

Truth, Knowledge, and Democratic Authority in the Public Health Debate

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ABSTRACT

Quality of democratic arrangements does matter. This kind of conceptual breakthrough has been made through painfully engagement with the nonphilosophical area of inquiry arisen by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has dramatically emphasized that health is a highly political domain. No surprise then that it made possible to challenge common thought about democratic procedures in political theory that considers procedure-independent standards suspicious. Therefore it is fair to state that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken the quality of democratic outcomes back on center stage in the debate in political theory, which has been dominated by fair proceduralism's claim not to refer to any procedure-independent standards of good political decisions. The aim of this paper is to justify the legitimacy and authority of public health policies on the basis of arguments that do not simply are a matter of their being democratic. In the *first* part, I want to display and criticize the idea that proceduralism's not getting one's hands dirty with the substance of decisions and remaining neutrally adherent only to procedures is untenable in the present case. Having criticized democratic theories that want to restrict themselves to purely procedural values, in the *second* part I will focus on the idea of knowledge and make explicit its characters of being practical and shared. Eventually, it will help to have one example. M-Health will show that many valuable insights would be incompatible with the restrictions of the proceduralism. Philosophical consideration of health will combine epistemic issues with political ones triggered by technology and sharpened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. The limits of fair proceduralism: the retreat from substance

Procedural values have traditionally been seen as a defining element of fair deliberation and essential for democracy. They have been extolled in social choice theory that claims that democracy does not exhibit any particular

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disposition to lead to good or just political arrangements. They are the focus of attention in Jürgen Habermas' procedural rationality, though philosophers are now more skeptical about the divorce between procedures and substantive standards (Ceva 2016)¹. Overall, issues surrounding the topic of ensuring citizens' health make the topic politically central and philosophically interesting for epistemic theories and impartial proceduralism theories of democracy alike. Both social choice theory and deliberative democracy defend the idea of substantive-independent standards of correctness, the property of being generally acceptable in a certain way. In doing so, they embrace a tension between the usual ways of speaking about the truth of substantive political arrangements and the theory which does not fit the manner in which social interactions unfold. When we tell someone that discrimination in the distribution of vaccine based on GDP is unjust, we mean then it is *true* that discrimination in vaccine distribution based on GDP is unjust. On a different view, if we accept that the only politically relevant values are procedural (Schumpeter 1976)², then the political theory will not be able to account for those beliefs. For sure, stating, denying and making inferences, which by definition require truth, would be not accounted for by this conception. Indeed such a conception cannot account for people's attitude to be truthful. People do not give truthful answers with the intention of having to reach consent in a deliberative process, but simply and plain because they are honestly and truthfully convinced of their endorsed beliefs.

On my view, the difficulty lays in the accounts that attempt to provide theoretical support for the practice, which are not able to include epistemic values. It is less with the actual practices or policies. Once you accept that you have to deal with the pluralism of standpoints, the real problem here is to determine what counts as a true option. In other words, in Public Health policies, the question of the epistemic dimension turns out to be whether all points of view are qualified, how robustly they make use of truth in political justification.

¹ Her idea of interactive justice argues that proceduralism can be considered a promising approach to justice provided that human interactions governed by procedures are recognized as independent *loci* of justice.

² A new elitist conception (Achen and Bartels 2016, 299), which departs from the Schumpeterian attitude even if it endorses the same results: "Can ordinary people, busy with their lives and with no firsthand experience of policy- making or public administration, do what the theory expects them to do?". This gives way to different forms of disengagement with substantive arrangements in the field of policies. See Thaler and Sunstein 2008 for the theoretical justification.

The range goes from no boundaries to public reason at all (comprehensive position) to denying that there are truths on political matters (skeptical position, see Bernard Yack 2012). In the middle there is the convincing position of epistemic political liberalism that claims real truth both in the principle of legitimacy and in political discourse. On this account not all points of view are justified. And here is the reason why:

That is, some points of view are such that objections that depend on those disqualified points of view are not capable of defeating a proposed political justification. People who believe that their own race has a right to rule other races, or who simply desire to subordinate other people to their power, will not accept certain principles about moral and political equality. But objections stemming from those unreasonable points of view are morally weightless (Estlund 2008, 4).

