “more like spectators . . . than deliberators [βουλεύομενός]” (3.38), while other speakers exhort their hearers to “deliberate well” (ἐν βουλεύομεθε; e.g., 4.87, 6.17, 36). Andocides noted to the Athenian assembly that “today you are considering [βουλεύεσθε] a peace” (3.12), Aeschines wished “to recall to you the time and circumstances of your deliberations [ἐβουλεύεσθε]” (2.70), Demosthenes argued that other speakers had “made the mistake of submitting to you the wrong subject for deliberation [βουλεύεσθε]” (3.1), Dinarchus described the herald praying “before he hands over to you the task of deliberation [ὑμῖν τὸ βουλεύεσθαι]” (2.14), and so on.

The representation of public speakers as advisers is also easily shown. What the would-be orator must know in order to offer advice (συμβουλεύω) is the topic of the Pseudo-Platonic Alcibiades I, Xenophon’s Memorabilia 3.6, and Aristotle’s Rhetoric 1.4. Aeschines prosecuted Timarchus for failing to live

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121. See, e.g., Aeschin. 1.25: “Now this is a reminiscence, fellow citizens, and an imitation of the posture of Solon, showing his customary bearing as he used to address the people of Athens [διελέγετο τῷ δήμῳ τῶν Ἀθηναίων]” (trans. Adams): Cf. Dem. 24.48, 58.45; Aeschin. 2.12; Hyp. 5 frag. 7; [Arist.] Ath. pol. 43.6.

122. Cf. Thuc. 1.36, 43, 71, 73, 78, 80, 6.92, 7.14, 15.


up to the moral standards expected of an Athenian σύμβουλος (1.185); Demosthenes asked his audience to “show yourselves willing hearers of those who wish to counsel [συμβουλεύων] you” (Ex. 3); and Dinarchus identified advising (συμβουλεύω) as the special duty of public speakers and attacked Demosthenes for occasionally failing to do so (1.35), among many other examples.125 Most significant are cases where assembly speakers and listeners are represented as, respectively, advising and deliberating at the same time, and again, examples are plentiful. Some we have already encountered, such as Protagoras 319d (“When the Athenians have to decide [βουλεύσω], ... the man who rises to advise them [συμβουλεύει] ...”). Others appear in Alcibiades I, such as “on what subject do the Athenians propose to deliberate [βουλεύουσι], that you should stand up to advise [συμβουλεύεσθαι] them?” (106c, cf. 107a–e). As usual, the orators prove to be a rich resource. Lysias mentioned how Diocles had “advised you while you were deliberating” (συνεβούλευσε βουλευομένοις ὑμῖν, 6.54). Aeschines recalled Demosthenes saying that he was “amazed at both the listeners and the ambassadors, for they were carelessly wasting time—the listeners wasting time taking counsel [βουλεύεσθαι], the ambassadors in giving it [συμβουλεύειν]” (2.49). Demosthenes said that if in the past Athens’ regular speakers had advised (συνεβούλευσαν) well, “there would have been no need for you to deliberate today” (ὑμας ... βουλεύεσθαι, 4.1); “If you will listen with the attention appropriate to men deliberating [βουλευομένος] ... I shall be able to advise [συμβουλεύεσθαι]” (5.3); “It is your duty when deliberating [βουλευομένος] ... to allow freedom of speech to all your advisers [τῶν συμβουλευόντων]” (5.1); and so on.126 The Demosthenic Exordia, a collection of fifty-six stock openings to assembly speeches, illustrates the general pattern. Out of thirty uses of βουλεύομαι, only one, a first-person plural, denotes an action undertaken by both speaker and audience (18, quoted above). Another is first-person singular and refers to the speaker making up his mind about whether or not to speak (19); another, first-person plural, refers to the deliberations undertaken by assembly speakers prior to speaking (50); and yet another is third-person plural and refers to the deliberations undertaken by all men in adversity (43). The remaining twenty-six cases are all second-person plural and denote the activity of the audience in contradistinction from that of the speaker.127

AUDIENCE DELIBERATION AS COLLECTIVE ACTION

We have thus arrived at an answer to the question posed earlier: Who deliberated when orators orated? Not, at least on the usual representation found in our

125. Xen. Hell. 1.7.16, 19, 2.2.15, 2.4.40; Andoc. 4.12; Lys. 10.1, 14.45, 25.27, 33.3; Isoc. 4.3, 19, 170–71, 5.88, 143, 8.1–2, 27, 52–55, 75, 12.170–71; Aeschin. 1.1–3, 1.26, 64, 110–11, 120, 180, 186, 2.29, 49, 65, 79, 157, 165, 158, 225–26, 3.71; Dem. 4.1, 8.1, 4.73–74, 9.19–20, 10.17, 75, 14.8, 15.1, 18.86, 236. Ex. 1, 3, 6.11, 20, 26–27, 30, 33, 35–36, 56; Din. 1.31, 35–36, 40, 72, 76–78, 81, 93, 2.14, 15; Hyp. 5 col. 28; Pl. Prt. 322d–24c; Grg. 455b–56a; Arist. [Ath. pol.] 23–24, 29.


