

Stephen Turner and the Philosophy of the Social

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Contents

Notes on Contributors VII

Stephen Turner and the Philosophy of the Social

An Introduction 1

Christopher Adair-Totef

PART 1

Overviews

On What There is, Maybe

Turner versus Turner on “the Social” 11

Paul A. Roth

Rationality and Interpretive Methodology

Transformations in the Apparent Irrationality Debate 30

Mark Risjord

Practical Normativity

Stephen Turner’s Contribution to the Philosophy of the Social 49

Rafał Paweł Wierchoś

PART 2

Practices and Beliefs

What Is in an Account of Practices? 71

Theodore R. Schatzki

Yes Virginia, Folk Psychological Understanding Really is Explanatory

Towards a Realist Conception of the “Verstehen Bubble” 90

Karsten R. Stueber

Individualistic and Holistic Models of Collective Beliefs and the Role of
Rhetoric and Argumentation

The Example of Religious and Political Beliefs 110

Alban Bouvier

PART 3***Intentions and Norms***

What Does Normativity “Explain”? 133

Peter Olen

Norms

*You Can’t Always Get What You Want ... but You Can Get What You
Need* 150

David Henderson and Terence Horgan

PART 4***Social Science***

Cognitive Theories and Economic Science 177

Sam Whimster

Interpretivism and Qualitative Research 202

Julie Zahle

Sociology, Expertise and Civility 221

John Holmwood

Response

Normativity, Practices, and the Substrate 243

Stephen Turner

Index 267

Sociology, Expertise and Civility

John Holmwood

Abstract

This chapter discusses Stephen Turner's contribution to the role of expertise in liberal democracy. It addresses the shift from expertise understood as certain knowledge that can be applied to policy problems to the role of expertise as staging arguments for public consideration. Drawing on Talcott Parsons' arguments about the relation between the professions and the modern citizenship complex, the chapter argues that the current problem of expertise lies in the dismantling of citizenship associated with neo-liberal policies, which have created the conditions for populist partisanship. The marketisation of higher education has also facilitated the presentation of knowledge as the expression of interests. The chapter concludes by suggesting that the problem of expertise is better understood as a problem of democracy where the issue is less the contested nature of knowledge claims and more a new incivility – that undermines the staging of arguments in public domains.

Keywords

democracy – knowledge – professions – public opinion – universities

Turner's work extends across a wide range of theoretical and philosophical topics, always challenging dominant understandings and upsetting apple carts. Unusually, he brings a deep engagement with the philosophy of social inquiry, and of social action more generally, together with a concern for the practical (sociological) conditions of possibility of warranted knowledge. His approach is reflexive in the best sense; engaged with sociological understandings as social constructions, but also with their material (institutional) conditions.

I have known Stephen Turner for several decades, mainly through participation in conferences organised by social theory and history of sociology sections of the American, European and International Sociological Associations. We collaborate as editors of a Palgrave Pivot series on the History of Sociology in different national contexts. We do not share sociological assumptions, or political opinions, but his sharp and distinctive observations about the nature of the academic craft and the misapprehensions of standard positions have

been the goad I have needed. Indeed, I can think of few other sociologists and social philosophers who regularly force a re-think of how we understand our practices. It is an honor to contribute to this *Festschrift* and to acknowledge his significance and his influence.

1

In this chapter, I want to address the issues raised by his discussion of “expertise” and “professional knowledge.” This brings together his contributions across a number of areas. First is his concern with democratic knowledge, as set out in *Liberal Democracy 3.0* (2003). With characteristic economy of expression he defines democracy as “government by discussion” (2003, 5) and he goes on to set out that civility is one of its necessary conditions.

An overall thesis of the book is that the increasing role of expertise in government has undermined the role of the public. This is an argument that goes back to Walter Lipmann and his argument of the “phantom public” (1925). What makes Turner’s argument different is that he sets out different epochs of the role of science in government, alongside an account of the problem “after the sociology of science” and its deconstruction of the politics of expertise. The latter has culminated in claims that we are in post-truth times and that this is something prefigured in developments in the sociology of science across the last few decades (Fuller 2018). Turner is setting out something more sophisticated than Fuller’s knowledge as a “power game.” He is seeking the institutional conditions for the public discussion that he argues to be integral to any meaningful liberal democracy.