In order to address the question of which points of view are potentially conducive to better decisions, one must first accept the idea that democratic political theory is not only committed to fairness but also to epistemic values. On this view, contractalist understandings of politics have hampered philosophers from recognizing the ways in which democracy can make room for substantive truth and therefore endorse good decisions. The descriptive level of how practice does work does not entail the alleged gap between empowerment of the people and relinquishment of quality claims concerning political arrangements. As Estlund convincingly puts it,

public justificatory discourse evidently involves asserting things, denying other things, giving arguments for conclusions, pointing out fallacious reasoning, in the arguments of others, and so on. (Estlund 2012, 262)

All this is not accounted for in a theoretical framework that aims at detaching citizen participation from the content that such participation could make possible. It is a fact that disconnecting *procedure* from *substance* leads to inconsistencies at the level of the theory like those I have been highlighting. In the case of political philosophy, which has the ambition to put ideas into practice, therefore the shortcomings of the theory have an impact on the practice either.

2. Historically important issues associated with the quality of political arrangements

Political philosophy maintains not only close contact with practical applications of philosophical ideas but also with the history of its subject. Considering that both social choice theory and deliberative democracy notwithstanding their differences accentuate the justificatory role of proceduralism, it may be worthwhile to note that this idea enjoys a long tradition rooted in the idea of social contract. The classic avenues of debating these topics are well established. They are familiar to those engaged in political theory, a brief re-walking will help clarify my intended route, which entails a robust critical perspective on intrinsic procedural approaches to politics. In the modern age, contractualism addresses the need to ground the legitimacy of politics from a conception inspired by the theory of rationality and the consent of the individual. On Kant's legal principle, the protection of the individuals under the rule of law requires a system of equal basic freedoms for all citizens, limited only by the liberties of others. As Habermas (2008, 10) puts it:

The institutional framework of modern democracies puts together three elements: the private autonomy of citizens, who have the right to lead a self-determined life; democratic citizenship, i.e., the equal inclusion of free and equal citizens in the political community; and an independent political community; and an independent political public sphere, which as a sphere of free opinion-forming sphere of free opinion and will-forming, linking the state and civil society.

The contractualist framework entails a variety of positions. Different versions of contractualism are not just concerned with determining which acts are right and wrong. They are also concerned with what reasons and forms of reasoning are justifiable. This explains why social contract theories are indebted with theory of rationality. Many topics have been debated such as whether this is a real or hypothetical contract or whether consent should be explicit or implicit. What is relevant to my intent, however, is the assumption that the idea of the contract travels with epistemic abstinence. Interestingly, this trait has spread throughout political philosophy up to the contemporary one. Even if, a certain form of epistemic indulgence is to be found in Habermas and Rawls, who introduce epistemic constraints at the level of procedures, their political frameworks are focused on denying that there are procedure independent standards. On their view, on a scale about how robustly a theory makes use of truth in political

justification, they would claim that democracy will do without truth altogether. Both Habermas and Rawls are deeply committed to ensuring the conditions for fair proceduralism to get involved with substantive issues. Habermas's emphasis on legitimate procedure (deep proceduralism) endorsed for escaping the damaging effects of ruling of experts operates over a hybrid background, which is made up of decisions and principles acceptable to all citizens (Habermas 1973). On Habermas's account of deliberation, emphasis on legitimate procedure is summarized by his emphasis on "the unforced force of the better argument" (1998, 306).

Habermas is mainly concerned with a normative vision anchored at an "ideal discourse". In the ideal discourse all reasonable parties participate to debate the merits of practical arrangements. The main condition of the ideal discourse is rigorous deliberative equality. Precisely, Estlund considers the result of such a position to be summarized in the following: the result acquires legitimacy solely and only by virtue of the process that brought it into being. "The preferences that ought to matter, this tempts many to say, are those that are formed under that kind of egalitarian practical deliberation" (Estlund 2012).

At the beginning there are some conditions that will give shape to the process that then will ensure the legitimizing result. In sum, the normative vision of deliberative democracy requires "a conception of deliberation which is (a) noninstrumentalist, (b) interpersonal, (c) justificatory, and (d) public" (Talisie 2012).

The same holds for Rawls, who is more explicit as he is overtly being indebted with the contractualism:

My aim is to present a conception of justice which generalizes and carries to a higher level of abstraction the familiar theory of the social contract as found, say, in Locke, Rousseau, and Kant (Rawls 1971, 11).

