Interdisciplinarity and Liberalism's Epistemic Division of Labor
The Integration of Lay and Expert Deliberation

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In Plato's Apology, Socrates explains how he went around Athens to speak with "all those who had any reputation for knowledge." He wanted to refute the Oracle at Delphi who had said that nobody was as wise as Socrates. Socrates found that the politicians were not wise at all, and the poets could not explain their own poems. Worse yet, "because of their poetry, they thought themselves very wise men in other respects, which they were not." And although he found that the craftsmen "knew things I did not know (...) each of them, because of his success at his craft, thought himself very wise in other most important pursuits, and this error of theirs overshadowed the wisdom they had" (Plato 1981, 21e-22e).

Socrates' interrogation of Athenian experts is instructive for recent efforts to improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of expertise in politics. As Socrates discovered, experts are laypeople in almost everything they do. The very specialization that defines expertise also limits its range of application. Moreover, individual experts cannot personally verify all the expert claims on which they rely in the course of making their own expert claims, so they are forced to accept vast areas of knowledge on trust (Hardwig 1985). Both laypeople and experts, that is, must trust experts, because neither have the practical capacity to acquire or understand the evidence needed to justify all their beliefs. Finally, in some contexts experts may depend not only on other experts but on laypeople as well. Biomedical scientists conducting drug trials or other kinds of human subjects research, for example, depend on active and informed cooperation by the participants (Pierson 1994, 400-1; Bohman 1999).

These limits of expertise have often been seen as an opportunity for both interdisciplinary research and public participation in the politics of science. Some commentators even see a dissolution of boundaries between disciplines and institutions, sometimes associated with the idea of transdisciplinarity, such that non-scientists necessarily play a role in scientific knowledge production (Nowotny et al. 2001, 89). Understood in this sense, transdisciplinary research is arguably required in situations where stakes are high, knowledge is uncertain, and disciplinary boundaries are contested (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1993). The concern in this paper, however, is with communication across lay-expert boundaries, not the dissolution of boundaries either between disciplines or between experts and laypeople. Steve Fuller, for example, has offered a series of policy proposals that create incentives for scientists to make a public case for new research projects, in part by requiring them to present their proposals before an interdisciplinary audience (Fuller [1988] 2002, 286; Fuller 2000, 135-136, 146-147). Fostering interdisciplinary communication of this sort has often been seen as a way to move beyond the limits of disciplinary specialization, stimulate scientific innovation, and address real-world problems (Weingart and Stehr 2000). Fuller's argument extends this line of thinking to suggest that interdisciplinarity facilitates lay-expert communication. If a high-energy physicist can make his or her research proposal
comprehension to a microbiologist, the reasoning goes, it is likely that an educated layperson would be able to understand it as well.

This conception of lay-expert communication resonates with recent efforts to rethink the role of expert advisors in politics and policy making. According to Roger Pielke's (2007) account of experts as "Honest Brokers," for example, experts go beyond summarizing the state of expert knowledge or responding to the specific technical questions posed by lay people. Honest Brokers seek to expand the range of policy options by clarifying existing options and identifying new options consistent with available knowledge. They explicitly integrate stakeholder concerns with available scientific knowledge. An example appears in the former U.S. Office of Technology Assessment, which produced reports that identified a range of policy options, showing how each of the various options related to disagreements over both science and politics (Pielke 2007, 17, 95). When they assume the role of Honest Brokers, experts must find ways of communicating intelligently with laypeople. And given that even the most honest Honest Brokers may disagree, laypeople must find ways of evaluating competing expert claims.

This paper explores the implications of Socrates' interrogation of Athenian experts for the contemporary politics of expertise. Given the need today for an epistemic division of labor between laypeople and experts, what are the prospects for communication between them? To what extent should we expect interdisciplinary communication to foster communication between laypeople and experts? What conceptual resources and institutional mechanisms foster effective and legitimate lay-expert relations? How do prevailing conceptions of "lay knowledge" shape such efforts? The first part of the paper sketches the historical sources of the epistemic division of labor in liberal political thought, which has long assumed a rationalist form of lay-expert communication. The second part develops a preliminary response to the preceding questions by making a case for integrating lay and expert deliberation in citizen advisory bodies. It may be worth noting that this paper is concerned with the specific forms of communication generated by expert advisory bodies charged with addressing publicly contested sociotechnical questions. The key reference point for such committees is not "science" and its various disciplinary standards, but rather "expertise," the standards of which are often highly contested. Lay-expert communication may well take different forms, and face different challenges, in other institutional contexts than those assumed here.

1. The Epistemic Division of Labor in Liberal Political Thought

From its origins in the seventeenth century, modern science has been closely intertwined with a paradoxical conception of the public. The leading practitioners of modern science developed a mode of legitimating their epistemological claims as both uniquely public and highly exclusive (Ezrahi 1990; Shapin and Schaffer 1985; Shapin 1994). By soliciting laypeople to witness laboratory experiments, and by inviting anyone to replicate their claims, seventeenth-century experimentalists gave science a distinctly public face. But they simultaneously made science into an elite enterprise by restricting the classes of people allowed to serve as laboratory witnesses, by excluding metaphysical questions, and by insisting on the superiority of experimental method over common sense. In this respect, modern science has a double identity, what Bruno Latour calls "the Janus face of science" (Latour 1987, chapter 1). Modern science is both generally valid and locally produced. It is both supremely open to public criticism and highly exclusive and insulated from objections by lay citizens.