The book was written before the Obama and Trump presidencies in the US. The former’s extensive use of “administrative orders” and their background justifications through commissions, regulatory agencies and the like (Rudalevige 2016), rather confirms the prescience of Turner’s arguments about the usurping of democracy by administration. However, the excessive use of administrative orders was not occasioned by any specific logic of government, but rather by the rise of bi-partisan incivility and the refusal of Republican cooperation. This incivility has been ratcheted further by the populist presidency of Trump, including attacks on expertise which have taken place alongside a disdain for discussion.

Liberal Democracy 3.0 begins on a pessimistic note and, throughout, he invokes the figure of a future historian and the judgement she might make on what we are living through. When we look back at the situation in 1944, liberal democracy would have seemed fragile to those living through the time, with

only anglophone countries showing any evidence of a deep cultural commitment to its principles and institutions that strongly embodied them. By 2003, after the collapse of communism, the situation looked very different, with liberal democracy triumphant and affirmed across the globe with few hold outs. Barely two decades later, and our future historian would see that populist governments are resurgent, whether in Poland, Hungary, the Philippines, Brazil, Russia, or India. More poignant, the erstwhile strong anglophone liberal democracies have fallen victim to the virus, with Trump in the US and Brexit in the UK each governing with an uncompromising “mandate from the people” based on support from a minority of voters. Incivility is perhaps too decorous a word for the pathologizing of opposition, but, nonetheless, incivility reigns.

What are we to make of this situation and what are its implications for sociology, Turner’s “home” discipline (notwithstanding that he is a restless traveller to other disciplines, too)? What can we say derived from his own earlier analysis?

2

In essence, Turner offers philosophical reflection on a sociological account of the rise of professional knowledge and its changing contexts in the organisation of political life. His focus is the changing nature and organisation of public life in the post second world war period (although, of course, his interests in sociological knowledge have a broader historical range), including the changing role of the university in public life, and the role of sociology within the university. Paradoxically, this was one of the gaps in *Liberal Democracy 3.0*; there is no discussion of the university—a primary space in which knowledge is made, even if it has no monopoly on its production, and in the arguments of some, declining significance (Barber et al 2013).

Any critical account of expertise necessarily raises the question of the authority of its own claims and its broader disciplinary warrants. The nature and possibility of sociology was something he addressed together with Jonathan Turner in *The Impossible Science* (1990). Many commentators found the conclusions dispiriting. The possibility of sociology as a coherent and cumulative science was argued by them to be *institutionally* impossible (or, at the very least, unlikely). Changes since they wrote have, in my view, made that conclusion more, rather than less, plausible. These changes are associated with neo-liberal public policies that have asserted private goods over public goods, including the subordination of universities to market

processes of revenue generation—including, for example, leveraged revenue from student fees justified as investment in human capital (Newfield 2016; Holmwood 2019).

The changes, I will suggest, are part of a broader shift in the privatisation not only of public assets, but also of the functions of government and their replacement by the market. The university is late to this development, and it is one that has gone further in the UK (more properly England) than in the US because of the system of public higher education that preceded it. However, it is a situation that must compromise any straightforward claim for public sociology (Burawoy 2005), in terms both of its internal (student) and external audiences.

In the reviews of the book (for example, *Social Epistemology* 1994), there was little reflection of the nature of the disagreement between the authors—with Jonathan Turner arguing that such a science was intrinsically possible and Turner that it was not—despite the fact that their fundamental disagreement facilitated cooperation rather than an inability to work together. Given that arguments for the impossibility of sociology frequently point to fragmentation and the lack of consensus over foundational concepts as obstacles to scientific sociology (see Balon and Holmwood 2019), this did not seem to trouble the authors' cooperation. In this way, the book itself models an important insight of Turner's work, namely that we are witnessing a shift in sociological sensibility from expertise as the *statement of certain knowledge* as a possible instrument of policy to its role in *the staging of arguments for wider public engagement and deliberation*. For its sociological audience, *The Impossible Science* modelled discussion, rather than (failed) foundationalism as the necessary way forward, even if its reviewers did not get it. The institutional setting of the university, however, does not favour that self-understanding, nor the loosening of the boundaries between academic social science and wider publics (Turner 2014).

