EXPERTISE AND THE GOLDILOCKS PRINCIPLE

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Intellectual experts are “one special and rather greedy group”
Feyerebend (1978: 85-86)

“down with spokespersons!”
[referring to intellectual prophets and problem-solvers]
Foucault (1985: 81-82)

“[every man must learn] to speak rather than being spoken to”
Bourdieu (1980: 17-18)

We should not root out the expert entirely. We should use them but not fully trust them.
Feyerebend (1978)

[Do not obliterate all those who]
“speak for and above the others …
[just develop] specific [tasks for them]”
Foucault (1980: 126ff)

[We need a] “reapolitik of reason …
[because a corporatist defence of the interests of intellectuals can support a]
… “politics of the universal”.
The Goldilocks Dilemma

Too Much  Just Right  Not Enough
“Making political decisions requires judgement and skill. It should, Plato urges, be left to the experts.”

Wolff, 2006: 67
“A democracy would do well to apply a plan of compulsory attendance for the deliberative assembly. The results are better when all deliberate together; when the populace is mixed with the notables and they, in turn, with the populace.”

Aristotle, Politics, IV, 14, 1298b12-20).

“[t]he people acting as a body are capable of making better decisions, by pooling their knowledge, experience, and insight, than any individual member of the body, however excellent, is capable of making on his own.”

Waldron, 1995: 564
• The Statesman
  • Master builder
  • Knowledge of the good

• Subordinate knowledge
  • Rhetoric
  • Military expertise
  • Juridical expertise

• Democracy privileges subordinate knowledge over true knowledge of the good
Experts as Handmaidens

Watertight Compartmentalization?

* Experts are a threat to democracy *

1) Expert understandings narrow the sphere of political debate
2) Experts endanger democratic civility
3) Expert discourse itself, or experts as a class, constrain political discussion
1) Experts understandings narrow the sphere of democratic debate
   - Habermas: scientization of politics closes debate by technical fiat
   - Weber: decisionism closes debate by devaluing pluralism

2) Experts endanger democratic civility
   - Dahl, Turner: Information asymmetries undermine mutual persuasion

3) Expert discourse itself constrains political deliberation
   - Fischer: professional discourses mark out the domain of the meaningful
   - Expertise defines reality for political purposes
     - Gieryn (1999): expert boundary work constitutes domains of reality
     - Ezrahi: this capacity is as source of political influence
     - Sarewitz & Pielke: expertise becomes contested, and balkanized, because being technically right has become ultimate prize. Political/value debates are displaced into the domain of disputes over expert knowledge claims
Fischer, *Democracy and Expertise* (2009), Chap 5

**Sociocultural Reason**
- Geared to social processes
- Gained from social experience
- Attends to unanticipated consequences of decisions
- Trusts process over predictive outcomes
- Pays attention to circumstances under which judgments made
- Community social values
- Concerned with impacts
- Deliberate about standards

**Technical Reason**
- Method
- Logic
- Empirical outcomes
- Expert judgments
- Depersonalized calculations
- Statistical problems
- Risk-benefit ratios
- Causal relations and outcomes
- Given standards
Democracy
- Popular sovereignty
- Majority rule

Liberal Democracy
- Popular sovereignty
- Majority rule
- Independent institutions
- Protection of Rights

Populism
- Anti-elitist
- Anti-pluralist
  - moralized imagination of politics
  - Delegitimise independent institutions
  - (Fictionalized) real people versus elites
  - Only one true Rep at the Party level
  - Real people versus the socio-cultural pretenders
- General will (Rousseau)
  - *Volante generale*: general will; capacity to define common interests via participation
    - Populism: representing a substance (*volksgeist*)
  - *Volante de tous*: will of all; aggregative interests at 1 moment
- Thin-centred ideology
Goldilocks Principle
Non-watertight compartmentalization?

* Experts enable Democracy *

1) Expertise is functional for democracy
2) Power dispersal is functional within democracy
3) Anti-pluralism is populist
Expertise is functional for democracy

- **Instrumentally useful**
  - Informing deliberation
  - Empowering collective will
  - De Vries (2007): how much sub-politics can a society afford?

- **Normatively useful**
  - Speaking truth to power
  - A negative power
  - Rosanvallon (2008): democracy resists democracy; negative sovereign can act to minimize counter-vailing institutions
  - Mansbridge (2012): The resistance tradition pushes democracy towards the *status quo* of stopping not using coercion
Power dispersal

**Authority**

- … as a temporary suspension of judgment at a procedural level so as to deal with substantive differences
- Democratic to the extent the judgment is a warranted suspension of judgement
  - There exists an ongoing possibility for challenge
- Criticism and questioning are constitutive moments within epistemic authority

**Expertise as part of deliberative systems**

- Moore (2017) and Warren (1996) on democratic authority
  - Warranted, temporary suspension in a context of ongoing potential for challenge (Warren, Brown)
  - Expertise as a special case of distributed deliberation
Anti-pluralism is Populist

- Populists
  - Leakage is a problem
    - Wary of power drifting away from the hands of the people
    - Watertight compartmentalization

- Republican
  - No exact division is feasible (between authority relations and citizens)
  - No serious issue if power is dispersed
  - Leakage across functional boundaries is OK
Speculation: a demographic objection to expert authority?

J. S. Mill

- The better educated should have plural votes

D. Estlund (2003)

- Inadequacy objection
  - Formal education does NOT promote good ruling

- Equality objection
  - Equal treatment implies equal voting power

- Demographic objection
  - The educated may disproportionately have epistemically damaging features that countervail the epistemic benefits of education
  - Systemic biases: latent and/or conjectural