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DISCUSSION PAPER

ABSTRACT The phenomenon of expertise produces two problems for liberal democratic theory: the first is whether it creates inequalities that undermine citizen rule or make it a sham; the second is whether the state can preserve its neutrality in liberal 'government by discussion' while subsidizing, depending on, and giving special status to, the opinions of experts and scientists. A standard Foucauldian critique suggests that neutrality is impossible, expert power and state power are inseparable, and that expert power is the source of the oppressive, inegalitarian effects of present regimes. Habermas argues that expert cultures make democratic discussion impossible. Analogous problems arise with 'cognitive authority', understood in Mertonian terms. Cognitive authority, as Merton sees it, allows us to ask about the democratic legitimacy of this authority, which appears to solve the problem (or part of the problem) because it returns ultimate 'authority' to the people, who reject or accept the experts' claims. And many claims to expertise in fact do fail to gain acceptance. Through an examination of the type of expert that appears to evade the demands of legitimation, it is shown that expertise and liberal democracy can in principle co-exist, contrary to the claims of the critics.

Keywords bureaucracy, constructionism, democracy, discretion, expertise, liberalism, science

What is the Problem with Experts?

Stephen Turner

Discussions of expertise and expert power typically have 'political implications', but the underlying political thinking that gives them these implications is rarely spelled out.[1] In what follows I will break down the problem of expertise to its elements in political theory. The first problem arises from social theory, and concerns democracy and equality. In the writings of persons concerned with the political threat to democracy posed by the existence of expert knowledge, expertise is treated as a kind of possession which privileges its possessors with powers that the people cannot successfully control, and cannot acquire or share in.

Understood in this way, expertise is a problem because it is a kind of violation of the conditions of rough equality presupposed by democratic accountability. Some activities, such as genetic engineering, are apparently out of the reach of democratic control (even when these activities, because of their dangerous character, ought to be subject to public scrutiny and regulation) precisely because of imbalances in knowledge, simply because

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'the public', as a public, cannot understand the issues. This is not to say that democratic actions cannot be taken against these activities, but they are necessarily actions beyond the genuine competence of those who are acting. So we are faced with the dilemma of capitulation to 'rule by experts' or democratic rule which is 'populist' – that is to say, that valorizes the wisdom of the people even when 'the people' are ignorant and operate on the basis of fear and rumour.

The second problem arises from normative political theory. Regarding differences in knowledge as a problem of equality leads in some troubling directions. If we think of knowledge as a quantity, or a good to which some have access and others do not, the solution, admittedly one with practical limitations, is egalitarianization through difference-obliterating education or difference-obliterating access to expertise, for example through state subsidy of experts and the dissemination of their knowledge and advice.[2] But if the differences are better understood as differences in viewpoint rather than differences in quantities of knowledge, then we have another problem. Paul Feyerabend (1978: 73–76) insisted that a programme of extensive public 'science education' is merely a form of state propaganda for a faction, the faction of 'experts'. Thus it is a violation of the basic neutrality of the state, of the impartiality the liberal state must exhibit in the face of rival opinions in order to ensure the possibility of genuine, fair and open discussion. This second issue may seem to be a marginal issue, of interest only to fanatics, but increasingly it has become a practical problem.

The abstract form of the problem is this: if the liberal state is supposed to be neutral with respect to opinions – that is to say that it neither promotes nor gives special regard to any particular beliefs, world views, sectarian positions, and so on – what about expert opinions? Do they have some sort of special properties that sectarian opinions lack? If not, why should the state give them special consideration, for example through the subsidization of science, or by treating expert opinions about environmental damage differently than the opinions of landowners or polluters? If they do have special status, what is it? The special status granted to religious opinion leads to its *exclusion* from the domain of state action. Religion is either not an acceptable subject of state action, or is granted a protected status of limited autonomy, as in the case of the established church in England, in exchange for the church's renunciation of politics. The status of religion has often been proposed as a model for the state's relation to science (Polanyi, 1946: 59; Price, 1965). But it is a peculiar analogy, because the state not only protects and subsidizes science, it attends to the opinions of science, which is to say it grants science a kind of authority, and reaffirms this authority by requiring that regulations be based on the findings of science or on scientific consensus, and by promoting the findings of science as fact.

With respect to religion, then, the state attempts some form of neutrality, if only by separating the two and delegating to churches authority over special topics or special rights. With science, and more generally

with 'expert' opinion, it is the opinions themselves that are treated as being 'neutral'. This special status becomes problematic when admittedly 'sectarian' beliefs come into conflict with expert opinion and the non-sectarian neutral character of expert opinion is called into question. Problems of this sort have occurred, for example, in connection with the teaching of creationism throughout the 20th century in the United States. But the issues here are more easily ridiculed than solved. For problems like 'is "creation science" really "science"?' there are no very convincing answers in principle, and no 'principles' on which to rely that cannot themselves be attacked as ideological. Nor is the problem limited to sectarian beliefs. Research on the genetic background of criminals has been denounced as 'racist' and government agencies have been intimidated into withdrawing support. Studies of race and intelligence, similarly, have been attacked as inherently racist, which is to say 'non-neutral'. A letter writer to *Newsweek* writes that 'theories of intelligence, the test to measure it and the societal structures in which its predictions come true are all developed and controlled by well-off white males for their own benefit' (Jaffe, 1994: 26). The idea that science itself, with its mania for quantification, prediction and control, is merely an intellectual manifestation of racism and sexism – that is to say, is non-neutral – is not only widespread, it is often treated in feminist theory as a given. There is a more general problem for liberalism that arises from this: if the liberal state is supposed to be ideologically neutral, how is it to decide what is and is not ideology as distinct from knowledge?

The Two Issues Together

If the two issues, equality and neutrality, are each taken on their own terms, these two problems can be discussed in a mundane political way: the solution to the problem of experts uncontrolled by democracy is to devise controls such as the citizens councils on technology that have been started in Denmark; the solution to a public incapable of keeping up with the demands of the modern world is to educate it better, a traditional aim of scientists, economists and others, for whom 'public understanding' is central. The problem with liberal democracy created by expert knowledge doesn't need a fancy solution: we can continue to do what we do now, which is to say 'muddle through'. For example, we may just declare science to be non-sectarian and deal with oddities like creation science by judicial fiat, or decline to fund science, or to permit or reject technology that has controversial implications or arouses the antagonism of 'public interest' groups on the basis of public opinion and political expedience. Taken together, however, the two problems raise a more difficult question: if experts are the source of the public's knowledge, and this knowledge is not essentially superior to unaided public opinion, not genuinely expert, the 'public' itself is presently not merely less competent than the experts but is more or less under the cultural or intellectual control of the experts.

This idea, inspired by Michel Foucault, is perhaps the dominant leitmotif in present 'cultural studies', and informs its historiography: the ordinary consumer of culture is taken to be the product of mysterious forces that constrain them into thinking in racist, sexist and 'classist' ways. These constraints are, so to speak, imbibed along with cultural products. In Donna Haraway's famous (but disputed) example, a person exposed to an 'expert' representation of human evolution at a natural history museum in which the more advanced people have features that resemble modern Europeans, for example, becomes a racist and a sexist (Haraway, 1984–85; Schudson, 1997). It is now widely taken for granted that this kind of effect of expertise is the true realm of 'politics', and that politics as traditionally understood is subordinate to – because it is conducted within the frame defined by – cultural givens, which themselves originate in part in the opinions of 'experts' in the past, such as the presentations of museum dioramas. It is this general form of argument that I wish to examine here from the perspective of liberal political theory, for it is to liberal political theory, not to say to liberal politics, that it poses a challenge.