But I am getting ahead of myself. I want first to discuss what I will term the “standard view” of the professions, democracy and sociological knowledge as set out by Talcott Parsons. Of course, I am conscious that, as befits a member of the “disobedient generation” (Sica and Turner 2008), albeit a maverick voice within that generation, Turner had no great respect (in truth, no respect at all!) for Parsons' work believing it to be both over-rated in its own terms and not at all the dominant voice within US sociology that it was frequently perceived to be (especially, perhaps from those outside US sociology). However, in the spirit of Turner's own contributions, I will present a non-standard view of the standard view, one that I believe will bring into relief the significance of his own contribution.

3

Parsons was one of the few major sociologists to write extensively on the nature of the university and the academic role and what he had to say is surprisingly pertinent to our own times and quite different to what is usually attributed to him even by those sympathetic to his position. Alexander, for example, describes Parsons' justification of the specialized functions of the university as deriving from, "the impersonal morality of cognitive rationality" (1988, 177). His critics, most famously Alvin Gouldner (1962), also took aim at what they saw as his technocratic conception of value freedom and social scientific objectivity, supposedly derived from Weber, but which erased all the agonism of Weber's own account. On this view, Parsons was perceived as being concerned with the articulation of a "liberal consensus" (Jewett 2012) and committed to sociology as an expert discourse separated from wider publics (see, for example, Haney 2008). The radical criticism developed by Gouldner also argued that this technocratic approach was tied to quiescence in the face of the corporate power structures of modern capitalism.

Absent the radical critique of corporate power, this is not far removed from Turner's own criticisms of Parsons' project for general theory, its patrician nature and (failed) attempts at disciplinary hegemony. His co-author, Jonathan Turner, took a different tack. The problem was less Parsons' positivism, but his failure to take it to its logical, behaviorist conclusion, which was implicit in the collaborative project associated with the short-lived Department of Social Relations at Harvard (Isaac 2012). This interpretation was reinforced by his wider professional activities, with him having been asked in 1946 to provide a report justifying the inclusion of the social sciences for funding by the National Science Foundation which was under discussion at the same time as the new Department at Harvard (see Haney 2008). The latter body and the politicians that oversaw it needed to be persuaded of the credibility of the claims of social science to be included among the natural sciences and Parsons provided a justification in terms of the rigour of concepts and methods and the mutual relations among the disciplines (Parsons 1986 [1947]). The bid was unsuccessful, but it seemed to confirm Parsons' positivism.

The wider political context also provided ammunition for Parsons' later critics to see him as raising professional expertise over democratic engagement. Somewhat earlier, Walter Lippman (1925) had argued that the "eclipse of the public" was a consequence of the complexity of modern society. This view was reinforced by the recent political experiences of authoritarianism evident in Stalin's Soviet Union and fascism in Europe. According to Haney, the dominant sociological response—in which he includes Parsons—was a suspicion towards democracy, the advocacy of the importance of experts and

a denigration of public opinion as easily swayed and subject to non-rational impulses. In part, this was associated with arguments about the emergence of a mass society and the dissolution of intermediate groups between elites and non-elites (Kornhauser 1959). I will suggest, however, that the concerns about mass society apply rather better to our own times.

These are however, at best, partial understandings of Parsons' approach. It would be too simple to suggest that he was part of a wider conservative and elitist turn as Haney (2008) suggests. Parsons' argument involved a claim about the wider significance of professions in society, within which he would locate the emergence of sociology itself (and other social sciences) as a profession. The *apparent detachment* of the academy from public life, that he proposed, itself depended upon *its mediated attachment to democratic values*. His political commitments were those of a broadly social democratic amelioration of inequalities and realisation of social rights (see Nielsen 1991; Gerhardt 2002). These were integral to his sociological arguments rather than additional to them.

As I shall argue, Parsons ultimately justified the university by reference to its role in what he called the "citizenship complex." While he disagreed with his radical critics, he shared with them a commitment to sociology as a form of democratic knowledge even where they differ in how it is constituted. However, he also regarded the development of corporate capitalism as indicative of a new kind of individualism, what he called "institutional individualism" and suggested that the fears of corporate capitalism were misplaced. The corporation, he argued, was undergoing a process of transformation which meant that it could not simply be understood in terms of an unfettered exercise of property rights and the pursuit of profit. Indeed, as Howard Brick (2006) has argued, a dominant theme of US sociologists in the period was that capitalism had been transcended—certainly as understood by Marx. This was indicated by Parsons' use of the term, "modern society," rather than that of "capitalist society." The latter would have indicated one in which capitalist economy determined social formation, whereas modern society indicated one where capitalist economy was embedded and regulated by values that included and modified property rights.