127. Dem. 15.6, 18.65, 19.13; Ex. 6, 26, 27; Cf. Isoc. 12.170; Pl. Leg. 949e; [Pl.] Dem. 380a–c.

128. Dem. Ex. 6.2, 10.1–2, 11.1, 12.2, 18.3 (two cases), 19.1, 20.1, 21.3 (two cases), 22.1, 26.1, 27.1–2, 29.1–2, 30.1, 35.1–2, 36.1, 40.1–2, 47.2, 50.3, 56.3.
sources, the orators themselves, but their audiences, those who turned up at meetings, heard— perhaps with difficulty— the speeches addressed to them, and voted yes or no on the proposals under consideration. While speakers occasionally represented themselves as part of the deliberating group, far more often they were portrayed as playing the distinct role of adviser.

This interpretation raises some important questions. Even if the deliberation performed by ancient Greek assembly audiences did not involve participation in public speech, was it not communicative at all? If not, how could it have been collective? And why should public speakers have been so ready to represent themselves as advisers rather than deliberators? Were not they, too, part of the decision-making δήμος?

As is well known, ancient Greek assembly audiences did not sit in silence. θόρυβος, “clamor,” was commonplace and could have significant consequences, as in the cases of Cleon’s generalship (Thuc. 4.28) and the “trial” of the Arginusae generals (Xen. Hell. 1.7). An extended example of speaker-audience interaction appears in Aeschines’ speech against Timarchus. Autolycus, speaking on behalf of the council of the Areopagos, had let slip a number of double entendres in a speech concerning Timarchus and the result was much laughter and shouting (μετὰ γέλωτος θόρυβος, 1.83). Then, “Pyrrhandrus came forward to censure you, and he asked the δήμος if they were not ashamed of themselves for laughing in the presence of the council of the Areopagos. But you drove him away, replying, ‘We know, Pyrrhandrus, that we ought not to laugh in front of them, but so strong is the truth that it prevails over all the calculations of men’” (1.84, trans. Adams). This “reply” is surely not to be taken literally—Aeschines can hardly have meant that the audience chanted these words in unison—but the important point is clear. Communication in the assembly was not one-way. Audience members often shouted back to those who addressed them. Presumably still more frequently, they also spoke to one another.

Yet such behavior was not represented as dialogue or discussion. As we have already observed, verbs such as κοινολογέομαι, ἀνακοινώ, and διαλέγομαι do not appear in this context. Nor were either θόρυβος or intra-audience conversation regarded as essential to the deliberative process, since (as we saw in the second section above), votes in the Athenian assembly could be taken without debate. Most significantly, θόρυβος was typically portrayed as an

129. Bernard Manin has recently represented deliberation in ancient Greek assemblies in the same way. Referring to the debate over Mytilene, he argues that “in such deliberation, the driving element is the hearing of opposed persuasive speeches” (italics original). Turning to Aristotle’s Rhetoric, Manin (2017, 41) writes: “Here, as well, the orators speak, offering opposed opinions and arguments, but the citizens deliberate.”

130. See Andoc. 1.69–70; Isoc. 15.272; Dem. 18.52, 23.19, 47.44, 50.3, L1.3; Ex. 5, 21, 26; Lyc. 1.52, 58, 127; Hyp. 1.2, 20, 4.41; Theophr. Char. 7. Discussed in Gish 2012; Hansen 1987, 70–72; Schwartzberg 2010; Tacon 2001; Thomas 2016; Villacèque 2012; Roisman 2004; Wallace 2004. On θόρυβος in the courts, see Bers 1985. θόρυβος also frequently appeared in military or revolutionary contexts: see, e.g., Hdt. 3.80; Isoc. 4.97; Thuc. 1.49, 4.68; Arist. Pol. 1269b39.