Rawls explicitly places his theory in the realm of contractualism and thus resonates with a powerful tradition of political philosophy. In doing so, Rawls emphasizes that he will not argue for a concrete model of political order, but for abstract principles of justice, to which a political order has to orient itself, if it aims to be just. It is, therefore, questionable to what extent its political arrangement are not based on grounds of their politically epistemic value. In the case of Rawls, legitimate, authoritative results are produced because Rawls' approach is not epistemically abstinent throughout. At least in his first edition of *A Theory of Justice* there is some room for a position according to which the

procedures do travel with epistemic values. This initial position has been revised and downplayed at mere descriptive level as it does not play any role in the philosophical framework. The model of political authority based on epistemic abstinence has surely been the dominant account beyond the variety of forms (Shapiro 2002, 34). What are the reasons for embracing this approach? The arbitration model of political authority claims that democratic procedures produce legitimate and authoritative arrangements because the majority's acceptance of those outcomes provides reasons to accept them (Simmons 2012, 78-133). The idea is that the bindingness of democratic outcomes obtains without epistemic merits.

3. Truth, knowledge, and democratic authority

After having argued that a "pure procedural" democracy might not protect citizens' entitlement to both procedural rights of participation (e.g. electing representatives) and substantive rights, I will focus on the knowledge argument, i. e. on the nature of the political knowledge and its relation to democratic authority. I am aware that from the viewpoint of political theory, epistemic values independent from procedures seem to have a despotic character. Arendt points out at the very beginning of her reflections that it is difficult for truth to exist in the political sphere. She regards this as a remarkable and disturbing fact. The starting point, then, is the concern, or rather the observation, that truth cannot claim validity in the realm of the political and that this is in the nature of things, i.e. in the nature of both truth and politics. Arendt's argument seems to me to attempt, as descriptively as possible, to examine the interplay between truth and politics: "Every claim in the sphere of human affairs to an absolute truth, whose validity needs no support from the side of opinion, strikes at the very roots of all politics and all governments" (1967, 297). While philosophy is about truth, politics is about opinion and gaining consent. Truth excludes opinion and does not require the consent of a majority to be true. This makes it unsuitable for the political sphere, it cannot respect the freedom that must prevail in it and therefore truth in politics is necessarily despotic. Hannah Arendt makes this point very clear. On her view, as debate constitutes the very essence of political life, to start debating with true claims will not facilitate debating rather it will make it impossible for the exchange of views to happen (1967; see also Yack 2012 and Urbinati 2012). Overall, there are two worries that are to be kept apart in Arendt's thought: i. factual truths are diminished to

mere opinions in the discourse and ii. Factual truths are hidden or destroyed by lies and deliberate, systematic concealment. When not bound by a sterile contraposition, philosophers are ditching procedural standards for substantive ones. Not all of them would share this alternative. Emanuela Ceva's book, *Interactive Justice*, provides a refreshing perspective about procedures in political theory (2016). She distinguishes two autonomous dimensions of justice. The one is related to outcomes and the other is related to procedures. As a result we have to deal with considerations of just outcomes and just procedures. Her end-state justice and interactive justice are about justice throughout, including the justice of procedural adjustments, which puts the justificatory weight on two different spheres of justice. Corey Brettschneider (2007) elaborates a "value theory of democracy", which should be able to go further and challenge the idea that democracy is just about to guarantee the rights of the people to participate in fair procedures. In order to do this, he needs to introduce three core values – equality of interests, political autonomy, and reciprocity – underlying both outcomes and procedures. In addition to these proposals, even the pandemic is influencing political theorizing. Worries about versions of truth conceived in terms of claims that peremptorily demand to be acknowledged are giving way to users focused on contributing to knowledge and truth production, on having access to better data and their processing, and on sharing decisions and potential health benefits. Along with the practical transformations, the pandemic will also have changed attitudes towards what was seen as quite normal before the emerging of the global health crisis. Anxiety about truth has been replaced by the anxiety about substantive political arrangements especially regarding the public health. Procedural-independent standards seem to be dramatically at odd with the need for better decisions. In place of the earlier concern with procedural-independent standards, the current situation dominated by health issues sees the emergence of more practical attitudes such as situations, needs, and interests (Sciutti et al. 2021). The pandemic has been clarifying how public health policies constitute a central element for the future of human societies. Therefore, it requires philosophers to go beyond the discussion of general principles and rules and to embrace a concrete analysis of the real scenario in which their theories may be able to find their application. The pandemic has accelerated existing trends concerning science both as a discipline and a practice (Wicks et al. 2014; Lunshof et al. 2014). Moreover, the pandemic pointed scholars of political philosophy back to the ideas of truth and knowledge in the political arena, arising issues about

