

Who's in charge? *Deliberative democracy in a world of risk*

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PaTHES/ University of Uppsala webinar, 19 October 2020
www.ioe.ac.uk



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Education Studies

Argument/ thesis/ approach

- My answer to the question - 'On top or on tap?' - is *neither*.
 - there *is* such a thing as academic expertise
 - and its role is *simply and modestly* but *significantly* to play its part in *contributing* to public debate as part of an *open deliberative democracy*.
 - » There are some stings in the tail of this answer.
- Mainly raising issues/ asking questions that interest/ concern me
- Fundamental issues
 - Of place of the academy in society/ the life of a nation
 - Its responsibilities - And its limits.
 - » Thesis: *The rational society: it would be a nice thing to have.*

Six issues

- 1 The relationship between the state and the academic community
- 2 Legitimacy of political decision-making, esp where there is ac expertise to hand: basis of authority?
- 3 Matter of democracy – who has a vote? Do academics have a responsibility to speak for/ vote for the rhinos and the glaciers?
- 4 Place of academic domain in the public sphere – the is/ought issue
- 5 Can the academic spokespeople be neutral? Should they be neutral?
Are they not bound to take a position?
- 6 Processes of deliberation in a world of risk (decisions have to be made)

The state and the academic community

- On top or on tap?
- & Which is which?
- 'Following the science' ...?
- Implicit relationship of (1) hierarchy and (2) separation
- Neither is tenable
- Both swim in each other's waters

Reason in a democracy

- Significant of (a) reason in general & (b) evidence
- Problems (already!)
- Too much weight on reason?
- Too limited a sense of evidence? (What counts as evidence?)

- Distinguish 'space of reasons'/ space of reasoning
- Habermas' 'ideal speech situation' – no guide in the real world?

The old 'is-ought' problem

- The hard-line: no ought from is
 - Implies keep academy separate from decision-making
- But the is-ought separation:
 - Increasingly critiqued within philosophy
 - (Bhaskar's) 'absence' thesis - & absencing absence
- But, even so,
- Academy has a responsibility to attend to societal implications
 - (1940s: scientists warned about the nuclear bomb)
 - Indeed, danger of 'washing one's hands' – nothing to do with us.

‘What is the evidence?’

- ‘What is the evidence?’, we hear the cry
- But which evidence?
- Do perspectives from ethics/ humanities/ the Earth count as evidence?
- And the evidence is NEVER sufficient
- **Always** a gap between evidence and situation
- So the politicians have to decide ...?

Evidential legitimacy

- The politicians claim to be ‘guided by the science’
- They do so when the science already accords with their decisions
- ie, their decisions are prior to the science
- So how generate legitimacy – in a democratic society
 - (in an environment of risk)

Purity of the science

- The scientists claim/ assume a purity
- But – in the wake of 50 years of STS (Latour etc) – that's unsustainable
- Science and technology swims in murky waters
- Chains of interlocking connections
- 'Triple-helix'/ 'Mode 2' knowledge
- Knowledge is in the world

A matter for democracy

- Who has a vote?
- Who votes on behalf of the glaciers? The rhinos?
- Perhaps science is well-placed to speak for them?
- Or citizens' assemblies?
- But decisions have to be made.

Epistemic classes

- Are there two roles here for the academic class?
 - (a) To inquire into the world
 - (b) To reflect upon the world and to speak out to it and for it?
- Normal to think of
 - (a) the empiricists (science etc) are in group (a)
 - And
 - public intellectuals are only in class (b) – the humanities and social theorists
 - But why should this be?
 - Should not the scientists/ empiricists also be in (b)?

The problem of the humanities

- The humanities have a weak voice and they are rarely listened to
- In some countries, they are denied a voice
- They are subject to epistemic violence
- Hierarchy of knowledges
- Not only between Global North and Global South
- But within the Global North
- So what counts as an 'academic expert' is defined very narrowly.

The matter of neutrality

- Is neutrality possible?
- Is it desirable?
- (2 quite separate matters)
- Distinguish neutrality of academic voice/
 - neutrality of perception of academic voice
- The academic voice is always framed?
- No neutral space?
- BUT NB: neutrality is expected; there lies authority
- But does the academic voice not always reflect an interest (a 'knowledge interest')?

Public perception of the academic voice

- Authority is both granted and denied
 - ‘We’ve had enough of experts’
 - ‘We listen to the science’
- The ‘public’ is composed of many publics
- Each with its perception of the academic voice
 - And puts each academic voice in (that) epistemic hierarchy

The public sphere

Issues:

- Who participates?
- With what voice?
- Within which kind of process?
- Ideas of:
 - Space of reasoning
 - Spaces of reasoning

NB: We have no adequate conception of ‘the public sphere’ in a democracy of the C21.

Knowledge democracy

- Idea of knowledge democracy (compare knowledge economy)
- And Idea of knowledge socialism
- Traps for the unwary
- The university is a space of epistemic *inequality*
- An institution for furthering epistemic difference

The problem (revisited)

- In an age of populism, retreat to nationalism, authoritarianism, state surveillance – all aided by the internet
- The matter of public reason becomes crucial
- Can it be achieved?
- It can only be achieved by the academy playing its part
- Not public intellectuals (indicative of superiority)
- But of public reasoners.

Conclusions

- We live in a divided world
- Those (individuals/ groups/ states) who are amenable to placing themselves in an argumentative space (a space of reasoning)
- And those who are not.
- And those who claim to be doing that but who evade it.
- The academy has a responsibility to play its part in contribution to this space of reasoning publics
- *It will be impossible*, being undermined both without and within
- But it should not give up on this impossible task.



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