132. As the acoustic reconstruction discussed in Johnstone 1996 assumes.

133. Hansen 1983, 123–30; 1987, 90–91. In an important recent paper which I hope to discuss elsewhere, Mirko Canevaro (2018) has argued that audience response played a crucial role in determining which proposals were put to the vote. This is possible, although it is not clear that several competing proposals were often debated in tandem with one another, thus necessitating a choice by the proedroi which the audience might have been able to influence.
interruption of the deliberative process, not as a part of it. In the passage quoted from Aeschines above, Pyrrandrus comes forward to “censure” the δῆμος for its reaction. Dicaeopolis in Aristophanes’ Acharnians expects his heckling to put a stop to the day’s deliberations, not to be treated as part of them (37–39, 170–71), and Demosthenes twice explicitly represented crowd noise as an unwelcome distraction from deliberation (5.3, quoted above, and 8.3). Only once is the relationship between θόρυβος and βουλεύομαι represented more neutrally (Aechin. 2.50–51). By contrast, many other terms are positively associated with βουλεύομαι (across all contexts): δοκέω, “decide” (188 cases); ἀκούω, “listen” (89 cases); σκέπτομαι, “consider” (55 cases); σκοπέω, “examine” (35 cases); λογίζομαι, “calculate” (19 cases); and ψηφίζω, “vote” (18 cases).134 Of special interest with respect to assemblies are the imperatives σκέψασθε,135 σκοπεῖτε,136 λογίει̃σθε,137 and ἐνθυμεῖ̃σθε,138 which parallel the injunctions to “deliberate well” cited above. Again, this suggests that deliberation was associated primarily with internal reflection, just as Aristotle (and Plato) led us to expect.

Yet if the deliberation performed by ancient Greek assembly audiences was not intrinsically communicative, how can it have been collective?139 It is clear that the ancient Greeks conceived of assembly deliberation as a collective action. Although, as we have seen, βουλεύομαι often appeared in the plural in this context, suggesting a distributive conceptualization of deliberative activity, it also appeared in the singular with the collective subject δῆμος.140 Moreover, collective political action was well theorized by ancient Greek authors, particularly Aristotle, who gave logos a central place in his analysis.141 What if not dialogue could have knitted the actions of an assembly together?

A possible answer is the fact that all audience members heard the same speeches. Having listened to the same set of arguments for and against each proposal under consideration, those present shared in the same deliberative process. This is plausible, and is supported by the fact that listening (ἀκούω) was also commonly represented as a collective action performed by the δῆμος.142 Yet if Johnstone is right that many assembly-goers, at least in fifth-century Athens, could not hear the speeches addressed to them, then this may not, perhaps, adequately justify the representation of deliberation by δῆμοι as collective.

An alternative interpretation starts from a consideration of a wider range of actions performed by the δῆμος. As well as deliberating and listening, the

134. Word frequency to within fifteen words. TLG, accessed April 24, 2018.
136. Aeschin. 2.69, 160, 3.120, 176; Dem. 13.2, 15.26; Ex. 10.1.
137. Thuc. 6.36; Dem. 4.31; cf. Ex. 21.
138. Thuc. 5.11; Dem. 4.31; cf. Ex. 12, 26. See also Andoc. 2.19, 3.34; Dem. 24.32, Ex. 10, 18, 30, 32, 35; Pl. Def. 414a.
139. I thank CP’s anonymous referees for asking me to say more on this issue. Cf. Waldron 1999, 92–123; List and Pettit 2011; Yack 2006; Garsten 2013. For an alternative way of thinking about collective action (to which I am greatly indebted), see Tuck 2008.
dēmos acted (πράσσω),143 judged (κρίνω),144 crowned (στεφάνω),145 besieged (πολιορκέω),146 made agreements (συντίθημι),147 and—most commonly—decided (δοκέω).148 Strikingly, the dēmos did not, in our sources, laugh (γελάω), consider (σκέπτομαι), or examine (σκοπέω), although those actions were, as we have seen, assigned distributively to members of assembly audiences.150 Dēmos was also never the subject of θορυβέω in an assembly, but only on the battlefield.151 Nor, it bears repeating, did dēmos ever govern κοινολογέομαι, ἀνακοινόω, or διαλέγομαι, even though the actions represented by those verbs were surely performed by many—perhaps all—audience-members individually during meetings.