scientific literacy and science's relationship with and for society. Eventually, demand for new discussion of the related political and moral problems arisen from public health oblige scholars to pay new attention to this nexus and its profound implications on the theory. Biggeri and Tallacchini (2018) convincingly argue that in the field of health, citizens are not concerned about abstract ideas. They seem to be concerned with substantive questions regarding potential health benefits such as how to contribute to knowledge production, how to have access to information, and how to join decision processes. All those questions are real ones. Before focusing on the knowledge argument, I will first make clear what is the source of skepticism about truth in political philosophy. In particular, this clarification will be explored with regard to Public Health policies. We can state the thesis this way: there are two main issues as to epistemic engagement in political processes. For my purpose, there are relevant assertions found across political philosophy and over a variety of contexts. The first issue about appeals to truth in political philosophy is the insulation of politics from conclusions. On Hannah Arendt account, truth "precludes debate, and debate constitutes the very essence of political life" (Arendt 1967, 114). It is clear from this way of putting the question that scientific decisions are deemed to build a self-contained process, which is perceived as external to the political life. This view has been challenged as one can make a case for the constructivist view of knowledge that has taught us to be suspicious of unconditional claims concerning objectivity (Jasanoff 2005). Arendt's view would need a further controversial assumption namely one that would do a great deal to further strengthen an unbiased picture of the authority of science in society (Longino 1990; Fricker 2000; Daston and Galison 2007). There is a second aspect that prevents talks about epistemic engagement in political processes. The focus of this argument is on general questions regarding democratic authority. If we bring into the political process the epistemic dimension, then we will make room for standards that will loom over the political process. This seems to resemble the legitimation of the rule of the wise or of the educated, which has been treated by Habermas as the triumph of the monological reason. There are many arguments for the separation of authority from truth that are grounded in worries like these. As political authority needs to be grounded, it should be immediately clear how such a conception of knowledge would empower committees of experts and become a legitimation for epistocracy, i.e. the rule of the wise or educated who know how to rule best. Proceduralist à la Habermas tends to separate truth from authority as they are worried that expertise could

lead to an epistocracy of the wise or of the educated and in doing so undermine the claim of a free society of equals. But it is important to see that while it is not compelling to succumb to the temptation that expertise should rule, epistemic values do have a role in political arrangements.

I will summarize the discussion of truth and democratic authority. As discussed in the last paragraph, on Arendt account, views about the nature of truth are too controversial to play any role in the realm of public reasoning. As a result, our commitment to both democracy and truth is not going to be reconciled. On her reading, this could be interpreted as a crucial indication that no particular view of truth can be appealed to in political justification. Indeed, this would be divisive and the achievement of the goal of forming a reasonable consensus base would be compromised. However, to relinquish from all truth claims in politics comes with non-negligible difficulties. If truth were indeed to remain excluded from the domain of public reasoning, it seems especially problematic to explain and justify how beliefs, claims, judgments, and reasons are to maintain their *raison d'être* and factuality in the deliberative process. Not even making truth a clause that has legitimacy only in forms of technical government seems to do a good service to the conception of democracy. Here again the alternative is proposed: where there is truth there is no democracy and where there is democracy there is no truth. While Arendt and the lovers of democracy (Urbinati 2012) are convinced that truth and majority rule are two irreconcilable claims, a comparatively vast array of social activities is now being transformed by disruptive events that accelerate democratic participation and considerably reshaping towards more substantive arrangements. Both public health crisis and innovation force us to reconsider – at least in the field of public health – a divorce that seemed to be relatively unquestionable. To be sure, the impact of knowledge production by citizens is by no means unquestionable: the mere participatory aspect on citizens' involvement does not legitimate knowledge production and democratic authority.

As distinct levels of participation often coexist, it needs to be specified the level of involvement and agency that will be required for citizens as knowers and producers of knowledge. Participation per se is not a significant sign of a paradigm change in knowledge production if the different political interests involved are not re-considered, re-weighed, and re-legitimized. If participation has to be value-laden for the political theory to be reshaped then it cannot just mean using individuals as a source of information. Comprehensive participation claims for the involvement of the citizens in the process of the redefinition of the

goals. It calls for new forms of agency and claims to knowledge. As Biggeri and Tallacchini put it, this is the way to achieve something completely new as “some common goods that can hardly be protected in more traditional forms” (2018, 873). It may be sometimes remain unfocused, but it is unquestionable that health per se is a highly political field. Therefore concern for public health is an integral part of the practices and institutions of democratic societies. But what is new about the political dimension of health is its impact on political theory. On this view, health is a source of hard political questions in terms of social welfare allocations and thus is both a probing and a relevant area for political theory.