A standard view of liberalism, perhaps most pungently expressed by Carl Schmitt, sees it as the product of the lessons of the wars of religion of early modern Europe. Liberal politics developed, where it did develop, as the consequence of the adoption of a certain kind of convention: matters of religion were agreed to be outside of the domain of the political. The domain of the political was reduced, *de facto*, to the domain of opinions about which people could agree to disagree, to tolerate, and further agree to accept the results of parliamentary debate and voting in the face of disagreement. It was also implicitly understood that some matters, such as matters of fact, were not subject to 'debate', but were the common possession of, and could be appealed to by, all sides in the course of public discussion. Schmitt made the point that parliamentary democracy depended on the possibility of 'persuading one's opponents through argument of the truth or justice of something, or allowing oneself to be persuaded of something as true or just' (Schmitt, [1926] 1985: 5). Without some such appeal – if opinions were not amenable to change through discussion, and persuasion was simply a form of the negotiation of compromises between pre-established interests – parliamentary institutions would be meaningless shells. What Schmitt saw in parliamentary politics of the Weimar era was that this assumption of parliamentarism no longer held. Rational persuasion with respect to what is true or just had ceased. The parties of Weimar politics, however, were more than mere interest parties. They were 'totalizing' parties, that construed the world ideologically, ordered the life experiences and social life of their members, and rejected the world-views of other parties and all the arguments that depended on these other world-views.

Schmitt believed that the former historical domain of parliamentary discussion, in which genuine argument was possible, had simply vanished. The world of totalitarianism, of the rule of totalizing parties, had begun.

He didn't say that the liberal idea of parliamentary government, government by discussion, was wrong in principle. But there is a currently influential argument from principle that has the same conclusion. Stanley Fish has recently claimed that liberalism is 'informed by a faith (a word deliberately chosen) in reason as a faculty that operates independently of any particular world view' (Fish, 1994: 134). Fish denies that this can be anything more than a faith, and concludes that this means that liberalism doesn't exist. This is an argument, in effect, for undoing the central achievement of the modern state and unlearning the lessons of the wars of religion. But it is a curiously compelling argument nevertheless, especially if it is conjoined with the idea that the major products of the modern liberal state have been racial and gender inequity and injustice.

Expert knowledge is susceptible to a variant of this argument: expert knowledge masquerades as neutral fact, accessible to all sides of a debate; but it is merely another ideology. Jürgen Habermas makes this charge implicitly when he speaks of 'expert cultures'. Many other critics of past experts, influenced by Foucault, have substantiated this claim in great detail. Their point, typically, is that 'expert' claims or presentations of reality by experts have produced discursive structures – 'ideologies' – that were unwittingly accepted by ordinary people and politicians as fact, but were actually expressions of patriarchy, racism, and the like. Present-day 'expertise' raises the same problems: the difference is that we lack the historical distance to see the deeper meaning of the claims of experts.

If it is true that expert knowledge is 'ideology' taken as fact, the idea of liberal parliamentary discussion is, intellectually at least, a sham. The factual claims on the basis of which parliamentary discussion is possible are exposed as ideological. The true ideological basis of liberalism is thus hidden: it is really what is *agreed to be fact*, and what is agreed to be fact is, some of the time, the product not of open debate but of the authority of experts. The actual discussions in parliament and before the electorate are conducted within the narrow limits imposed by what is agreed to be fact, and therefore, indirectly, by expert opinion. To accept the authority of science or experts is thus to accept authoritative ideological pronouncements. So liberal regimes are no less ideological than other regimes; rather, the basis of liberal regimes in ideological authority is concealed under a layer of doctrinal self-deception.

These two problems – the problem of the character of expert knowledge, which undermines liberalism, and the problem of the inaccessibility of expert knowledge to democratic control – thus combine in a striking way. We are left with a picture of modern democratic regimes as shams, with a public whose culture and life-world are controlled or 'steered' by experts whose doings are beyond public comprehension (and therefore beyond intelligent public discussion), but whose 'expert' knowledge is nothing but ideology, ideology made more powerful by virtue of the fact that its character is concealed. This concealment is the central legacy of liberalism. The public, indeed, is its pitiful and ineffective victim.

Jürgen Habermas gives a version of the social-theoretical argument that suggests why the usual solutions to these two problems, of neutrality and democracy, fail. The argument depends on a characterization of the viewpoint of ordinary people, which he calls 'the internal perspective of the life-world'. This perspective, he claims, is governed by three fictions: that actors are autonomous beings; that culture is independent of external restraints; and that communication is 'transparent', by which he means that everyone can, in principle, understand everyone else (Habermas, [1985] 1987: 149–50). But in fact, he argues, the life-world is the product, at least in part, of external controls, which he calls 'steering mechanisms', operated by experts whose thinking is not comprehensible within the traditions that are part of, and help to constitute, the life-world. There is an unbridgeable cultural gap, in short, between the world of illusions under which the ordinary member of the public operates and the worlds of 'expert cultures' (Habermas, [1985] 1987: 397). The fictions of the life-world themselves prevent its denizens from grasping the manner in which it is controlled.

Robert Merton expresses a related point in a different way, with the notion that professionals and scientists possess 'cognitive authority'. Presumably Habermas has many of the same people in mind when he refers to 'expert cultures', but there is an important difference in the way the two conceive of the problem. Habermas's experts don't exert their influence by persuasion, but rather by manipulating conditions of social existence (especially to manufacture a kind of unthinking satisfaction), which Habermas calls 'colonizing the life-world'. Merton's model, the relation of authority, is more familiar. Merton adds that this authority is experienced as a kind of alien power against which people sometimes rebel – the coexistence of acceptance and rebellion he calls 'ambivalence' (Merton, 1976: 26).

Authority is, in its most common form, a political concept, and it points to the problem posed by expertise for the theory of democracy. Experts are not democratically accountable, but they nevertheless exercise authority-like powers over questions of true belief. Habermas's picture is somewhat different: the experts he seems to be concerned with are not professionals whom we deal with often in a face-to-face way, but policy-makers hidden behind a wall of bureaucracy. Whether this difference is significant is a question that I will leave open for the moment. But it points to some difficulties with the concept of expertise itself that need to be more fully explored.

Expertise thus is a more complicated affair than my original formulations supposed. Cognitive authority, whatever it is, seems to be open to resistance and submission, but not to the usual compromises of democratic politics. It is not an object that can be distributed, nor can it be simply granted – so that everyone can be treated as an 'expert' for the sake of service on a committee evaluating risks, for example. To be sure, legal fictions of equality can be extended to such political creations as citizens oversight committees, and legal fictions have non-fictive consequences that

may be very powerful. But cognitive authority is likely to elude such bodies, for reasons pinpointed by Habermas: the limitations of the perspective of the life-world preclude communicative equality between expert and non-expert.

Construed in either way, expertise is trouble for liberalism. If experts possess Mertonian cognitive authority, they pose a problem for neutrality: can the state preserve its independent authority, its power to act as neutral judge, for example, in the face of the authoritative claims of experts? Or must it treat them as inherently non-sectarian or neutral? Experts in bureaucracies pose a somewhat different but no less troubling problem. If we think of the distinctively German contribution to liberalism as the idea that official discretionary powers ought to be limited as much as possible – the ideal of a state of laws, not of men – it is evident that 'experts' have an apparently irreducible rôle precisely in those places in the state apparatus that discretionary power exists. Indeed, expertise and discretionary power are notions that are made for one another.