What distinguished actions performed collectively by the dēmos from those performed severally by members of that body? The evidence presented above suggests that actions were represented as collective if and when they related directly to the shared purpose for which the members of the group had gathered. Athenian citizens did not meet on the Pnyx to laugh or to shout (although shouting was, this argument implies, an intrinsic feature of hand-to-hand combat). Nor did they gather merely to consider or to reflect. Their thinking was more purposive than that. They gathered to make decisions by voting on proposals of common interest, and any action that could be interpreted as fulfilling that purpose could be characterized as one performed collectively. There were, in fact, two significant communicative elements to this process: simply by turning up, audience members communicated their intention to vote; and they communicated their views by voting, either by raising hands, by balloting, or (in Sparta) by shouting. But the deliberative process was not collective because it involved those forms of communication, but because—to draw on a less widely discussed part of Aristotle’s definition of political animals—citizens were engaged in a “common task” (κοινὸν . . . τὸ ἕργον)—the task of deciding policy for the polis.152

On this view, the sine qua non of deliberation in ancient Greek assemblies was the vote, or perhaps more accurately the prospect of one. In contemporary political theory, deliberation and voting have more often been counterposed than conflated.153 But it was voting that enabled each attendee to participate in the decision-making process, thus giving the proceedings not only their collective character but also their deliberative one. As we saw above, βουλεύομαι denoted a two-stage process, the run-up to a decision and the decision-making

143. Xen. Hell. 1.7.12; Dem. 3.30.
144. Lys. 30.30; Dem. 18.165; Arist. Pol. 1292a28.
148. Aesch. Supp. 601; Thuc. 4.118; Andoc. 1.28, 79, 83, 96; Isoc. 18.68; Xen. Hell. 2.3.2; Pl. Phdr. 258a; Dem. 18.29, 75, 84; Arist. [Ath. pol.] 44. δοκέτῳ δήμῳ also appears in hundreds of inscriptions.
149. Andoc. 1.77; Lys. 13.59, 30.19; Xen. Hell. 2.3.45, 6.3.2; Aeschin. 2.60, 86, 3.36, 47–48; Dem. 18.121, 24.23; Lycurg. 1.16, 41, 113; Hyp. 5 frag. 1; Arist. Pol. 1298b3; Arist. [Ath. pol.] 45.
150. This is true even of Aeschines. 1.84, where one would expect to find γελάω in the singular, since the subject is apparently dēmos. Nonetheless, interestingly, Aeschines uses the plural.
151. Thuc. 4.130.
moment itself—but it was the decision that made the consideration stage deliberative rather than merely reflective or (in the case of dialogical deliberation) discursive.

The association of assembly deliberation with preparing to vote and voting is widely supported. In the second meeting on the peace with Philip, the dēmos deliberated (ἐβουλεύομαι) and voted (ἐπεψηφίζετο) at the same time (Aeschin. 2.67). Eteocles in Seven against Thebes announces that if anyone fails to obey his command, “a vote [ψήφος] of death will be decided [βουλεύσεται]” (198). Lysistrata’s Myrrhine reminds her husband to vote (ψηφιεῖ̣) for peace, and he rejoins, “I’ll think about it” (βουλεύομαι, 951–52). The Spartans put the war to the vote (ψήφον) of their allies, in order that it might be “jointly decided” (κοινῇ βουλευόμενοι, Thuc. 1.87), while the Platonic Demodocus, which treats the relationship between advising, deliberating, and voting, takes for granted that the culmination of the collective deliberative process is casting a vote.154

The correspondence of βουλέομαι in the aorist with voting is particularly clear in decrees. In the decree of the allies quoted at Aeschines 2.60, βουλέομαι in the present tense denotes the ongoing deliberations of the Athenian dēmos while the aorist denotes the result of the vote. The aorist also appears throughout the decrees quoted at Aeschines 3.67–69, which concern Demosthenes’ attempt to hurry the Athenians into a decision on peace and an alliance (not to hurriedly begin deliberating about them). IG II3 1 337, which records a decision of the Athenian council in 333/2, is especially illuminating. The Kitians had asked for permission to found a sanctuary of Aphrodite, and the council agreed “that the dēmos, having heard [ἀκούσαντα] the Kitians . . . and any other Athenian who wishes, shall decide [βουλεύσασθαι] as seems to it best.” Deliberation will take place after hearing speeches: βουλεύσασθαι, here, can only refer to a vote.155

Further support appears in Aristotle. It was noted above that although large groups do deliberate in his work, the details of the process are left open. Yet a significant line appears in Politics 4. “They will decide [βουλεύσονται] better [βέλτιον] when all deliberate together [κοινῇ βουλευόμενοι], the dēmos with the notables and they when with the masses” (1298b20). Evidently Aristotle envisaged a joint meeting of dēmos and notables, in which all heard the same speeches and considered the same proposals, rather than two separate meetings like a modern House of Commons and House of Lords, or the Cimmerian dēmos and notables mentioned in Herodotus 4.11. The same idea appears in Politics 3:

πάντες μὲν γὰρ ἔχουσι συνελθόντες ἰκανὴν αἴσθησιν, καὶ μηνύμενοι τοῖς βελτίοις τὰς πόλεις ὀρφελούσιν, καθάπερ ἢ μὴ καθαρὰ τροφὴ μετὰ τῆς καθαρᾶς τὴν πᾶσαν ποιηθεὶς χρησιμωτέραν τῆς ὀλίγης ... 156

For all have sufficient perception when assembled, and when mixed up with the better class benefit the polis, in just the same way that unrefined food when mixed up with what is refined makes the whole meal more nourishing than a small amount of refined food alone . . .

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154. Cf. Andoc. 1.72, 82; Ar. Lys. 507–14; Thuc. 4.87–88, 6.14; Xen. Hell. 6.5.49; Aeschin. 2.60.
155. Cf. IG II1 1; IG I3 40; Thuc. 6.39: “The many, having listened, judge the best” (κρίνας δ’ ἂν ἀκούσαντας ἄριστα τοὺς πολλοὺς).
Yet why should a decision made jointly by dēmos and notables prove “better”? The context of the line from Politics 4 supplies a clue. Aristotle was discussing how to improve τὸ βουλέωσθαι in communities where the dēmos was maximally powerful, and to this end he proposed increasing the number of elite citizens on the deliberative body; fining elite citizens for non-attendance—the immediate prompt for the line quoted above; electing deliberators or choosing them equally by lot from each class; giving payment for attendance to no more than the number of non-elite citizens needed to balance those in the political class; and eliminating by lot any excess of the former over the latter (1298b10–28). In every case, the goal was to balance the number of non-elite and notable citizens who would take part in deliberation. In other words, Aristotle aimed to boost the elite’s influence on the outcome of a vote.

A final question concerns the distinction between public speakers and deliberating dēmos for which I argued earlier. Especially if I am right to emphasize the significance of voting in assemblies, why should orators have been so ready to represent themselves as advisers, distinct from the deliberating group? In coming forward to speak they did not, after all, lose their right to vote. At the end of their speeches they returned to their seats and when the vote was called raised their hands along with everyone else. Moreover, as we have seen, speakers did sometimes use βουλέωμαι in the first-person plural to refer to themselves and their audience. Contrast this with the situation of, say, Xerxes’ adviser Artemisia, who could never have represented herself as deciding an issue jointly with the emperor. Why should assembly speakers, who had the same decision-making power as other citizens, have tended to emphasize the authority of their listeners by contrast with their own?

One possibility is tact, or, less generously, flattery. As Josiah Ober has argued, those who spoke publicly in ancient Greek democracies trod a difficult path. On the one hand, in proposing and debating motions, they provided structurally necessary leadership; on the other hand, their prominence conflicted with democratic ideology, which stressed citizen equality. Consequently, to gain the audience’s goodwill, speakers may have wished to play down their personal influence and to play up that of their listeners. By repeatedly representing their audience as the polis’ principal deliberators, they may have been tipping their hats, rhetorically, to the audience’s ultimate political power.

That interpretation is plausible but incomplete. Those who offered advice in assemblies were being perfectly accurate when they excluded themselves from deliberating group, not because they had lost their decision-making power, but because, in speaking, they were effectively casting an early and patently non-decisive vote. Audiences were supposed to keep an open mind during meetings: as Demosthenes argued, “the first step in correct examination [τοῦ σκοπεῖν] is not to have decided [βεβουλεύσθαι] before you have heard that upon which you should base your decision [βουλεύσασθαι]” (Ex. 18). But public speakers completed their deliberations in advance. Aeschines attributed both his speeches and his silences to “having deliberated” (βουλευσάμενος),

while Demosthenes claimed that “it is difficult . . . not only to say before you what must be done, but even to have found it out by solitary reflection” (καθ᾽ αὑτόν σκοποῦμενον, Ex. 33). Even those (few, Demosthenes implies) speakers who came forward on the spur of the moment did so because a “timely suggestion” had already occurred to them (1.1, Ex. 3.1). Most important, speakers did not expect to change their minds on the basis of others’ arguments. For a speaker to vote against the position he had just publicly recommended would have been as incredible as a candidate for office today to publicly endorse his opponent. It follows that in offering advice, speakers self-consciously withdrew from the collectively deliberating dēmos—and that is precisely how they are normally represented in our sources.