4. Practical knowledge in political matters

Duress and necessity to which we have been exposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic have dramatically shown that the bindingness of democratic outcomes is partly dependent on their epistemic merits. Therefore, I think that we need to reconsider the theoretical framework and to eliminate the tension between commitments to democracy and commitments to truth by improving our understanding of both democracy and truth with a view to fitting each to the other.

Because we have seen that persevering in this divisive vision makes it impossible to argue for a decision or a certain policy, we need to improve and re-adjust the underlining assumptions. To summarize, proceduralist theories make it impossible to promote substantive positions. More generally, they make it impossible to promote “a practice of reason that permits different perspectives to come to the fore not merely in order that they should gain expression, but in order that they should contribute to an ongoing critical discursive practice” (Fricker 2000, 160). This general problem is exacerbated when we move into the field of health and even more so when health is put to the test during a period of public health crisis. We will see, however, that this does not only apply to the context of emergencies and public health crises; it is rather a trend that we can register in management and monitoring of health. For instance, m-health confronts us with the same need to reconsider the political framework. Concerns about health have led – and this is even more true in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic – to groundbreaking rethinking within the political theory, which challenges traditional approach to epistemic reasoning, reversing virtually all the political values of earlier times. Epistemic values and competence

on the one hand and democracy on the other hand cannot be two opposite values. Participatory approaches to knowledge and theories of responsible co-creation have been challenging political theory from within not only because citizens who recognize the result of a vote as establishing a binding rule are the same citizens who are bearer of knowledge in a number of other fields but also because those theories about co-creation of knowledge have been articulated by reference to public reason. What matters here is that epistemic accounts of democracy like the one I am arguing for make good this link between democracy and knowledge, for they locate democracy not in a merely empowerment of the masses, but in an authoritative state of the citizens on the one hand. On the other hand, epistemic accounts of democracy locate knowledge, truth, and epistemic values not in an external perspective of scientific facts, they rather stay within the ordinary evaluative beliefs. Knowledge is from the very beginning linked with evaluative attitudes about what are worthwhile and worthless, livable and not livable lives. This practical signature of knowledge means that investigation and innovation are matters for common judgment and decision, not for detached investigation. This kind of epistemic enterprises is thoroughly internal to the communities, and is useful to explain the community to itself, for which there is no further external action required (Arendt 1963). To give an account of what is going on in co-creation theory is the necessary premise for understanding how co-creation activities may have an impact on democratic decision making. How is the co-creation of knowledge possible? Why does co-creation of knowledge bother? These questions are at the center of the epistemology of the co-creation and have remarkable effects on a number of dimensions beyond democratic authority. Insights like these are generating new knowledge about the general evaluation of the science. They do not question the scientific character of the knowledge, but rather what knowledge does mean for social agents by putting a closer attention to lived experience. In doing so, this discussion aims at a better understanding of these emerging activities by improving their reflexivity. Co-creation of knowledge is not something entirely new. It can be traced back to a number of practices. Co-construction and co-production processes have been initiating in policy-making, for example with agenda-building and policy inputs, co-assessment, and co-funding. As far as information computer technologies are concerned, a path of co-construction and of society-sensitive design can be also traced. In any case, these practices show the emergence of a new social agent, the so-called “prosumer”, who is a consumer who becomes involved with designing or customizing products for their own needs. What these different