Parsons' argument rested on a form of the 'end of ideology' thesis, which, in other writers, was associated with the idea of a mass society (Bell 1960; Kornhauser 1959), but, again, Parsons was proposing something different. The institutional developments associated with the rise of professions are central, he argued, to the resolution of an "individualism-socialism" dilemma that had characterized an earlier phase of capitalist development. For Parsons, this brought into being the era of sociology which, while it overlaps with the

psychological and economic era, involves the recognition that the complexities of large-scale society require an analysis that goes beyond individual behaviour and, therefore, beyond the individualistic assumptions of economics and psychology. Parsons' claims represent a powerful mix. Sociology, itself, had come of age into a new professional role. The "end of ideology," as understood by Parsons, presaged the "age of sociology" (Parsons 1959).

In this context, Turner's representation of Parsons' conceptualisation of the professions as being, "squarely within the nineteenth century paradigm of 'interests'" (2003, 136), rather misses the latter's critique of that paradigm. Indeed, while Parsons is clearly influenced by Durkheim's arguments about professional ethics and civic morals, it is misplaced to suggest that the issue for Parsons was one of "professional *morality*" (Turner 2003, 136). It is clear that Parsons understands professionalism in terms of socially structured motivations, rather than morality per se (Holmwood 2006). As I shall argue, the social structures that are involved, according to Parsons, are those of the modern citizenship complex, linking professional development directly with the issues of democracy that are of concern to Turner.

4

My "revisionary" account of Parsons' arguments is made easier by a recent convergence upon them from within the critical theory tradition of the Frankfurt school. This is unexpected in the light of that tradition being associated with a radical account of mass society taken from Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of mass consumption capitalism and the entertainment industry.¹ It is a convergence which is largely unacknowledged in the case of Habermas (see, Holmwood 2009), but explicit in the case of Honneth (2014) who has presented Parsons' sociological account of modernity as the successor to that of Marx and the one which is required by a reinvigorated (critical) Hegelian normative theory of modernity.

Turner is (rightly, in my view) rather dismissive of Habermas's idealized conceptualization of discussion under conditions of undistorted communication (Turner 2003, 98ff) precisely because of its utopian view of social structures and failure to grasp the sociological conditions of modernity. This is not a criticism that can be levelled at Honneth. For the latter, the issue is how to

¹ For an early discussion of US and Frankfurt school approaches to mass society, see Bramson (1961).

understand the different spheres of modern society as expressing normative values. Essentially, for him, these spheres are those of personal relationships, market, and political will-formation (or family-household, market and public sphere). In this way, values are not assigned to the sphere of a distinct and separate lifeworld, but also embed spheres otherwise usually understood as instrumental, or only “externally” regulated. Instrumentalization—what Habermas (1987) would refer to as the colonization of the life-world—is a possible “deformation,” within each sphere, but it is not intrinsic to any sphere as its internal “logic.”² This, then, begs the question of what the normative basis of each sphere might be and how they are interrelated.

It is here that Parsons’ treatment of modernity has interest for Honneth (albeit, in common with others, he does not address the role of the university, and education more generally, in the former’s account). In effect, Parsons’ theory of modernity has the form of a projection forward of tendencies he believed to be evident in the 1960s and 1970s as representing intrinsic features of modern society. Rather than the reduction of modern society to capitalist economy, what was occurring, he argued, was the embedding of capitalist economy within modern values of achievement and egalitarianism, providing, thereby, not simply a normative grounding of the public sphere, but also of the market economy itself.

Parsons broadly accepted T.H. Marshall’s (1950a) account of this process in terms of the development and extension of civil and political rights to include social rights. These refer to membership in what Parsons calls the “societal community,” a domain broadly equivalent to civil society in Habermas (see, Mayhew 1997). Civil rights provide the framework of the boundary relations between the societal community and the state in terms of issues of free expression and assembly. Political rights determine participation in the selection of government and are expressed through the extension of the franchise. Finally, social rights address the welfare of citizens, “treated as a public responsibility” to secure the “provision of realistic opportunities to make good use of such rights” (Parsons 1971, 21); that is such rights represented as political and civil rights. Social rights seek, “to ensure that adequate minimum standards of ‘living’, health care, and education are available” (1971, 22). Parsons goes on to argue that “it is particularly notable that the spread of education to ever wider circles of the population, as well as an upgrading of the levels of education

² “Instrumentalization” in Habermas’s terms also entails the rise of “administered” capitalism and thus of expertise which now necessarily functions as “ideology” behind a veneer of “objectivity.” See especially, Habermas 1976.

has been closely connected with the development of the citizenship complex" (Parsons 1971, 22).