Cognitive Authority and its Legitimacy

'Authority' is a peculiar concept to use in conjunction with 'knowledge': in political theory one usually thinks of authority in *contrast* to truth, as for example Schmitt does when he paraphrases Hobbes as saying that authority, not truth, makes law. By authority Schmitt means effective power to make and enforce decisions. Cognitive authority is, in these terms, an oxymoron. If you have knowledge, one need not have authority. But it is a nice analogue to 'moral authority'. And there is of course an earlier, and perhaps more fundamental, notion of *auctoritas* as authorship. The underlying thought is that the 'authority' has at first hand something that others – subjects or listeners – get at second hand. And this is part of the notion of expertise as well: the basis on which experts believe in the facts or validity of knowledge claims of other experts of the same type they believe in is different from the basis on which non-experts believe in the experts. The facts of nuclear physics, for example, are 'facts', in any real sense (facts that one can use effectively, for example), only to those who are technically trained in such a way as to recognize the facts as facts, and do something with them. The non-expert is not trained in such a way as to make much sense of them: accepting the predigested views of physicists as authoritative is pretty much all that even the most sophisticated untrained reader can do. The point may be made very simply in the terms given by Schmitt: it is the character of expertise that only other experts may be persuaded by argument of the truth of the claims of the expert; the rest of us must accept them as true on different grounds than other experts do.

The literature on the phenomenon of the cognitive authority of science (see Gieryn, 1994; Gieryn & Figert, 1986) focuses on the mechanisms of social control that scientists employ to preserve and protect their cognitive authority. The cognitive authority of scientists in relation to the public is, so to speak, corporate. Scientists possess their authority when they speak

as representatives of science. And the public judgements of science are of science as a corporate phenomenon, of scientists speaking as scientists. So these social control mechanisms are crucial to the cognitive authority of science, as they are to the professions, Merton's original subject. But what these literatures have generally ignored is the question that arises in connection with the political concept of authority, the problems of the origin of authority. How did cognitive authorities establish their authority in the first place? And how do they sustain it?

If we consider the paradigm case of physicists as cognitive authorities, the answers to this question are relatively straightforward, and it is not surprising that the issue is seldom discussed as problematic. We all know (or have testimony that comes from users or recipients) about the efficacy of the products of physics, such as nuclear weapons, that we do accept, and we are told that these results derive from the principles of physics, that is to say the 'knowledge' that physicists certify one another as possessing. Consequently we do have grounds for accepting the claim of physicists to possess knowledge of these matters, and in this sense our 'faith' in physics is not dependent on faith alone – though, it is important to add, these are not the grounds that physicists themselves use in assessing one another's cognitive claims, or are only a small part of the grounds.

If we take the model that is suggested by this discussion of cognitive authority in science, we have something like this. Expertise is a kind of possession, certified or uncertified, of knowledge that is testified to be efficacious and in which this testimony is widely accepted by the relevant audience. But if this were all there was to expertise, it is difficult to see why anyone would regard claims to expertise or the exercise of expert authority to be a threat to democracy. Authority conceived of as resting in some sense on widely accepted (at least within the relevant audience) testimony to the efficacy of the knowledge that experts correctly claim to possess is itself a kind of democratic authority, for this acceptance is a kind of democratic legitimation.

One might go on to suggest that these authority claims are themselves subject to the same kind of defects as those of democratic political authority generally. Public opinion may be wrong, and mistakenly accept authority that ought not to be accepted. One might cite the relation between theological authorities and audiences of believers as examples of the way in which spurious (or at least mysterious) assertions of special knowledge can come to be regarded as authoritative, and in which highly problematic esoteric knowledge is granted the same sort, or similar kind, of deference as is scientific knowledge. But in the case of theological knowledge we do see something that was perhaps not so clear in the case of the cognitive authority of science, namely that the audiences for authority claims may indeed be very specific, and may not correspond with the public as a whole. And claims made to, and accepted by, delimited audiences may themselves be in error, and subsequently be rejected by these same audiences or by their successors.

Thinking about the audiences of the expert – the audiences for whom the expert is legitimate and whose acceptance legitimates her claims to expertise – illuminates a puzzle in the discourse of the problem of expertise and democracy. Merton and Habermas, it appeared, were not talking about the same kinds of experts. For Merton, the paradigm case was the physician, whose expert advice, say, to cut down on high-fat foods, we receive with ambivalence (Merton, 1976: 24–25). For Habermas, the 'experts' who steer society from a point beyond the cultural horizon of the life-world, and do so in terms of their own expert cultures (Habermas, [1985] 1987: 397), are themselves a kind of corporate body or audience which has no public legitimacy as expert, and indeed is largely hidden from the public. This model does not fit physics. If the account of the cognitive authority of science that I have given is more or less true, the authority of physics is itself more or less democratically acknowledged, and is thus legitimate in a way that the authority of hidden experts is not. Physics, in short, not only claimed authority, and embodied it in the corporate form of the community of physicists, but this corporate authority has achieved a particular kind of legitimation, legitimation not only beyond the sect of physicists, but acceptance that is more or less universal.

If we begin with this as a kind of ideal-type or paradigm case of a particular kind of legitimate cognitive authority, and call them 'Type I Experts', we can come up with a list of other types in which the character of legitimacy is different. In this list we can include experts of the type discussed by Habermas, who seem not to possess the democratic legitimation of physicists. The easy distinctions may be made in terms of audience and legitimators. As I have suggested, the theologian is an expert with cognitive authority. Like the physicist, the authority of the theologian is legitimated by acceptance by an audience – the audience is simply a restricted one, but a predetermined one. The cognitive authority of the theologian extends only to the specific audience of the sect. We may call these 'restricted audience' experts 'Type II Experts'.

If the first two types of expert are experts for pre-established audiences such as the community of physicists, or a predefined community of sectarian believers, a third, the 'Type III Expert', is the expert who creates her own following. This type shades off into the category of persons who are paid for the successful performance of services. The massage therapist is paid for knowledge, or for its exercise, but payment depends on the judgements of the beneficiaries of that knowledge to the effect that the therapy worked. The testimony of the beneficiaries allows a claim of expertise to be established for a wider audience. But some people do not benefit by massage therapy, and do not find the promises of massage therapy to be fulfilled. So massage therapists have what is, so to speak, a created audience, a set of followers for whom they are expert because they have proven themselves to this audience by their actions. 'Experts' who are considered experts because they have published best-selling books that do something for their audiences, such as Dr Ruth (Westheimer), are experts

in this sense as well: they have followings that they themselves created, but which are not general. They have *auctoritas* in the original sense.

Experts of three kinds – those whose cognitive authority is generally accepted, those whose cognitive authority is accepted by a sect, and those whose cognitive authority is accepted by some group of followers – each have a place in the scheme of liberal democracy. The expertise of the physicist is taken to be itself neutral; the state is neutral toward the other two, but in different ways. One can enter politics – Dr Ruth might run for the Senate, for example, or promote some political cause, such as sex education in elementary schools – but it is agreed that the other is to be excluded. The religious sectarian is excluded by way of the concept of the neutrality of the liberal state: the domain of politics is delimited, by agreement, to preclude the state, as the First Amendment puts it, from establishing a religion. But literally 'establishing' religion and at the same time restricting it (on, for example, the model of the established churches of European states), can serve the same purpose of both separating religion from politics and assuring that the boundaries of the domain of the political are decided politically rather than by religious experts. Religious regimes, such as Iran, operate on the premise that the domain of religious authority is decided by religious experts, thus delegating authority to Type II Experts. But this is a conscious and 'public' choice.

There may, of course, be conflicts of a more or less transitory kind between the authority of physicists and political authority – King Canute may attempt to command the tides in the Wash against the advice of his physicists. Conflicts of a less transitory kind – between expert economists and economically inexpert political ideologues, such as those that concerned Joseph Schumpeter ([1942] 1950: 251–68) – might constitute a threat. This is because the economists' expertise is systematically relevant to policy, and that of the physicists is only transitorily so. But if the economists deserve legitimacy as experts with the general public it presumably is because, like Canute, the politicians who ignored their advice would fail to achieve their goals.