cases share is the role of the user or agent in the creation of the knowledge needed to shape the product, which is adapted to user's desires and demands. This blurring of the roles of consumers and producers has been transposed from goods and services also to knowledge production, which is the ground for democratic arrangements. If there is no doubt that processes of co-creation already occur, nevertheless we cannot fully understand their occurrence especially for the debate on truth and democracy. It is still lacking an account of these processes in order to show how society could benefit from the early participation of a number of social agents. While such views arguably have some interesting overlapping ideas, they also refer to distinct frameworks addressing the role of the individual as a consumer in one case and in designing products and the role of the individual as a citizen in producing knowledge in the other. Some of the implications comprised in these different frameworks will be our focus here. Without attempting here to offer a broad justification for the distinction between citizen and consumer, I note *en passant* that the European legislation aims to protect consumer safety and consumer rights. Therefore, even in the case of the consumer, their area of action is expanding to include an increasingly active and participatory role. Of course, citizens are the bearer of more rights that do not only include their capacity as a consumer. In fact, they belong to a political community that can be ideally extended to include a cosmopolitan dimension of citizenship such as that envisioned by the human rights. Besides the distinction between the scope of epistemic participatory practices of citizens and consumers, even political theory is going to benefit from this consideration of practical aspects of knowledge embedded in political processes. Additionally, specific human action areas have shown that the lack of involvement of specific social agents leads not only to the defective results of goods, services, and knowledge, but also to forms of injustice (Fricker 2007). Drawing on these practices and on the analysis of bias on the production of goods or services it will become possible to reframing the process of creating new knowledge in a participative way. What is missing is a genuine theoretical approach that addresses the understanding of co-creation and provides the reasons for adopting a co-creation approach beyond the immediate evidence of benefit that is proceeding from the engagement in participatory practices in the production of goods, services, and knowledge. It is an approach that is capable of both explaining and formulating the epistemic and ethical reasons behind these processes, in order to enhance well-functioning practices and avoid possible shortcomings in their implementation. This approach is still a

desideratum for any epistemic research, which aims at making sense of the social experiences of every involved social agent. Such an approach has also to investigate the gap in collective interpretive resources (gender gap, for example). This gap is responsible for both the unfair disadvantage, which occurs when someone's experience is neglected, and the possible shortcomings in the implementation of epistemic practices. The involvement of citizens represents a new path to the scientific process based on cooperative work and new ways of diffusing knowledge, which in the current scenario is supported by using digital technologies and new collaborative tools. The idea entails a systemic change to the way science and research have been carried out for the last decades: it moves from the standard practices of publishing research results in scientific publications towards sharing and using all available knowledge at an earlier stage in the research process. Co-creation dynamics are made of contribution and selection (Pralhad and Ramaswamy 2000). Co-creation takes place in the forms of tinkering, submitting, co-designing and collaboration. Research on epistemology and ethics of knowledge is currently one of the most innovative approaches for understanding co-creation processes of practical knowledge. The dynamics working beyond these processes needs to be critical addressed. In particular, the missing link between science and the definition of its aims, which should be an intrinsic task of the very research program, needs to be dealt with. In his famous characterization of the European crisis, Husserl argues for a new perspective promoting a better relationship between science and life, which would overcome the crisis of both the sciences and the life of European humanity. While he refrains from endorsing the rationality of the scientific knowledge in the manner how Galileo Galilei has been successfully established it, he claims that everyday sense-experience needs to be included in the rationality of science, which needs therefore to work with different aims and scopes and to put its justificatory weight on their reasonableness (Husserl 1970). On this non-naturalist version of rationalism, every position will supplement the working of democracy and its legitimation of the general binding force of its political and legal norms. However, the variety of political philosophies, which can hardly work in recent time, nevertheless results in a negative impact. Indeed, all these versions are no longer divided into reasonable directions, such that they could still seriously work together, carry on a scientific dialogue through criticism and counter-criticism, and still inform the common idea of a practical knowledge leading democracy toward the path of its fulfilment. This is the manner as it works within physics, mathematics, and biology. Rather, in political philosophy

these stances are contrasted as attitudes of aesthetic nature, so to speak, analogous to the “directions” and “currents” in the arts. In order to make room for truth apt positions, we need to make room for another perspective and to abandon the scientific posture, which is merely directed towards the objects neglecting thereby the “up to us” aspect. On the contrary, in the everyday experience the world is given to us as subject-related. This kind of setting doesn’t require a lot of scientific information. Nevertheless, making sense of our social experiences is very helpful for successfully orientating ourselves. Scientific knowledge attitude systematically ignores this fact. Moreover it downplays it as doxa, i. e. one’s opinion or mind. In so doing something very important gets lost in the scientific approach. To be sure the scientific approach can bring unquestionable successes only in the positive sciences. It remains beneficial, provided that it will restrain itself to a specific field of inquiry and will not claim to be the universal science, which can read and rule the world. According to this view, the subject-related meaning of the object can only be constructed ad hoc afterwards. It can only rely on validity and not on truth. As a result, the meaning of such experience is exposed to the major criticism of relativism. A robust account of truth and democracy will address this and other kind of criticisms to co-creation processes, integrating in a perspective on responsible co-creation in democratic processes.

