Deliberative democratic theory (see Chambers, 2003) focuses on the mutual obligations that unite a society. A core premise of this theory is that legitimacy derives from justifications that we offer to our fellow citizens.

In its focus on making information public, deliberative democracy bears some resemblance to the open source movement. But deliberative democracy and open source politics don’t always line up harmoniously. Arguing against any restrictions on their own autonomy, members of the free and open source community often articulate a libertarian vision of democracy--one that advocates minimal government and maximal individual freedoms. By contrast, deliberative democrats focus on the processes of collective reasoning and decision-making, and on the mutual respect these processes can foster (e.g. Gastil & Levine, 2005). They see outcomes of public discussions as legitimate, even if these deliberations result in the consensus that certain individual rights should be limited on behalf of the collective.