The incomplete legitimacy of economists points to a set of interesting issues. Claims to cognitive authority are not always accepted. Economists do agree among themselves, to a great extent, on what constitutes basic competence and competent analysis. There is a community of opinion, and some people who aren't members of the community – that is, the 'public' of economics – accept the community's claims to expertise. But the discipline's claims to corporate authority – claims that would enable any economist to speak 'for' economics on elementary issues, such as the benefits *ceteris paribus* of free trade, in the way that even a high school teacher can speak for physics – may be fragile. The sight of ads signed by several hundred economists is a kind of living demonstration of the distance between the claim to speak representatively found in physics and the claim in economics. In economics, agreement on the basics – long since assured within the community of professionals – still has to be demonstrated by the ancient collective ritual of signing a petition – itself

among the most ancient of political documents. Even these near unanimous claims are not always accepted as true: sectarians, textile interests, or a sceptical public may contest them.[3] Moreover, around every core of 'expert' knowledge is a penumbra, a domain in which core competence is helpful but not definitive, in which competent experts may disagree, and disagree because the questions in this domain cannot be decided in terms of the core issues that define competence. Establishing cognitive authority to a general audience is not easy: major achievements, like nuclear weaponry, antibiotics, new chemicals and new technology are the coin of the realm. Policy directives rarely have the clarity of these achievements, and policy failures are rarely as clear as Canute's tidal initiative.

Two Novel Types of Expert

Now consider the following type of 'expert': those who are subsidized to speak as experts and claim expertise in the hope that the views they advance will convince a wider public and thus impel them into some sort of political action or choice. This is a type – the fourth on our list – that appears at the end of the 19th century in the United States, and developed hand-in-hand with the development of philanthropic and charitable foundations. The fifth type, to be discussed below, is a variant of the fourth, or rather a historical development of the fourth. Where the effort to create and subsidize recognized 'experts' failed – typically because their expertise was not as widely accepted or effective as the funders hoped – an effort was sometimes made to professionalize target occupations and to define professionalism in terms of acceptance of the cognitive authority of a particular group of experts. Both types exist nowadays, and in some fields there really is no clear distinction between the two. The difference is in the kind of audience, and in many cases, such as psychotherapists, perhaps, the 'professional' audience is not so different from the public with respect to their actual sources of information and wisdom.

The history of social work provides a good example of a failed attempt to establish a claim of expertise that is further distinguished by the self-awareness of the process of claiming expert status. When the Russell Sage fortune was put to charitable purposes by Sage's widow, her advisors, themselves wealthy community activists, created an organization that attempted to persuade the public to adopt various reforms. The reforms ranged from the creation of playgrounds to the creation of policies for tenement housing and regional plans. Some of the participants were veterans of 'commissions', such as the New York Tenement commission, others were products of the Charity Organization Societies, still others came from social movements, such as the playground movement. What the Foundation did was to subsidize departments with people employed as experts in these various domains. Some of them, such as Mary Richmond, had a great deal of experience, had written books, and were well known. Others were not well known, but learned on the job, and played the rôle of advisor to volunteer groups of various kinds – such as women attempting

to promote the construction of playgrounds in their community, who needed advice on what to ask for.

The Russell Sage Foundation had a particular model of how to exert influence, a model that other foundations were to follow. They objected to 'retail' philanthropy, and wished to influence others to commit their own resources to the cause. Playgrounds, for example, were not to be directly financed by the Foundation, as Carnegie had financed libraries. The Foundation offered expertise that local groups could use so as to assure that resources could be mobilized for the cause and used properly. At most, demonstration projects would be directly financed. The means of exerting influence was thus through the creation of public demands; this required means of reaching the public and, at the same time, persuading the public of the validity of the demands.

The Foundation thought it had hit on the ideal device for doing this: the 'Social Survey'. Indeed, surveys were a powerful device, and literally hundreds of surveys – of sanitation, education, housing, race relations, child welfare, crime, juvenile crime, and so on – were done in the period between the turn of the 20th century and the 1930s depression. The particular kind of survey the Foundation was most enamoured with was the comprehensive community survey. They had one great success with community surveying – the Pittsburgh survey – and a few minor successes. What the Pittsburgh survey did was to examine all of the aspects of community life that were of special concern to the 19th-century reform movements, and 'publicize' them. To influence the building of better sewers and a better water system, for example, they included in their public exhibit to the community (one of their primary means of publicizing the results of the survey) a frieze around the top of the hall which illustrated pictorially the number of deaths from typhus in Pittsburgh annually. Some of this effort worked; change did occur.

In the full flush of this success, the leading intellectual figure behind what he called 'The Survey Idea', Paul Kellogg, wrote extensively on the meaning of such surveys, and on the difficulty of persuading others of the expertise of 'social workers', as they styled themselves. The foremost need was to persuade people to pay for expert knowledge. As Kellogg ([1912] 1985: 13) complained:

> . . . while many of the more obvious social conditions can be brought to light by laymen, the reach of social surveying depends on those qualities that we associate with the expert in every profession; knowledge of the why of sanitary technique, for example, and of the how by which other cities have wrought out this reform and that. And townsmen who would think nothing of paying the county engineer a sizable fee to run a line for a fence boundary must be educated up to the point where they will see the economy of investing in trained service in social and civic upbuilding.

Kellogg himself said that the task of persuasion would have been easier if there was an event like the Titanic disaster, which dramatized the need for lifeboats and confirmed the warnings of naval engineers. The survey and its

publicity, however, were designed to serve the same purpose (Kellogg, [1912] 1985: 17):

> To visualize needs which are not so spectacular but are no less real . . . to bring them into human terms, and to put the operations of the government, of social institutions, and of industrial establishments to the test of individual lives, to bring the knowledge and inventions of scientists and experts home to the common imagination, and to gain for their proposals the dynamic backing of a convinced democracy.

In the end, few communities were educated up to that point – at least to the acceptance of the generic kind of reform expertise that Kellogg and his peers claimed. But to an astonishing extent, the strategy worked, especially in such areas as playgrounds and juvenile justice. Major reforms were enacted on the basis of supposed expert knowledge that was based on little more than the highly developed opinions of the organized reformers themselves.

There is a sense in which this kind of expertise has proven to be a permanent feature of American politics, and now world politics, though in a somewhat different form. Organizations like the Sierra Club can support 'experts' on policy matters, whose expertise is at best part of the penumbral regions of scientific expertise. These 'experts' are not unlike those subsidized by the Russell Sage Foundation in its early years. Their rôle is both to persuade the public of their expertise and, of course, about matters of policy.

What distinguishes these two types of experts is the triad of support, audience and legitimation their rôle involves. Experts of the fourth kind, whose audience is the public, do not support themselves by persuading the public directly of the worthwhile character of their services or advice, as Dr Ruth does, but by persuading potential subsidizers of the importance of getting their message out to the public and accepted as legitimately expert. So, like the economists who seek to be accepted by the public as experts, they too seek public recognition of their expertise. But the expertise they claim is inherently policy-oriented, rather than incidentally so. Kellogg, who played a leading rôle as a publicist for the survey movement, constantly likened the 'social worker' to the engineer. But he rejected the idea that there was any need for a base for engineering knowledge in some sort of social science – the things the 'social worker' engineer knew already about the right way to do things and the right standards to impose were amply sufficient to make public policy. The purpose of the survey was not to advance knowledge but to demonstrate to the public how far below the standards their community was, and thus to spur it into action.