Notwithstanding that Parsons was much less sympathetic than was Marshall to framing these issues in terms of *class*, he does provide a similar discussion, which is, perhaps, more telling for our purposes. For Parsons, the "citizenship complex" is understood as transforming the corporation, *not from below, but from above*. In effect, Parsons traces the "civil," "political," and "social" development of organizational forms. This occurs first in terms of the orientation to the market, where increased scale introduces distinct occupational roles associated with management and its separation from labor. This is found in the rise of bureaucratic forms of organization. Finally, "associational" forms of organization emerge. These extend throughout the societal community and become increasingly important in the fiduciary boards' of large corporations. With significantly much less emphasis on struggle than Marshall, Parsons nonetheless identifies employment as a form of membership of a collectivity (beyond a simple contract). Different forms of associative membership both define a modern societal community and interpenetrate with organizational forms.³

What is significant about this account is that Parsons explicitly understands the core structure of the university to be "associational" (that is, "collegial") and uses its mode of organization to understand wider developments. In other words, if the modern university becomes more like a corporation, as Habermas (1971) suggests, this is also because, at the same time, the *corporation becomes more like a university*. In part, Parsons attributes this to the rise of the large corporation and the separation of ownership from the functions of management. This latter development assigns managers a "political" role in the corporation, reconciling different claims upon it. In this way, management is able to take on the status of a profession similar to the rise of other professions.

The development and transformation of the professions was, for Parsons, one of the key features of associative membership in the modern societal community. Professions enjoy a monopoly of practice in the light of claims for special expertise requiring considerable trust on the part of clients who are not able to judge services provided in terms of a principle of *caveat emptor* that might operate in other contractual relations. This poses a moral hazard, or information asymmetry, where clients may be vulnerable to a self-interested

3 Significantly one of Parsons' severest critics, David Lockwood, also came to a similar view, drawing on Marshall to argue for an "institutional unity consisting of citizenship, market and bureaucratic relationships" (1996, 532). What I am arguing is that it is this "institutional unity" that has been broken, with citizenship and bureaucracy increasingly reduced to the market.

professional's pursuit of profit. However, according to Parsons, professional associations serve to regulate the relations between practitioners and clients and do so both by certifying knowledge and by codes of practice that establish a "professional ethics" (something he develops from Durkheim). The point is not that the professional person is less driven by self-interested motivations, but that these are constrained by new social structures toward a reconciliation of private and public interest in terms of self-conscious duties and responsibilities.

Once again, this is an argument also set out by Marshall (1950b). In an article first written in 1939, but specifically selected by him for publication alongside his more well-known "Citizenship and Social Class" (1950a), he makes the point that the development of rights also requires special occupational groups to deliver them, namely professions. Under the dominance of civil and political rights, the professions are associated with an "individualist" form of transcendence of self-interest related to pecuniary advantage. This involves, "the belief that the individual is the true unit of service, because service depends on individual qualities and individual judgement, supported by an individual responsibility which cannot be shifted on to the shoulders of others ... it is not concerned with self-interest, but with the welfare of the client" (1950b, 140). With the development of social rights and services provided directly through public authorities, however, this involves that, "the professions are being socialized and the social and public services are being professionalized" (1950b, 147). With regard to the first aspect, professions are brought to connect the welfare of the individual client with obligations to the wider public. With regard to the second, the professionalization of services means that they are provided in a manner befitting social rights of citizenship. They are provided as a service to individuals regarded as equal members of the political community, rather than as recipients of charity.

To some extent, then, the development of the professions follows the track of the university itself. Just as the professions once recruited from those with high status backgrounds because they served people of a similar status (an argument that goes back to Adam Smith), so the university was initially associated with the reproduction of elite culture. However, with the development of the "citizenship complex," as the professions are democratized, so, too, is the university. This is not the democracy that might be claimed by a student movement concerned to disrupt all hierarchies (a situation that confronted Parsons and led to him being accused of conservatism), but the latter orientation, for Parsons, was a symptom of changes to the university and not in itself the direct expression of the new meaning of the university for democracy.

