

## How should one assess the conflict between expertise and democracy?

*TURNER, S. P. Liberal democracy 3.0*

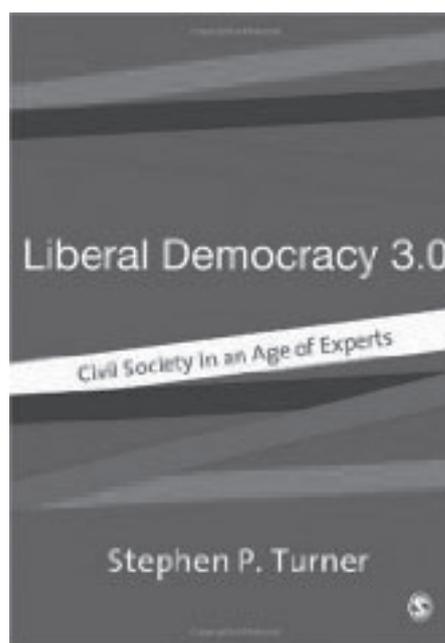
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Turner aprofunda a discussão iniciada em 2001, in 2001, with the publication of the article “What is the problem with experts” in the Social Studies of Science magazine, where he discusses the political problem of expertise. The article gave rise to a broad discussion, where several authors – among which were Harry Collins and Robert Evans (2002) , Sheila Jasanoff (2003), Brian Wynne (2003) and Arie Rip (2003) – present their theoretical perspectives about the role of experts in politics. The book highlights and analyzes the crisis of knowledge in liberal democracies. In short, the crisis would be the result of the idea that most citizens would not be able to understand – let alone judge – propositions made by scientists. Turner, therefore, poses the following question: if knowledge is not equally distributed, what bases could provide support for the philosophy of equal rights, of liberal democracies?

By examining the political implications of the knowledge of science and of the expert on liberal democracy, the author points out that a response to this crisis is the assembly of committees, with participation of the public, that provide support to public decisions. There are also the so-called commissions from below, which challenge the boundaries of the expert’s knowledge and of power, by making propositions of opposing knowledge. The book attempts to look into the issue of political implications of expertise from at



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least three standpoints: political theory, philosophy and scientific studies. In order to achieve this, Turner brings in elements from Max Weber, Joseph Schumpeter, Jürgen Habermas, Michel Foucault, Auguste Comte, Ulrich Beck, Karl Marx and Carl Schmitt, among other authors. He also draws attention to the political importance of scientific studies. Such importance becomes evident with the increase in the amount of scientists, and committees of scientists, who participate in public decisions.

As the book describes, from a theoretical standpoint the growing participation of scientific experts in decisions brings about two problems for the future of democracies. One is the coexistence of expertise as a phenomenon, and the theoretical principle of equality of liberal democracies. According to this principle, all should be equal, or have equal importance in political decisions. Inequalities in terms of knowledge create asymmetries in the participation of specialists and non-specialists, which would end up overlooking the rights of citizens, turning public participation into a farce. From this standpoint, specialized knowledge is seen as a political threat, as experts are treated as having access to knowledge that bestow upon them power that is both uncontrollable and unattainable by other individuals. This idea stems from the assumption that the population would not be able to understand some subjects, and would thus not have control over its possible consequences.

The second problem, on the other hand, occurs when a purportedly neutral State when it comes to different opinions, by giving a special status to the opinion of experts, deflects the theoretical principle of neutrality of liberal democracy. This different status between the opinion of laymen and experts assumes that the unspecialized public is incapable of participating in the decision making process, due to the fact that such individuals do not have enough scientific and technical knowledge.

According to Turner's analysis, and when considered separately, these two problems could be solved by politics. The lack of democratic control over specialized knowledge could be solved by means of citizens' councils in technology, or boards and steering committees with public participation, as is the case in most democracies of developed countries. The solution for the purported "public incapacity" to take part in decisions would be education, which would shed a light on the importance of public comprehension of science for political decisions.

When analyzed together, however, the two issues pose a more complex question: If experts are the principle of public knowledge (since

they generate and detain this knowledge), and if such knowledge should not be regarded as being essentially superior to that of the layman, who does not bear the certificate of specialist, then the public is less competent than experts, and is (to a greater or lesser extent) under the cultural or intellectual control of specialists.