There is a kind of threat to discussion posed by these 'experts' that results from the fact that they are subsidized, and are thus the preferred expert of some funder. The sources of the funding are typically concealed, as is the motivation behind the funding and the process by which the funding occurs. Concealment can serve to lend the claims of an expert a kind of spurious disinterestedness. But these are threats that liberal democracy is used to examining and indeed, in the case of the Russell Sage

Foundation, the issue of interests was raised at the start, by no less a figure than Franklin H. Giddings, the leading figure of Columbia University Sociology, and famously raised by Congressmen at the time of the creation of the Rockefeller bequests. The problem, in short, became part of the public discussion, and foundations found ways to deal with the suspicions their activities aroused, not least by genuinely delegating a great deal of the control over the money to boards of notables.

The fifth type of expert is distinguished by a crucial difference in this triad: the fact that the primary audience is not the public, but individuals with discretionary power, usually in bureaucracies. The legitimacy of the cognitive authority exercised by these individuals is not a matter, ordinarily at least, of direct public discussion, because they deal with issues, such as administration, that are not discussed in newspapers until after they become institutional fact, and indeed are rarely understood by reporters, and may be subject to administrative secrecy of some kind. A paradigm case of this fifth kind of expertise is public administration, which contains the three distinctive elements of the type: a distinctive audience of 'professionals'; experts whose legitimacy is a matter of acceptance by these professionals, but who are not accepted as experts by the public (and ordinarily are not even known to the public); and whose audience of 'professionals' is itself not (or, at most, partially) recognized as possessing 'expertise' by the public.

It would be useful to survey the major national administrative traditions to better understand the rôle of this kind of expert knowledge in each of them. Doing so, I suspect, would point to sharp differences with deep historical roots. But there are some commonalities as well, that result in part from the historical fact that public administration itself was the product of a strategy for the creation of expertise which had American roots. In what follows I will simply describe the strategy and its origins, and consider the political meaning of the strategy in terms of the elementary political theory problems with which I began.

Public administration was a major target of the reformers of the early part of the 20th century – corrupt and incompetent city officials, given jobs as part of a system of patronage appointments, were major obstacles to the correction of the conditions the reformers objected to. But political reformers – reform Mayors, for example – came and went, and the underlying problem of ineptitude and corruption remained. The movement for the professionalization of public administration, sponsored in large part by the Rockefellers (who had previously invested heavily in the professionalization of social work as well), changed this.

The professionalization strategy was rooted in the successful experience of Abraham Flexner in the reform of medical education, and in the Rockefeller efforts in creating a medical profession in China. It targeted practitioners and sought to turn them into an audience for expertise. One of the pillars of the reform of medical education was to make it 'scientific', and this meant in part the creation of a sharp distinction between medicine as a craft skill to be conveyed from one practitioner to another and

medicine taught and validated by medical scientists, and the elimination of the former. One of the major goals of the reform of medical education was the elimination of part-time clinical faculty: this was made a condition of grants for improvement (Brown, 1979: xv).

The professionalizing strategy employed by the Rockefeller philanthropists in this and other domains ignored, for the most part, the 'general public', except to educate the general public in the differences between professional and non-professional workers. This education was supplemented by legal requirements and schemes of certification designed to drive non-professionals from occupations that had previously been weakly professionalized. The strategy, by the time it was applied to public administration, was well-tested and mature, and the machinery for implementing it was already in the hands of the Rockefeller founders. The Rockefeller philanthropies already had a well-established relationship with the social sciences, particularly through such individuals as Robert Merriam and such organizations as the Social Science Research Council, as well as long-standing relationships with certain major universities – some of which were 'major' largely as a consequence of Rockefeller largesse, and one of which, the University of Chicago, was a Rockefeller creation. During the 1930s, at a time when Rockefeller funding was being redirected away from 'pure' social research – the professionalization of the social sciences themselves was a Rockefeller project of the 1920s, and social science institutions were still dependent on Rockefeller funds – and many universities were in dire financial straits, the Rockefeller philanthropists induced, through the use of their financial muscle, several key universities, such as the University of North Carolina, to establish training programmes in public administration (Johnson & Johnson, 1980: 111–12).

The 1930s saw the creation of a number of schools of public administration, of professional organizations of public administrators, and the gradual creation of a class of specially trained public administrators. The remnants of these original Rockefeller efforts still persist, in such forms as various schools of Public Administration and the professional associations of public administrators. The training, by experts, of municipal workers who had traditionally been 'amateurs' appointed as political favours led to the creation of a distinction between trained and untrained administrators, and between political and professional administrators. The expertise of the teachers of public administrators was no different than the expertise of municipal research bureau researchers. The institutional structures were novel and took the form not of training schools but of university departments which eventually produced professional academic public administrators. These then became the experts, and their audience became the professional public administrators.

The striking feature of this development is that it solves the problem of the audience of the expert by creating an audience for the expert and assuring indirectly that this audience is in a position to compete successfully with amateurs. A similar kind of development took place during and after World War II with respect to foreign policy, area studies, and similar

domains related to the postwar American imperium. Such organizations as the Russian Research Center at Harvard, for example, were the product of the same strategy, and involved some of the same players – previous recipients of Rockefeller funds. Later the newly created Ford Foundation played a significant rôle in the creation of foreign policy experts. In this case the primary consumer of professional employees was the federal government, often indirectly: training of foreign service officers, military officers, and the like, was a major task of these experts. Indeed, the Harvard investment in regional studies began with contracts during World War II for the training of occupation army officers (Buxton & Turner, 1992).

Bureaucratic Discretion and Sectarian Expertise

It is with this step that the problem of democracy and expertise becomes salient. The experts whose expertise is employed are experts in the sense that they have an audience that recognizes their expertise by virtue of being trained by these experts. The audience, in a sense, is the creation of the experts. In this respect the expert more closely resembles the theologian whose expertise is recognized by the sect he successfully persuades of his theological expertise. In the case of theologians, however, liberal governments withdrew (or were based on the withdrawal of) public recognition of expertise from such sectarian 'experts'. In the case of the kinds of experts I have been discussing here, there is, in contrast, a discrepancy between the sectarian character of their audience and their rôle in relation to political authority. Since a great deal of political authority in modern democratic regimes resides in discretionary actions of bureaucrats, the control of the bureaucracy by a sect can amount to the denial of the original premises of liberal regimes.

Analogues to these 'sects', as I have characterized them, exist in all modern bureaucratic traditions: the élite Civil Servant in Britain, the graduate of the Grandes Écoles in France, and in Germany the bureaucracy with its own distinctive internal culture. The German case perhaps does fit Habermas's category of 'expert cultures'. To the extent that these groups exercise power in terms of a distinctive 'culture' that is neither understood nor accountable, they violate equality and neutrality. But one can also claim that there is a kind of tacit consent to their expertise.

In the case of physics, with which we began, there was a kind of generalized approbation and acceptance on the grounds of indirect evidence of the physicist's claim to expertise, and the claim to exercise powers of self-regulation and certification that should be honoured by the public at large. In the case of professional bureaucrats and administrators there is perhaps something analogous. In the course of creating an audience for public administrators and area studies experts, there was indeed a moment in which the offer of 'professionally trained' workers could have been resisted, and the amateurism of the past been allowed to persist. Similarly, there might have been, in the United States, a strong civil service core that

exercised some sort of generalized quasi-representative functions for the nation, as arguably is the case in, for example, France and Britain. There, professional administrators did displace 'amateurs', and this occurred with democratic consent of a sort.