As we saw above, Thucydides’ Pericles distinguished those who had “besides politics, their private affairs to attend to” from others who “though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters.” Isocrates called orators a “tribe” (γένος) opposed to the majority (πλῆθος), while Hypereides characterized speakers as “snakes” distinct from “men,” although he allowed that some were nonetheless useful. The two parties had distinct tasks: speakers made proposals, took a “broad view” and “explored best policy,” discerned the trend of events, forecast results, and offered warnings when necessary, while “the right course for you,” Demosthenes said, “is first to hear the situation next to decide [βουλεύσασθαι], and finally to carry out your decision” (19.34, trans. Vince, modified). His obligation was “to tell you what I have convinced myself is advantageous,” his audience’s “to listen, to judge, and if it is your pleasure, to adopt” (Ex. 33, trans. DeWitt). Most significantly, it was the audience that was deemed responsible for the actions of the polis. “Who sent reinforcements to Byzantium and prevented the entrapment of the Hellespont?” Demosthenes asked, and answered himself: “You, and when I say you I mean the polis.” He went on: “Who advised the polis, moved resolutions, took action? I did.”

In democratic Athens, this division of labor had legal implications. Speakers could face stiff penalties for making an illegal proposal, for deceiving the dēmos, or for speaking when prior immoral behavior disallowed it. By contrast, voting carried no risk at all. Yet, as Demosthenes argued, “No one is ordered or obliged by you to engage in public affairs. When someone comes forward . . . you vote him appointments and put your business in his hands. If he succeeds, he will be honored and to that extent gain more than the masses; but if he fails, is he [merely] to offer excuses and apologies?” That would be “unfair” and “poor consolation” to those he had ruined.

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162. Din. 1.35; Dem. 16.1, 18.246.
played an individual role in a political system defined by the rule of the collective. In doing so they knowingly cast themselves outside the collective body.¹⁶⁷ And in disciplining advisers while maintaining its own inviolability, the Athenian dēmos merely enjoyed one of the prerogatives of kratos, “superior power” or “rule.” Isocrates, Aeschines, and Aristotle all likened the dēmos in democracies of their day to a collective monarch, and that characterization had much to recommend it.¹⁶⁸ Xerxes, Darius, and Philip treated their advisers with exactly the same freedom.

CONCLUSION

Political deliberation is today often construed dialogically and associated above all with those who speak publicly. Deliberation in ancient Greek assemblies has been interpreted on the same lines, but I have argued against that interpretation. βουλεύομαι, “deliberate,” was historically associated with internal reflection and was typically ascribed to assembly audiences rather than to those who addressed them. The dēmos did not discuss proposals but considered and voted on them. Those who spoke publicly cast themselves outside the deliberating dēmos. They acted as advisers, analogous to the advisers to kings found elsewhere in the ancient evidence.

The distinction between speakers who advised and audiences which deliberated is only one aspect of the difference between those who played individual political roles in ancient Greek poleis and those who participated in politics through collective action—a difference that I have begun to elaborate elsewhere.¹⁶⁹ But it is important for our conceptualization of ancient Greek democracy. On the dialogical model of assembly deliberation, deliberation was performed by speakers and listeners alike, and both groups comprised the dēmos. On the audience model advanced here, dēmos denoted those who listened, deliberated, and voted collectively—and thus, in democracies, ruled over the rest of the polis, including over their own advisers.

That group has been represented by scholars as more or less “passive,” but a better understanding of βουλεύομαι confirms that it was the supreme political agent, in the literal sense of acting for the polis. The fact that assembly audiences did not engage in public discussion did not make them passive, any more than a king, brooding in silence over the recommendations of his counselors, is a passive figure. Where a dēmos differed from a monarch was, of course, in producing its decision through voting. And as far as that practice is concerned, ancient Greek democratic politics does not, after all, look so different from its modern counterpart. There are many undeniable and significant differences between ancient and modern democracy. But the use of the vote rather than the voice as the mode through which ordinary citizens participated in politics was not one of them.

¹⁶⁷ Finley 1985, 62 (quoting Grote); Ober 1989, 295.
¹⁶⁸ Isoc. 15.170; Aeschin. 3.233; Arist. Pol. 1292a15. See further Landauer 2014; Hoekstra 2016.
¹⁶⁹ See further Cammack 2013a; 2013b; 2019.
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