In an attempt to deepen the issue, Turner creates a list with five types of experts, who vary depending on the process of political legitimization of the specialist's authority. The purpose of the typology would not exactly be the creation of taxonomy, but rather to discuss the various legitimization processes and the political implications of the activities of the various specialists from North America and from most developed countries. He finds reference in the comparison between the ideal type of expertise described by Robert Merton, from the group of physicists, and the experts, or the "expert culture", as described by Habermas. In the latter case, contrary to what happens with physicists, the authority of the expert who supports the political decision does not undergo, oftentimes, any type of democratic legitimization process. As for the cognitive authority of physicists, as presented in the book, it can be considered a type of authority that undergoes a democratic process of legitimization by the public, like other processes of political legitimization.

Turner starts from the two ideal types of domination, as defined by Max Weber. To Weber there are, theoretically, three ideal forms of political domination, with different mechanisms of authority legitimization. The first is called "traditional power", which is exerted by the patriarch or landlord, by means of the authority of the "eternal past", that is, by custom sanctified by immemorial validity and habit. The second, "charismatic power", is legitimized by strictly personal devotion for and trust on an individual due to their prodigal qualities, heroism, or other qualities that may make them a leader. The third is the "rational", or bureaucratic-rational power, which prevails through "legality", and would be based on rationally established rules, by the belief in the validity of a legal statute, or of a positive competency, as is observed in the case of the "State servant".

Despite the fact that these two ideal types of domination do not exist in pure form, their importance for political sociology lies in the fact that they can be used to analyze the processes that legitimize authority. Turner highlights that the three ideal types ultimately contain an ethos, a set of rules that provide the basis for the legitimacy of dominance. This ethos, in the case of

traditional and rational authorities, is indirect. As for charismatic authority, it implies an ethos, or a direct belief. In order to build his typology Turner considers cognitive authority as being analogous to charismatic authority, since there is a belief that scientists possess special cognitive power.

In the typology proposed by Turner, expert type I would be the type described by Merton (to use the example of physicists), whose expertise is widely accepted outside its institutional context by the unspecialized public. Expert type I, therefore, has a democratic legitimacy built in a way that is similar to that of the construction of political authority. A contemporary example of this type of authority could be that of geneticists, since it could be associated to the technological results and social implications of the scientific area. We can hence think that physicists also built their legitimacy based on technological artifacts that provided from electricity to nuclear energy. Likewise, geneticists also gain notoriety by enabling the creation of transgenic products of interest for and with an impact on both economy and public health.

Theologians, despite having the authority of being specialists, only have legitimacy in certain areas of society, and therefore do not undergo the same democratic legitimization process as physicists or geneticists. These specialists, with authority restricted to one sector, are the so-called type II experts. With the separation of State and church that is characteristic of modern western societies, theologians no longer subsidize political decisions, which started having a closer relation with science consultants. However, the leaders of a religion are legitimately treated as experts by its followers, and this fact has had frequent influence on some political decisions. Some recent examples that theologians are treated as experts include, but are not limited to, the introduction of creationism lessons in scientific classrooms, as is the case in some North American states, in addition to the participation of theologians in the recent decision by the Federal Supreme Court of Brazil about the legality of using cells of human embryos for research purposes.

Contrary to the first two types, which go through a legitimization process in pre-established hearings, the type-III experts create their own followers. Authors of best-sellers (for instance, self-help books) and therapeutic massage practitioners would be examples of the third type. This type of expert builds their legitimacy solely by means of the success of their work with a group of followers, since they do not have the status of belonging to a scientific community or church.

The fourth type of the list is directly or indirectly encouraged by the State, by means of philanthropic foundations and institutions, to talk like an expert, to convince the audience and to influence towards a certain action or political choice. Some leaders of NGOs and social movements in North America could be examples of the "type IV" expert.

The type V expert, the result of the historical development of type 4, is the specialist that has a direct influence on public management, and therefore remains unbeknownst to the general public. Conflicting interests involved in the relations between scientific consultants and public decision makers are oftentimes not made clear or widely announced. Many political decisions are made with subsidies and technical legitimization from the type V experts, unknown to journalists and to the public, which precludes any type of democratic control.