To briefly summarize my position, the involvement of citizens in the scientific research is emerging as the demand for both intelligent discussion and participatory policy orientation. This is in exact antagonism to the dominant political doctrine, which states that politics should stay democratic, i.e. focused on procedural values, even though democracy shows no particular tendency to produce good decisions. Unfortunately, this new orientation towards substantive policies is still largely unexplored in its theoretical implications. It is worth noticing that the involvement of citizens comprehends various levels of civic involvement across a continuum according to how robustly they include civic participation to have a stronger hand in shaping our future common ground. Moving from the least robust to the most we can cover civic literacy about science, foster citizens in participating in the scientific process by providing, observing, gathering and processing data. The ideal citizen science envisions activities such as setting the scientific agenda, co-designing and implementing science-related policies.

The new philosophical framework articulates key notions by reference to involvement, engagement and participation. Scientific literacy, science

education, counteracting perceived anti-intellectual attitudes and promotion of more inclusive societies are the expected results of this new approach. Obviously, rethinking science as a discipline, a profession and as a practice is essential to the development of this pathway. Along with these major changes the very relationship between science, society, and politics is going to be impacted. It is a matter of both internal and external set up of science and technology, which I am going to explore in the following section, which presents and discusses a case study.

5. The case of M-Health

This paper has argued against the assumption that, given a certain apparently inevitable thesis about knowledge, we could not appeal to epistemic values in politics. Oddly enough on this view, knowledge and civic ways to have a stronger hand in shaping the future embraces a tension. This approach may end up having undesired implications such as this that while democracy can seem to empower the people it has no consideration for the quality of the political arrangements that may result from their empowerment. This is an awkward implication as the level of talent, knowledge, virtue, and motivation that the average citizen brings to the task of voting is low and as a consequence needs to express itself in other kinds of participatory activities (Yack 2012). Other forms of more substantive participation remain unconsidered on this reading. This is the reason why I am skeptical about this approach.

Health digital technologies provide a laboratory for the exploration of the nexus between science, knowledge, and democratic order. Their issues are situated at the intersection of different thematic strands that are controversial in quite different discourses. In this part of the paper I will clearly argue for the connection between them, which is not provided in the distinct discourses. I hope to demonstrate the strong connection between public health arrangements and democratic procedures, drawing on the transformations of health and public health induced by the deployment of m-health.

Health is a matter of political decisions (Sen 2010). Digitalization is a highly political domain (Winner 1980). Then it does not come as a surprise that the intersection of both will yield a remarkable number of issues but also of implications for the moral and political theory. I will develop a gradual approach in order to show the relevance for political theory of these health-related questions.

I will begin with a rather non-political definition, which is provided by the World Health Organization in 2011. According to this technical definition, M-health is a “medical and public health practice supported by mobile devices, such as mobile phones, patient monitoring devices, personal digital assistants (PDAs) and other wireless devices (WHO, 2011, 6)

This technical definition will be unsatisfactory from a political standpoint. Individual and public engagement with medical and public health practice supported by devices connected with the internet has been both promoted and perceived as implementing the idea of scientific literacy, while respecting individual dignity and making compatible individuals’ and communities’ health (Gottweis and Lauss 2010; Saha and Hurlbut 2012; Tallacchini 2015; Jongsma and Jongepier 2020). Whether participated medical and public health practice is both empowering citizenry and providing substantively good decisions is left open by this definition. That is, this definition does not settle whether, this practice will support both involved and literate citizens and quality of the health care. The definition only offers an extensive mapping of devices, which can fit the data collection required for m-health. And yet potentially visible lines of argumentation converging with the idea of how citizen science would fit can be traced in the very idea of digital health, which is about employing routine and innovative forms of information and communications technology (ICT) to address health needs. This would make the goal of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) easier to achieve. Compared to the claims of the citizen science approach, which entails different levels of citizen involvement to ensure a procedure as fair, this definition is lacking details about what would make m-health a fair procedure in both intrinsic and substantive procedural sense. Only later recommendations address the approach of m-health from a more evaluative perspective (WHO 2019). They acknowledge the use of digital technologies for health as a “means of promoting equitable, affordable and universal access to health for all, including the special needs of groups that are vulnerable in the context of digital health” (WHO 2018). A full consideration of all those elements that encompass the different epistemic and ethical aspects that can then provide strength to the argument in favor of democracy and epistemic values at the same time can be summarized according to the following more value-laden definition: “(M-health) comes with promises of revolutionizing healthcare by increasing patient’s self-management and empowerment, fostering efficiency and disease prevention, and promoting accessibility to

health around the globe (Lucivero and Jongsma 2017, 1)”. Lucivero and Jongsma interpret the technology not just as a neutral medium, but also as a tool that provides us with both a better understanding of the world and the ways of how to change it for the better.