This is so not least because the university is responsible for what Parsons calls the “cognitive complex” and its normative significance within modern societies. While the professions are the outward face of the knowledge society and its demand for specialized expertise, the university is increasingly the guarantor of the knowledge base of that expertise and its development through research. Professional associations continue to regulate practice, but increasingly the knowledge they certify is credentialized through universities and their professional schools (including business schools). At the same time, for Parsons, this means that the “profession of higher education, and of scholarly research, has also been acquiring greater relative importance” (1971, 26), along with the notable fact that the educational revolution has begun to “transform the whole structure of modern society. Above all, it reduces the relative importance of the two major ideological concerns, the market and bureaucratic organization. The emerging emphasis is on associational organization, especially its collegial form” (1971, 98).

It should be stressed at this point that Parsons’ functional analysis of systems (cultural, social and behavioral) and sub-systems within systems creates a complex set of locations (nodes) and exchanges (see Holmwood 1996 for discussion). While associational forms arise in different organizations, they also have an expression specific to their functional location. A university is not the same as a business organization, although it does have its business side (for example, it has to generate revenues and make material provision for its activities and this requires a distinctive —functionally specific—type of employee different from the academic). In a similar way, the business organization has its aspects similar to the university, but with a different ordering under the pursuit of profitability over the long term, while the university is defined by its pursuit of cognitive rationality.

By emphasizing the rise of associational organization, Parsons is, of course, mobilizing a theme of American democracy that goes back to Tocqueville. Nowhere does Parsons use the language of the “public sphere” to account for the changing roles of the university. However, as I have suggested, he does locate the university centrally within the societal community as an expression of a citizenship complex that secures social rights and defines overall legitimacy within the societal community by reconciling private and public interests. The “autonomy” of the university, then, takes on a new meaning within this citizenship complex. Its knowledge is at service to a societal community in which, “the principle of equality has broken through to a new level of pervasiveness and generality. A societal community as *basically* composed of equals seems to be the ‘end of the line’ in the long process of undermining the legitimacy of ... older, more particularistic ascriptive bases of membership” (1971, 119).

5

It is not my purpose to argue that Parsons was right in his characterisation of the professions and democracy, only to point to the connections he was making with the development of a citizenship complex grounded in social rights. Turner is similarly oriented to the relationship between expertise and democracy. Admittedly, he has a simpler definition of democracy as government by discussion, whereas Parsons' definition extends to the idea of government of and by equals. Once again, we can allow that Turner's definition is intended to encompass the equal status of the parties to discussion. Indeed, it is the very substantive inequality in comprehension of topics brought forward for discussion that expertise creates that exercises him. Parsons suggests that this problem can be overcome through social structure and the direction toward inclusive membership in the societal community.

This construction is not subject to the same criticism that Turner makes of Habermas. Parsons may be wrong about the development of social rights of citizenship, but it is a substantive argument not a utopian construction against which all extant social structures will fail. However, Turner is correct to argue that Parsons' sociology of science is Mertonian in character and that subsequent developments in the field have proceeded with knowledge itself, not simply its institutional frameworks, as the object of analysis. This has coincided both with the expansion of knowledge claims and more extensive coalitions of practitioners. The diversity of knowledge claims involves competing expertises and the idea that consensus is a (conditional) achievement *within* coalitions and not *across* them.

Just as sociology must be conducted in fragments (see, for example, Abbott 2001), with no overarching consensus, so is this the case with other disciplines. Even where they exhibit greater internal consensus—for example, economics—that consensus evaporates once expert claims travel outside the bounds of the academy. Experts are frequently in name only and self-identified. As Turner nicely puts it, there is a difference between a scientific consensus and a consensus among scientists (2003, 121). The former is less secure than the older sociology of science proposed and it is both contingent and time limited. The second is merely a gambit within a political game (frequently carried out via signatures and petitions), which can simply reveal the distance between experts and wider publics.