Since they are directly or indirectly supported by the State and effectively act within the sphere of political decisions (as opposed to self-help book authors and the religious type), these two types of experts (types IV and V) are the ones who could, according to Turner, cause the biggest problems for the democratic process. Furthermore they do not go through democratic audiences of legitimization by the public, since they are unknown to the population. It is, therefore, impossible to ascertain, for instance, by whom and how the specialists who provide technical subsidies for public decisions are paid. Actually, it often happens that experts unknown to the public are invited as consultants just to provide technical support to contentious political decisions, making use of the widely criticized and opposed neutral standpoint of science.

From a historic perspective, by positioning himself as someone in the future, Turner identifies two big changes in the 20th century: The transformation into a close relationship between science and technology and the change from a system of empire-based government to parliamentary democracies. To him, one possible interpretation of the history of liberalism is that there has been a continuous expansion of citizenship and a growing participation of the population in political decisions. This idea, on the other hand, could also be analyzed as regarding politics solely as the occupation of public positions, which Turner proves to be a quite incomplete way of looking at liberal democracy.

A point of view opposed to this continuous increase in participation is that of Jürgen Habermas.

This author simultaneously uses and criticizes Carl Schmitt's opinion about classic liberalism, which Turner calls liberal democracy 1.0. Habermas' main argument is that the idea of a bourgeois public sphere was a form of usurpation. He finds support in the idea that the core of the ideology of classical liberalism was a fiction: that the owners of the means of production were identical to all common individuals. According to this assumption, owners were the only participants in public speech and in shaping public opinion, and liberal discussion in the past was a farce. That is, liberal democracy 1.0 would not exactly be characterized by liberal democracy, since it is a liberalism of the notable ones, the classical liberalism of the 13th century.

Acknowledgement of the importance of gathering several voices and rejecting exclusions in the political process gradually started to happen. This is what Turner calls liberal democracy 2.0. If one analyzes it in an extreme manner and attempts to take it towards new directions, in politics, the idea of liberal democracy 2.0 implies an almost unlimited trust in the effectiveness of two factors: Representative government and a complete freedom to discuss. At certain points, many labeled liberal democracy 2.0 as populism.

By looking at the current situation of most industrialized countries one will see that we are facing a conflict in the relation between, on the one hand, a representative democracy with a persuasive liberal speech and, on the other hand, a society of knowledge with rational practices, arguments and justifications. In this context it is possible to compare our situation with that of European monarchies that were replaced by representative democracy, even in countries where monarchs still exist. Likewise, even though we do not see "official" changes in the forms of government, we have been through a process of liberalization of expertise, and outsourcing State decisions to the group of experts. These two factors are characteristic of liberal democracy 3.0. This occurs in the context of current democracy of developed countries, where different activists, movements, committees, associations, NGOs, experts with specific roles take part in extremely complex processes, which Turner discusses from several standpoints.

The use of civil society as a normative ideal is currently regarded by many as being as retrograde and populist in the society of knowledge. Politics are made by people who look at the past. Europe, for instance, which is experiencing a replacement of people's government with the management of things, is a European Community that largely rules through experts' committees. However, if the broad

and direct participation of the civil society, as in liberal democracy 2.0, is no longer regarded as an option, we are instead being faced with possibilities provided by liberalism 3.0: the liberalization of expertise with democratic control, expressed through committees and executed by specialized bureaucracies (TURNER, 2009 pg. 143).

Despite the fact that it focuses mainly on Europe and the United States, this work is arguably extremely important for assessing the process of redemocratization of Latin America, especially Brazil. This is due to the institutionalization of public participation in the decision making process, which has been occurring since the Constitution of 1988. The strength of this theoretical reference for the analysis of the Brazilian reality was experienced during the case study carried out in the drainage basins of rivers Piracicaba Capivari and Jundiá (PIOLLI & COSTA 2008; and PIOLLI 2009). Even though it is necessary to make adjustments to the theory, in order to take into account specificities of the Brazilian social movements, Turner's work provided a highly consistent reference for analysis.

Tutelary councils, health management councils, drainage basin committees, participative budgeting and the National Technical Committee for Biosafety (CTNBio) are only a few examples of spaces that characterize the Brazilian liberal democracy 3.0. Turner's work provides a full analytical tool for the study of this context and these spaces, and despite its possible and lasting usefulness for the current reality of many Latin American countries it is still hardly read and found in Brazilian libraries and bookstores.

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