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*Review of The Social Sciences and
Democracy, edited by Jeroen Van
Bouwel, London, Palgrave Macmillan,
2009, 268 pp., £58 hb, ISBN 9780230224391*

Ioana Negru



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This book is bringing an interesting and valuable contribution to the literature on how democratic are the social sciences and whether the concept of democracy can help the debate on consensus and the lack thereof amongst competing approaches/alternatives. Thus, this book is trying to develop the many facets of the relation between the social sciences and democracy. The social sciences are characterised by the lack of epistemic and theoretical unity and by a plurality of interests encountered in the epistemic realm. In this context, a relevant place to frame this scientific plurality and the interactions within social sciences is the idea of *democracy*. The book attempts to draw parallels between models of science, i.e. envisaging a plurality of epistemic interests, and models of democracy, i.e. a plurality of political, social, economic and moral interests.

The first part of the book looks at the relation between social scientific experts and the public in a democratic society. Social scientists, in their relation with the public and society can be distinguished as technocrats, epistocrats or democrats. The impartial and neutral social scientist is the *technocrat*. As Jeroen van Bouwel states (3) the technocrat is a social scientist 'that provides technical insight and optimal problem-solving strategies to the public and society and is impartial vis-à-vis the ultimate goals the public and society should pursue.' The epistocrat not only behaves like the technocrat, but also 'knows the goals that society should pursue.' According to the democratic view, the impartiality and universality advanced by some social scientists should be replaced by an 'inclusionary and democratic approach which might involve nonscientific stakeholders...in order to obtain better social science.'

The first chapter of the book by Patrick Baert, Helena Mateus Jerónimo and Alan Shipman analyses the technocratic model as the early view in social sciences, i.e. social sciences are neutral vis-à-vis the ultimate goals that are pursued and they link the idea with the social sciences' struggle for identity. They argue that whilst social sciences are crucial to the workings of democracy and they are part of the democratic process, the dialogical model has emerged as a coherent alternative to the technocratic model. The dialogical model of social science offers a way out by showing the importance of involving citizens within a broader debate about science-driven policies. The relationship between the technocratic and democratic dialogue plays a central role in chapter two as well. Stephanie Solomon argues that a call to democratize expertise 'is philosophically incoherent' (41). Using examples from feminist theory (Lynn Hankinson Nelson) and the sociology of science (Brian Wynne), she succeeds in demonstrating how existing attempts to democratise science 'blur the distinction between experts and stakeholders.' She looks at how to incorporate nonscientists in the social scientific discussion as experts. Finally, she analyzes how the scientific practice can be democratized and how can be maintained 'an epistemically coherent notion of expertise in science.' (42)

Whilst part II of the book concentrates on how can social sciences develop further the idea and practice of democracy, part III focuses on science, freedom and pluralism. In chapter 5, Harold Kincaid explores the interactions between normative democratic theory, the social sciences and the philosophy of science. The author argues that 'normative democratic theory often rests on the dubious social science- overly thin notions of the social – and that social scientific study of democracy not only does that but also makes important normative assumptions in the process.' (113) He challenges the notion of liberal democracy, arguing if the assumptions are valid in the normative democratic theory and political thinking. The style of his work is to counterpose thesis and anti-thesis (counter-thesis?) as his cognitive process of reflection (106-107).

By far, the most interesting chapter of the book, from the point of view of economics, is chapter 6. Jeroen van Bouwel explores the parallels between models of democracy and models of science and challenges the ideal of consensus and deliberative democracy. He uses these symmetries to elaborate and clarify the issues of dissent and pluralism in science and to ask the question whether consensus is undermining or helping progress. Amongst all the theories of democracy he chooses deliberative democracy which takes consensus as the goal of deliberation (e.g. Habermas, Rawls). Van Bouwell proceeds further by introducing Mouffe's

(1999, 2000) criticisms of deliberative democracy. The consensus, which plays the central role within deliberative democracy, is found to be oppressive: 'The theory of deliberative democracy eliminates conflict and fails to keep contestation alive.' (123) Having discussed the various points on models of democracy, Van Bouwel elaborates on the models of science and how they address scientific consensus, dissent and pluralism. Van Bouwell advances three different interpretations of scientific pluralism: a. pluralism and no dissent or Philip Kitcher (2002)'s version of pluralism: 'there are many different systems of representation for scientific use in understanding nature, none of them complete, and jointly consistent' (127); b. pluralism and dissent or Helen Longino (2002)'s interpretation that there are many different perspectives on scientific understanding of nature that might not be complete nor coherent; c. pluralism/plurality (Yes, No) and dissent (No, Yes): 'there are many different systems of representation for scientific use in understanding nature, all of them (aim to be) complete, and (presumed to be) irreconcilable.' (127) Van Bouwell coins the first interpretation of dissent and pluralism *consensual pluralism* presupposing consensus. The second interpretation according to Helen Longino (2002) does not presume consensus and recognises the fact that there are multiple perspectives that are equally defensible. This is labelled by van Bouwell as *agonistic pluralism*. The third interpretation or *antagonistic exclusivism* denies the possibility of consensus and engagement between opposed perspectives. These three versions of pluralism are made more concrete by being applied to economics and sociology. When it comes to economics, the controversy between orthodox/mainstream and heterodox economics is analysed with the final argument that an agonistic framework (à la Mouffe) would provide a framework for addressing epistemic plurality and the interaction between various approaches. Others authors such as Negru (2009) have explored the nature of pluralism, and how the establishment of an epistemic democracy within economics might enable us to cope with scientific plurality and contended that a state of deliberative or epistemic democracy is not yet present within the discipline of economics.

The theme of part IV of the book is an efficacious science policy and a democratic governance of science whilst in part V obstacles to the social sciences and democracy are scrutinised, both parts particularly relevant for the process of establishing democracy in economics. Mirowski (chapter 10) and Francis Remedios (chapter 11) analyse the process of commercialisation of scientific knowledge (as a result of the rise of neoliberalism in post-war science) that runs counter with the implementation of democracy in science. In the last chapter of this book (12), Steve Fuller discusses the differences between social sciences and natural sciences and argues that this

distinctiveness has disappeared today, but the author argues that a focus on the concept of humanity is what makes the social sciences different from both the humanities and the natural sciences.

We conclude by stating that this volume is welcomed as a worthwhile contribution to the discussions regarding the role of social sciences in promoting democracy in society. The quality, clarity and style of writing vary from author to author and some of the argumentation in certain chapters is prolix and difficult to follow. The thematic of the book is so large that the focus of the chapters of this book is not exhaustive.

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