Turner ends his book on *Liberal Democracy 3.0* with a discussion of the “withering away of civil society” and a hope for a new facilitation of democratic discussion with a holding to account of expert opinion. In fact, he does not say very much about the nature of recent developments except in terms

of the rise of administrative decision-making. Significantly, he describes social democratic Sweden as its apotheosis with decision making delegated to Royal Commissions. The treatment here is somewhat anecdotal deriving from a book by the British translator, Paul Austin, written in 1968. Turner regards the Swedish situation to be an expression of “expert bureaucratic power” as the ideal type of one solution to the conflict between expertise and opinion in liberal democracy 3.0. As he says, it describes a process where “expert opinion establishing fact-surrogates alone suffices” (Turner 2003, 133).

It is significant that this is described as having legitimacy, but there is no discussion of the wider implication of social democracy for establishing that legitimacy. At the time, Sweden was also the apotheosis of a welfare state embodying social democratic social rights. I am not concerned for present purposes with the issue of whether or not it retains this character. However, it is precisely the future anticipated by Talcott Parsons, in his outline of the modern citizenship complex. What I suggest is that the inclusive membership that is integral to that complex is also integral to the legitimacy of the ideal type discussed by Turner. Parsons was wrong about the future development of the welfare state in the US, which turned out not to be found in the development of social rights of citizenship, but their demise. A similar outcome is found in other anglophone countries, most especially the UK.

Elsewhere, I have suggested that the underlying reason is found in racial divisions intrinsic to the liberal state (Bhambra and Holmwood 2019). Indeed, Parsons, himself, regarded one of the obstacles to the institutionalising of social rights in the US to be the failure to resolve the problem of race. “Inclusion” was something that would require the agency of African Americans. As Parsons put it, “he can become the spokesman for the much broader category of the disadvantaged, those excluded on this egregious ground. The Negro movement, then, can become the American style ‘socialist’ movement. This is to say that the basic demand is for full inclusion, not for domination or for equality on a basis of separateness” (1965, 1040). Notwithstanding the general character of his theory, his realism about the likelihood of full citizenship—and it is significant that he punctuated the title of his article discussing the topic with a question mark—placed a significant query over the future of social rights in the US at the moment of their apparent embrace. At the same time, he identified the obstacle to lie in the re-emergence of the radical right under Barry Goldwater. Thus, Parsons suggested that, while social rights complete the citizenship complex, they do so in circumstances where they are likely to be contested on racial grounds. He writes that, “the alignment of the resistance to Negro inclusion, directly or through resistance to various measures essential to its success (such as federal support of education and the war against poverty),

with a generalized political conservatism is a highly important development” (1965, 1043).

Parsons thought that this resistance was not likely to succeed. In retrospect, we can see that it did, with profound implications. Inclusion in social rights could be avoided if social rights were themselves to be withdrawn (a withdrawal, which if the Marshall-Parsons argument about the relation between civil, political, and social rights and citizenship is correct, would entail consequences for other rights within the citizenship complex). What, at the time, was referred to as the rise of the “new right” (King 1987) and is retrospectively understood as the rise of neo-liberalism, would seem to be coterminous with liberal democracy 3.0, but, at the same time, undermines liberal democracy itself.

6

What is at issue involves the widening social inequality and stagnant real incomes that have characterised the decades of neo-liberal public policy in the US and UK (Piketty 2014). The dismantling of the citizenship complex can be considered as a shift from “thick” to “thin” citizenship, not a denial of citizenship as such. Nonetheless, “thin” citizenship will involve the return of problems that thick citizenship sought to resolve. Notwithstanding a continued emphasis on equal opportunities, inheritance of social position has become more evident, not least in low and stable, or declining, rates of social mobility, against the expectation that modern societies were becoming increasingly open. Social rights of citizenship are under challenge, but this is not simply an issue of distributive justice and the withdrawal of a public commitment to “adequate minimum standards of ‘living’, health care, and education” (Parsons 1971, 22). Given the way in which Parsons also argues that associationalism is a characteristic of the societal community, it also involves a transformation of the latter, involving the greater dominance of market and bureaucratic orientations. Another corollary is the “de-professionalization” of public and social services, as their recipients are transformed from clients to undeserving recipients and/or customers of services who would be better served by private providers.