Professionalization was a mechanism of reform that was appealing to reformers who lacked a sufficient body of amateur political friends to fill the jobs that existed, or the needs for personnel that arose. War, here as elsewhere, was a significant catalyst of these changes, especially in the realm of foreign policy, where the need for occupation army expertise was soon followed by a need for expertise in dealing with foreign aid. It should be obvious that this kind of expertise more closely resembles sectarian expertise than the expertise of physics. The distinction is not that the pronouncements of ideologists and theologians are ideological, and those of physicists are not. The distinction is between what might best be described as generalized public validating audiences and specialized validating audiences that do not correspond with the general public. No foreign policy expert is obligated to demonstrate the validity of his views on foreign policy by producing an unambiguous success, like curing cancer or constructing atomic weaponry. Indeed, there has often been a large disparity between the views of experts and the kinds of facts upon which these views are alleged to be based, on the one hand, and, on the other, the views of politicians and the kinds of facts and results on which their acceptance or validation by the general public is based.[4]

In the case of foreign policy, opinions based on secret information gain a certain prestige, and a foreign policy analyst who does not have access to information that the public does not have is diminished in his credibility in the eyes of the target audience of the expert – namely, government officials who themselves operate on the basis of information that the general public does not possess. The implications of this discrepancy are obvious. Conflicts between democratic and expert opinion are inevitable, not so much because the expert invariably possesses secret information (though that may be the case with respect to foreign policy, and in practice is the case with respect to bureaucratic secrets generally), but is a simple consequence of the fact that the processes by which knowledge is validated by audiences are separate, just as the processes of validation of theological expertise by sect are distinct from the processes by which public validation is achieved.

Conflicts between expert knowledge of this special 'sectarian' kind and democratic opinion are thus, if not inevitable, systematic and systematically produced by the very processes by which expertise itself is validated. The liberal ideal of a state that refuses to decide sectarian questions does not work very well when the sects are, so to speak, within the bureaucracy and their sectarian beliefs have their main effects on the discretionary activities of bureaucrats.[5] It is this peculiar combination of circumstances that allows for this kind of conflict, and it cannot be remedied by ordinary means. The whole process of bureaucratic selection and training is the means by which this kind of influence is exercised: to

root out sectarianism would involve rooting out the existing system of bureaucratic professionalization. Whether there is a practical alternative to this system of professional governance is a question I leave as an exercise to the reader. In specific cases, of course, government is 'de-professionalized': professional diplomats are replaced by individuals from other backgrounds, formerly bureaucratic positions are made into 'political appointments' or elected positions, government is run 'like a business' by businessmen, and the like.

I have suggested here that the difficulties that have concerned theorists of democracy about the rôle of expert knowledge must be understood as arising not from the character of expert knowledge itself (and its supposed inaccessibility to the masses), but from the sectarian character of the kinds of expert knowledge that bear on bureaucratic decision-making.[6] There is, in the case of science, an important check on claims of expert knowledge that is lacking in the case of experts of the kind who threaten or compete with democratic decision processes: scientists need to legitimate themselves to the public at large. The expert who is a threat is the expert who exerts influence through the back door of training and validating the confidence of professionals, and whose advice is regarded as authoritative by other bureaucrats but not by the public at large. The authority of the expert whose expertise is not validated by public achievements is the authority that comes into conflict with democratic processes. Of course, there is, in a sense, a check: governments that fail to deliver on promises may earn the contempt of their citizenry. But this is not the same as the check on science, for it is quite indirect. If we know that the juvenile justice system is failing, this is not the same as knowing who in the system is to blame, or which of its various 'professions' with claims to expertise ought not to be regarded as expert. The 'public' may be dissatisfied, and find outlets for its dissatisfaction, but the very fact that the bureaucrats themselves are not directly elected and do not appeal to the general public for legitimation means that there is no direct relationship.

Reconciling Expertise and Liberal Democracy

The discussion so far has distinguished five kinds of experts: experts who are members of groups whose expertise is generally acknowledged, such as physicists; experts whose personal expertise is tested and accepted by individuals, such as the authors of self-help books; members of groups whose expertise is accepted only by particular groups, like theologians whose authority is accepted only by their sect; experts whose audience is the public but who derive their support from subsidies from parties interested in the acceptance of their opinions as authoritative; and experts whose audience is bureaucrats with discretionary power, such as experts in public administration whose views are accepted as authoritative by public administrators. The first two do not present any real problem for either democracy or liberalism: physicists are experts by general consent, and their authority is legitimated by rational beliefs in the efficacy of the

knowledge they possess. The expertise of self-help authors is private, and the state need not involve itself in the relation between sellers of advice and buyers. Theologians and public administrators present a different problem. Neutrality is the proper liberal state's stance toward theologians, because the audience that grants them legitimacy is sectarian. The state ought not to subsidize them or to give one sect preferential treatment over another. The fourth and fifth type present more serious problems. Both typically are subsidized by the state, indirectly – foundations derive some of their money from tax expenditures. Had the Rockefeller fortune been taxed as an estate, there would have been no Foundation, or if there were it would have been smaller.

What does this kind of laundry list establish? It makes no claims to completeness as a taxonomy of expertise. But it does contain all of the types of experts that figure in the problem as traditionally conceived. Habermas's shadowy expert cultures are there, but not in the same form: they appear not merely because there is expert consensus, but also because there are bureaucrats with discretionary powers who share in this consensus and are guided by it. Ian Hacking's classic paper on child abuse (1991) is an example of this kind of argument involving expertise in this sense: here the triumph of an expanded concept of child abuse is seen as the successful imposition of a definition which serves the interests of certain professional groups. The experts in question here are perfect embodiments of what I have called the fifth type of expertise. The political issue here is not expert knowledge as such, but discretionary power: the reason child abuse is a problematic category is because social workers and physicians acting in the name of the state employ this concept and operate in terms of a consensus about it.

If we reconsider the traditional problems – and the Fish/Foucault 'cultural studies' form of the problem as well – in the light of the list, some of the difficulties vanish or are greatly modified, and some features of the problem stand out more sharply. Begin with the expert whose racist biases are passed off as science and become part of the culture through repetition and through presentations of 'facts' in which the prejudices are concealed but nevertheless imposed on the public recipient. Two things become apparent about such experts: (a) that their expertise was not simply given, but somehow had to be earned or created – in the language of the present discussion, legitimated; and (b) that their expertise typically operates in the penumbral regions of science – that is to say, topics on which there is neither agreement on conclusions, on appropriate methods, or on whether the topic is itself entirely 'scientific'. To be sure many things may pass, in the eye of the public, for science. Scientific views, and scientific consensuses, may of course change, and the public may well legitimate and accept scientific communities whose views later appear to be wrong. The 'public' is not merely the passive recipient of science and the prejudices and errors of scientists, but plays a rôle in their legitimation. The hard road that Darwinism had to acceptance should suffice to remind us that, although it may be easier to get public acceptance for views that flatter the

self-image or prejudices of the public, the public is not a passive receptor. The legitimating done by the public may lag the legitimating done by the professional community by decades. And the public is not very adept at distinguishing the core of expert knowledge from the penumbra: this is a distinction made within the community of experts, and it may be erroneously made by them – in the sense that retrospectively the community may come to conclude that only a fragment of what was formerly held to be true was in fact true. So experts are fallible, and the public is fallible in judging claims to expertise. But this does not mean that the public is powerless to make judgements.