They believe that digital technologies improve the access to health. In this sense digital technologies entail inherently morally motivated activities. Improving health access and health quality is no easy task and also not one that can be achieved on the basis of technical know-how alone. It also requires, among other things, ethical reflection and political engagement. This global strategy on digital health is committed to the application of participatory methods to health research and disease monitoring. At the same time, it turns out to make individual and public health more aligned with human rights and democratic procedures. Participatory methods not only increase democratic procedures, they also challenge conventional care concepts. Framing health monitoring as participatory in both individual and public health turns out to realize a strategic move towards more democratized practices. What is more, by directly involving the observed subjects even the quality of science’s relationship with and for society and the quality of the medical decisions that will result is going to be improved, let alone the deep and profound implications on health care as a discipline, a profession, and as a practice.

This global strategy on digital health is a commitment to a “thick” account of democratic authority in health-related questions, according to which the recruitment of citizens in practices of monitoring should be considered a comprehensive endorsement. It would be not sufficient to use individuals as passive providers of health data. People need to be given real power, in terms of control on the research protocols and clinical trials. Legitimation of democratic authority occurs when the form of participation includes the higher levels, where citizens find ways to have a stronger hand in shaping the future.

By involving citizens, a paradigm shift happens, which is backed up in empowering the “capacity we have as social agents to influence how things go in the social world” (Fricker 2007, 9). This capacity of influencing how things go needs a revised consideration and a new balance. Both are able to legitimize the emerging democratic authority from an active form of participation; participatory approaches do not mean just to be in some way present, but rather to be actively involved and engaged. In this sense, arguing for participatory forms enabled by digital technologies means a big deal about how to conceive of

democratic convictions. On a more theoretical mindset, this may open up new avenues to achieve some common goods, which has not be doable so far.

Of course, this is not an easy way to take. On a more positive note, trend in healthcare to develop m-health to its best potential in a morally and politically sound way may put some demanding claims about democratic thoughts on more secure foot.

To give a more timely appropriate example for the development of m-health and other associated measures supported by technological platforms, which includes the set of systematically connected ideas and assumptions, and claims I have discussed, it seems completely relevant to refer to policies aiming to counteract the Covid-19 pandemic as the environment to use for verifying the soundness of the proposed political analysis. Starting in about 2020, some substantive measures to break chains of infection were triggered by both technological and social dynamic empowered by new applications, which require citizens' participation. However, this objective has not been the only one in policy responses. Equally urgent was the need to rethink the architecture of health services, which involved rethinking and reshaping different levels of governance. National, regional, and local governments have been struggling to find a linear course of policy action. Often they have been found themselves in tension with respect to measures that do not always fit together while citizens find themselves part of different communities: local, regional and national with different obligations and services envisioned for them (OECD 2021). These scenarios, where a number of levels of government were engaged, have given rise to social networks and new forms of engagement for citizens (Swierstra and Efstathiou 2020).

6. Final remarks

The article critically addresses current philosophical approaches to truth in democracy. Amongst the main objections, it argues that there has been a long-standing emphasis on alternative commitments either to truth or to democracy. On the contrary, truth and democracy should not be kept separate, since both are responsible for the quality of the democratic arrangements. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly enhanced the role of science and knowledge in politics. What is more, there are gradually more scientific informed arguments discussed by the public at large. Arguments of this sort emerge much more clearer in the public discourse. Citizens are involved in the decision making process and their

literacy is going to be more requested in the future. While the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically sharpened the intuition that the quality of the public health arrangements do matter, health digital technologies show that commitment to democratic procedures and commitment to good decisions can be converging tasks even in contexts not characterized by emergencies and public health crises as epistemic authoritative state of citizens does justice to their talent, knowledge, virtue, and motivation, which do not even find a place in procedures.

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