Ironically, at the same time as sociological theory was developing the idea of the citizenship complex as the embedding of markets and bureaucracy, economic theory was addressing the problem of restrictions to the market that such embedding represented. It is not possible to do justice to this literature here, but my main concern is how some of it was taken up in a new economics

of private property rights (Bartzell 1989; Eggertsson 1990) that became especially influential in neoliberal policy circles and as an ideology of shareholder value. The core idea involved market exchanges as both the paradigm of efficiency securing maximum aggregate welfare and grounded in an idea of economic liberty. In this context, social rights are perceived as both inefficient, when they are delivered in the form of public services, and unjust because they entail a restriction on private property rights and the liberties they embody. In effect, what is proposed is a reorganization of the citizenship complex around an austere concept of simple freedom expressed through ownership, including that of self-ownership (Tomasi 2012).

“Self-ownership” in the context of declining returns to “self-investment” in human capital (Newfield 2016) is fraught. It does not override ascriptive bases of membership, but re-instates them and, at the same time constitutes politics as a competition for advantages. In so far as neo-liberalism represents the hollowing out of intermediate organisations in civil society it ushers in a new form of mass society, one which is the fertile ground for the excesses of social media. It is the sociological condition for opinion formation as occurring within ‘echo chambers’, because of the decline of both overlapping groups and common interests transcending private or group interests (as described in the citizenship complex).

In this context, the problem of democracy identified by Turner is less that of expertise and much more that of a structurally-produced incivility, something he discusses at much less length. The neo-liberal preference for markets also involves the representation of professional organisation as a monopolistic producer interest. Equally, acceding to a neo-liberal project for universities—“putting the student-consumer at the heart of the system,” as a UK white paper has it (Department for Education 2015)—opens the university to a wider neo-liberal project, one in which matters previously subject to public discussion are made matters of private decision. At the same time, professional motivations are separated from citizenship and represented as self-interested.

Ironically, this can seem to be no more than an extension of the radical critique of the professions that emerged in the 1970s. This is also part of the heritage of the sociology of science, perhaps most vividly encapsulated by Fuller (2018) in his recent book, *Post-Truth: Knowledge as a Power Game*. The idea of post-truth (or perhaps, more correctly, of multiple—competing and irresolvable—truths) has been widely seen as a consequence of the post-modern turn associated with late capitalism. Put very simply, Fuller endorses the idea of post-truth as the logical conclusion of the arguments of the sociology of science and its deconstruction of philosophical attempts at demarcation—reason from emotion, knowledge from belief, and so on. For

him, there is little to be gained from lamenting the situation and everything to be gained from joining the game. Post-truth, for Fuller, is nothing less than a consequence of the democratization of knowledge, especially in the context of social media and the internet where information and counter-information is readily available.

Turner provides a more sober account. Incivility, itself, is an enemy of democratisation, once we understand democracy as discussion. Fuller conflates self-determination within the market and democracy.⁴ We can understand the conflation by going back to an older sociological (pragmatist) understanding of democracy in terms of “publics” and discursive processes of decision-making. The wider project of neo-liberalism is to displace publics with markets, and thus the displacement of democracy itself by the market. Little wonder that a ‘hollowed out’ public sphere is vulnerable to populism. In the history of reflection on the nature of the university, the figure of Kant reigns large—the Faculty of Philosophy, for him, was emblematic of the university’s relation to truth. Without irony, Fuller suggests that the emblem of the University in the age of post-truth is the Business School, writing, “if any part of the university deserves to carry the torch for anti-expertism, it is business schools” (2018, 22).

7

Part of the hollowing out of the public sphere is the very privatization of the public university itself. Collegiality has given way to the corporate brand with academics expected to act in ways to support it. At my own university, with branch campuses in Malaysia and China, this involves alignment with a mission statement that can embrace the University’s contribution to well-being, but eschews democratic values and the criticism of a regime that has built concentration camps for its Uighur minority. Turner’s invocation of the historical perspective on liberal democracy in 1944, with fascism yet to fully reveal its horrors, is mocked by our individual institutions which might once have understood themselves in the pursuit of truth, but, in giving up truth, have also sacrificed democracy in the pursuit of revenue and, in the

4 Interestingly, an early radical critic of the professions and specialist in the field of the sociology of science, Randall Collins, wrote of the problem of credentialism created by the struggle for advantage under a meritocratic ideology (Collins 1979). He offered two solutions—markets or social democracy. Significantly, radical sociology, including the sociology of science, was always close to the embrace of neo-liberalism.

process, have contributed to the sociological process that diminishes expertise itself.

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