More importantly, however, 'expert' claims of this sort do not permanently or inherently occupy the status of 'scientific'. When issues arise in which there are grounds for questioning the legitimacy of expert claims, they may, along with the legitimacy of the experts, come under public scrutiny and lose legitimacy. Indeed, this process, call it 'politicization', is a normal fact of political life, and it goes both ways. That which is taken to be a matter of expert truth, or taken for granted as true by the public and therefore regarded by the liberal state as itself neutral, may cease to be taken as neutral truth. That which has hitherto seemed to be an appropriate matter for 'politics', or for the negotiation of interest groups, or for 'public' discussion, may come to be regarded as a 'professional' matter that only experts certified by their appropriate communities have any real business discussing authoritatively. We do not regard legislators as experts on physics, and for one to oppose a particular physical theory or its teaching we would regard as an inappropriate act – as 'politicization' of that toward which the state should be neutral.

This is typically an 'academic' issue – academic in the pejorative sense. But sometimes it is not academic. Illiberal regimes, notoriously, do not accept these distinctions, leading to such things as Islamic science, Aryan physics and socialist genetics, each sponsored by the state in opposition to expertise that has been defined as enemy ideology. But these are obviously very different cases than the ordinary expertise of, for example, physicians promoting CPR. It is nevertheless still common to collapse all of these cases of expertise, and the case of science itself, into the category of ideology. The term 'ideology' itself is a good place to start with this issue, for it figures in Fish's attack on liberalism. Fish regards liberalism as a sham because it rests on a bogus notion of reason – that is on the assumption that there is such a thing as neutral 'reason', that is reason that is outside of the battle between world-views (Fish, 1994: 135). So Fish thinks of liberalism as founded on an ideology it takes for granted, an ideology that is not neutral, and thus, paradoxically, liberalism cannot exist, for the idea of liberalism as neutrality represents a kind of self-contradiction. It can exist only by hiding the untruth of its foundations.

There is bite to this criticism, bite that derives from the naturalism of natural right thinking out of which liberalism historically grew. The liberalism of the American founding tended to regard the truths relevant to politics as immutable and self-evident, and accordingly could regard them

as neutral facts. It seems that the same kinds of claims arise in connection with scientific expertise. It is at this point that science studies, particularly controversy studies and such topics as the law's construction of science, become relevant as well. One might read these studies to be making a point that is similar to Fish's: the self-descriptions of scientists are applications of an ideology of precisely the same kind, an ideology of neutral reason. A closer grained description of the activities of science of the sort that science studies offers conflicts with these self-descriptions. Thus these studies undermine the distinction between politics and science by showing them to be constructed, historical, and so forth, meaning that science is really ideology.

Or does it mean this? To be sure, 'controversy studies' in the literature on science studies *have* sometimes focused on the problem of expertise in order to problematize the claims of experts (e.g. Timmermans, 1999, on CPR), to show that the public construction of science is wrong (e.g. Collins & Pinch, 1993), or that the law's construction of science is wrong, or at least arbitrary and misguided (e.g. Jasanoff, 1995: 60). But are the implications of these studies that expertise is ideological and therefore non-neutral? Or can they be taken differently?

When Collins and Pinch (1993: 145) discuss the contribution of science studies to citizenship, they wrestle inconclusively with the question of what is implied by their redescriptions of science. Their message is that 'scientists . . . are merely experts, like every expert on the political stage', like plumbers, as they put it, but experts who happen to have an immaculate conception of themselves, unlike plumbers. They suggest that both scientists and the public would be better off without this conception. The same point is made by Jasanoff with respect to judges. But in both cases it is not clear what the end game of this argument is. Professional ideologies of the sorts that scientists have and plumbers do not, can of course be exposed as false, or, to put the point in Schmittian terms, to be political or non-neutral. But there are at least two possible ways of reasoning from this kind of argument, which need to be carefully distinguished.

The differences between the two ways is parallel to the difference between the ways in which one might reason from Fish's account of liberalism as a faith which pretends it is neutral to faith. If we reason as Fish does, moving the givens of liberal theory into the category of faith (that is, outside the category of reason), we get a contradiction at the base of liberalism. Moving science and expertise generally from the category of neutral to ideological in the manner of Feyerabend begets a conflict with the practice of treating science as unproblematically a source of truth, or when the self-descriptions of scientists involve appeals which are absolute, such as the metaphysical claim that present science has succeeded in establishing the truth about the universe, or has a method for doing so – which I take it is part of what Collins and Pinch have in mind with the phrase 'immaculate conception'. But there is an alternative: we can take all of these presumptively absolute conceptions in a different way. Schmitt has a slogan that bears on this problem, the saying that what is political is a

political question – NB a political rather than a scientific or philosophical question, and for Schmitt this means a matter of decision, not truth. Terms like faith and reason, and also science, can be thought of as political in this sense as well, and indeed this is precisely how Schmitt thinks of such terms (Schmitt, [1932] 1996: 31). But treating these terms as political at the 'meta' level is not the same as discrediting them, eliminating them, or collapsing them into the category of 'ideological'. On the contrary, we can recognize them as political, recognize the foundations of liberalism as non-absolute, and still accept them in practice as a political necessity. To put this somewhat differently, consider the arguments made by Collins, Pinch and Jasanoff. One end game is to treat such things as the law's construction of science as ideological; another is to treat both categories as themselves political. If calling something a matter of expertise is a political decision, so is calling something 'ideological'. None of these are, or need be, natural or absolute categories.

Constructionism as Liberalism

The answer to Fish is to treat the liberal principle of neutrality not as an absolute assertion about the nature of beliefs, but as a core rule, whose application varies historically, whose main point is to establish a means of organizing the discussion of political matters, that is to say the discussion of political decisions. We can apply this to the problem of expertise as follows: it is no surprise that, in order for there to be genuine discussion in Schmitt's sense, some things would be temporarily taken for fact, or, alternatively, some things would be left to the experts to settle. 'Politicizing' everything, making everything into the subject of political decision-making (or treating it as an analogue to political decision-making), would lose the advantages of the intellectual division of labour and make reasoned persuasion impossible. Some facts need to be taken for granted in order for there to be genuine political discussion, and some of the work of establishing the facts is, properly, delegated to experts. Indeed, to imagine a world in which such delegation did not occur would be to imagine a simpler society, at best a society of Jeffersonian yeomen, in which everyone knew pretty much what everyone else knew that was relevant to public decision-making.

To preserve the possibility of political discussion that such societies established, it is essential to delegate to experts and grant them cognitive authority. But granting them cognitive authority is not the same as granting them some sort of absolute and unquestionable power over us. The fact that expertise goes through a process of legitimation also means that legitimacy may be withdrawn and the cognitive authority of experts may collapse, and this suggests something quite different than the idea that liberalism is a kind of self-contradiction, and also something much more interesting. We, the non-experts, decide whether claims to cognitive authority, which in political terms are requests to have their conclusions treated as neutral fact, are to be honoured. And we have, historically,

changed our minds about who is 'expert', and what is to be treated as neutral fact.

This is, so to speak, a 'liberal' argument about expertise. It grants that cognitive authority and the acceptance of expertise, in modern conditions, is a condition of genuine public discourse. Liberalism, in the form of the principle of neutrality, is a means to the end of the creation of the conditions for public discourse. It is a means, however, that is not given by God, or the courts, or 'reason', but lives in the political decisions we make to regard assertions as open to public discussion or not. Historically, liberalism established the space for public discussion by expelling religious sectarian 'expertise'. The challenge of the present is, in part, to deal with the claims of non-religious experts to cognitive authority. There is no formula for meeting this challenge. But there is a process of legitimation and delegitimation. And it should be no surprise that this process has come to occupy more of public discourse than ever before. But the very vigour of discussion, and the ability of the public to make decisions about what claims are legitimate, belies the image of the liberal public as victim.

Is this enough? Or is there a higher standard of proper public deliberation to which public acceptance of expert claims ought to be held? Anti-liberals, following the arguments of Habermas and Foucault, have generally said that it is not enough. For them, it is precisely the point of the critique of expertise to show how our forms of reasoning in public deliberation are preconditioned by unchallenged and, practically speaking, unchallengeable forming assumptions that derive from experts.[7]

The kind of social constructionism that has been practised in much of science studies is different in character, and has different implications, for it is concerned not with showing that some forms of discussion involve social construction and others do not, but with showing that even science has this character. As I have suggested, to the extent that it has been concerned with establishing the conventional and mutable character of many of the distinctions that philosophers of science have attempted to absolutize, that is to say to make scientists less immaculate and more like plumbers, social constructionism parallels a moment in liberal theory. The moment is the one at which it was recognized that the history of liberalism is a matter of 'continuation by other means', in which the 'foundations' of actual liberal democracies are conventions, custom, flexibly applied and typically somewhat vague 'principles' rather than rigid doctrines or acts of faith. A corollary recognition to this political realization is that despite being mutable and shifting, conventions have sufficed to preserve what Schmitt ([1926] 1985: 5) characterized as the real possibility of 'persuading one's opponents through argument of the truth or justice of something, or allowing oneself to be persuaded of something as true or just'.

The parallel claim that what counts as 'expert' is conventional, mutable and shifting, and that people are persuaded of claims to expertise through mutable, shifting conventions does not make the decisions to accept or reject the authority of experts less than reasonable in the sense appropriate to liberal discussion. To grant a rôle to expert knowledge does

not require us to accept the immaculate conception of expertise. The lesson of the second kind of social constructionism is that these conditions, the conditions of mutability – and not some sort of analogue to Habermas's ideal-speech situation – are the conditions under which scientific consensus itself occurs, and that there is no alternative. This is a negative message, but nevertheless an important one, in that it excludes a certain kind of utopianism about expertise and its 'control' by some sort of higher reason. Excluding this kind of utopianism is a kind of answer to the issues with which we began. Expertise is a deep problem for liberal theory only if we imagine that there is some sort of standard of higher reason against which the banal process of judging experts as plumbers can be held, and if there is not, it is a deep problem for democratic theory only if this banal process is beyond the capacity of ordinary people.

Notes

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1. There are exceptions to this, such as Steve Fuller's *The Governance of Science* (2000). In political science itself, the writings of Aaron Wildavsky (1995) and Charles Lindblom and Edward Woodhouse (Lindblom & Woodhouse, 1993) should also be mentioned. Each reflects the concerns of Robert Dahl (1993) with the competence of citizens.
2. The American system of 'extension education' in agriculture is an example of this. It soon created a new kind of inequality, between early adoptees and laggards.
3. The claims about the nature of intelligence to which the letter-writer to *Newsweek* objected (Jaffe, 1994), curiously, produced a similar kind of collective letter signed by a large number of prominent psychologists, designed to correct what they saw to be the alarming disparity between what was presented by journalists and commentators as the accepted findings of psychological research on intelligence and what psychologists in fact accepted. Here the issues were different: the accepted facts were simply not known to the journalists, who seemed to assume that the facts fit with their prejudices.
4. This is a large theme of the literature that inaugurated 'professional' diplomacy and foreign policy analysis. Hans Morgenthau (1946), for example, stressed the idea that it was often a necessity for the leader to act against the democratic consensus with respect to foreign policy.
5. For a detailed theoretical account of the notion of discretionary power, see the discussion of the notion of decision in the work of Schmitt. Schmitt focuses on the puzzle of declarations of states of exception (or states of siege) which are not, by definition, governed by rules that fully define the conditions under which the decision-maker can act authoritatively. This is of course the same phenomenon as administrative discretion: the law is not, and perhaps cannot be, written to cover every contingency, so the bureaucrat, or judge, is given power to apply the law as he or she sees fit (Schmitt, [1922] 1985: 31–34).
6. Elsewhere, I have discussed some other aspects of the problem of expert knowledge in relation to power. In 'Forms of Patronage' (1990), I discussed the problem faced both by scientists and by governmental patrons in deciding whether to patronize scientists, and I suggested that there was a generic problem that arose from the fact that politicians and bureaucrats were not trained in a way that enabled them to judge the promises made to them by scientists. It is questionable whether scientists are able adequately to judge such promises, as they do, for example, in peer review decisions on grant applications. I pointed out in that paper that the knowledge possessed by scientific

experts was so specialized and fragmented that there was no general threat of scientists or experts as a group supplanting democracy. In 'Truth and Decision' (1989), I discussed the issue of the limitations of specialist knowledge in the face of ill-structured decisions of the sort that policy makers and politicians actually face. I noted that typically experts with different backgrounds framed issues in ways that conflicted, and that consequently there was no univocal expert opinion in such decisions. This speaks to the notion that 'expert culture' is some sort of unified whole: clearly it is not.

7. Thinkers like Foucault and Habermas present a more serious challenge than Fish does when they attack the power of the public to judge, because this undermines the notion of democratic or liberal legitimacy itself. For Habermas, for example, the communication on which the legitimacy of uncontested as well as contested viewpoints is based may be 'distorted', and its results therefore bogus. Foucault is even more direct. The beliefs that we share or accept widely as true as well as the (for him) small domain in which political contests occur are all essentially the product of non-consensual manipulation, or rather a kind of hegemonic intellectual influence which does not require conscious manipulators but which prevents the ordinary citizen from, to put it in somewhat different language, giving 'informed consent' to the arrangements under which he or she is compelled to live.

   For Foucault, the condition of religious believer, that is to say the voluntary acceptance of the authoritative character of that which cannot be understood, is realized in an involuntary way by the citizen: the religious believer voluntarily accepts mystical authority; the ordinary citizen is mystified into the acceptance of uncontested givens through which he or she is deprived of the volitional and cognitive powers necessary for citizenship. Foucault holds out no hope that there can be any escape from this kind of 'control' and provides no exemptions from its effects, except perhaps to intellectuals who can recognize and protest against their fate, but who are politically irrelevant because they have no alternative to this fate. In Foucault, the experts and the public disappear simultaneously into the thrall of forms of discourse which is constitutive of their mental world. In Habermas, in contrast, there is an exemption for experts, of a sort. The people who do the steering are not trapped within the limitations of the life-world that they steer. This is not to say that they are not limited, however, by the effects of distorted communication. But their limitations are different from the limitations of those they administer over. Their control cannot be truly legitimate because the consent that they depend upon is not genuinely 'informed'. Those who assent are governed by myths that preclude their being truly informed or informable.

   As I suggest in the conclusion, both lines of argument depend on a kind of utopianism about the character of knowledge that social constructionism undermines.

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Stephen Turner is Graduate Research Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy at the University of South Florida, where he has taught since 1975. He is the author of *The Social Theory of Practices: Tradition, Tacit Knowledge and Presuppositions* (Polity Press, 1994). His recent writings on science include several on economics approaches, including 'Disciplinarity and its Other', in P. Weingart and N. Stehr (eds), *Practicing Interdisciplinarity* (Toronto University Press, 2000), 46–65; 'Universities and the Regulation of Scientific Morals', in J. Braxton (ed.), *Perspectives on Scholarly Misconduct in the Sciences* (Ohio State University Press, 2000), 116–36; and a basic theoretical statement, 'Scientists as Agents', in P. Mirowski and M. Sent (eds), *Science Bought and Sold* (Chicago University Press, forthcoming).

Address: Department of Philosophy, FAO 226, University of South Florida, 4202 Fowler Avenue, Tampa, Florida 33620–5550, USA; fax: +1 813 974 5914; email: turner@chuma.cas.usf.edu