This Janus face of modern science reappears in the epistemic division of labor central to liberal political thought. According to the standard liberal model of representative government, popular sovereignty is channelled primarily into voting, through which citizens express their individual and group interests (Urbinati 2006). Elections authorize public officials, who serve relatively undisturbed until the next election. The representative assembly is implicitly modelled on an idealized scientific community, engaged in the instrumental provision of public goods. Citizens play the role of lay witnesses who periodically evaluate their representatives' performance. The liberal-democratic public thus differs from several other conceptions of the public, including the Romantic's organic public constituted by shared history, the elitist's rowdy mob united by shared passion, and the communitarian critic's "lonely crowd" that lacks any shared identity at all (Ezrahi 1990, 87-88). In contrast to each of these views of the public, the liberal-democratic public emerges from a shared commitment to the modern scientific conception of the world as a "view," as knowable through visual inspection. Different versions of this basic view of representation appear in the writings of a wide range of liberal thinkers, including Montesquieu, Sieyes, Bentham, James Mill, and John Stuart Mill. It is also apparent in realist theories of democracy from Max Weber and Joseph Schumpeter to Niklas Luhmann and Giovanni Sartori, among others.

John Stuart Mill, for example, argued for a "radical distinction between controlling the business of government and actually doing it" (Mill 1991, 271). As Mill saw it, the representative assembly should have the task of appointing members of the executive branch, articulating public interests, discussing questions of public import, and giving or withholding sanction for governmental decisions (Mill 1991, 279). The representative assembly should not be involved in formulating policy, a task for which it lacks competence.1 Combining "the benefits of popular control" with "skilled legislation and administration," Mill argued, requires "disjoining the office of control and criticism from the actual conduct of affairs, and devolving the former on the representatives of the Many, while securing for the latter, under strict responsibility to the nation, the acquired knowledge and practised intelligence of a specially trained and experienced Few" (Mill 1991, 284). Although today's democracies do not maintain as strict a division between political and technical competence as Mill advocated, a view of expertise similar to Mill's has long served to legitimate the role of experts in politics. This view aims to assure skeptical publics that experts are "on tap, not on top".

An epistemic division of labor clearly has much to recommend it. It is simply impossible in modern societies for every citizen to participate intelligently on every issue.

1 A cabinet-sized "Commission of legislation," Mill argued, should be given the task of writing laws. Enacting laws, in contrast, would be left to the legislature. The former would "embody the element of intelligence," the latter would "represent that of will" (Mill 1991, 279).
The potentially anti-democratic implications of an epistemic division of labor between experts and laypeople can be avoided by creating institutions for public deliberation on the terms of cooperation between them.

Even this reformulation of the epistemic division of labor, however, risks neglecting systemic relationships between expertise and politics. If public deliberation on science and technology is confined to cases in which technical uncertainties provide an obvious opening for the politicization of sociotechnical issues, it cannot speak to the political effects of technical artifacts that enjoy both political and technical consensus. The technical design of the automobile, for example, has not been a site of major controversy since the early years of the twentieth century. To be sure, there have been occasional disputes over the relative effectiveness of various safety or pollution control measures, and sporadic protests against the automobile's effect on the quality of life. In the 1960's in the United States, public interest advocates such as Ralph Nader began a sustained critique of the health and safety effects of the automobile. The automakers eventually responded to the combined force of government legislation and public pressure with a number of technological innovations, including catalytic converters, feedback fuel control systems, seat belts, and air bags. These improvements were of very limited scope, however, and they did nothing to challenge the standard model of the gasoline automobile. For the most part, since at least the 1920s the gasoline-driven automobile has been a tightly closed “black box”. But despite this lack of controversy, or perhaps because of it, the automobile has gradually helped bring about a fundamental transformation of social and political life in industrial countries. Ever since the standard automobile was “purified”, to use Latour’s term, its political biases internalized and forgotten, it has quietly exerted a subtle influence on our politics and culture with very little controversy. Examples like this suggest that if public deliberation on expert claims is confined to cases of technical breakdown or uncertainty, it cannot challenge the power relations embedded in past processes of technical production and expert advice. This concern has led to increased interest in recent years in engaging lay citizens in science policy, advice, and research.

2. Images of Lay Authority

Much of the current discourse on public participation in science policy involves efforts to introduce a distinctive “lay perspective” (Brown 2006; 2009, chapter 10). Commentators and organizers rarely specify just what they mean by this term, but there seem to be two basic versions. First, laypeople are sometimes seen as bringing deliberative resources that differ from mainstream actors like experts, politicians, and interest groups. Lay participants in this sense are “value consultants” (Dienel and Renn 1995, 121). This version of the layperson makes a substantive contribution to public deliberation and decision making by voicing values and experiences that might not otherwise get a hearing.

A second version of the layperson appears in those accounts that characterize laypeople with reference to a certain absence or lack. These accounts suggest that

3 Goldman (2001, 97-104) also argues that the sheer number of experts holding a particular position is not a good indicator of reliability, because the larger number of experts may be less intellectually independent of each other than the smaller number.
laypeople lack relevant technical expertise, professional experience, political interests, and in some cases, any experience with the topic at hand. According to this view of the layperson, John Rawls's famous "veil of ignorance" is not merely an imaginative stance that deliberators voluntarily adopt; it describes their actual state of knowledge with regard to the topic at hand. According to one account of a Danish consensus conference, for example, candidates were "screened so as to ensure that they had no previous close involvement with biotechnology, since it was judged that this would compromise their ability to participate in a genuinely open-ended and collaborative exploration of the issues" (Durant 1995, 76). Another such forum was made up of "a group of citizens who are genuinely lay people in the sense that they do not have any special knowledge of, or interest in, the subject" (Joss 1995, 101-102). In these and many similar accounts, what qualifies a person as lay is not the particular resources they bring to deliberation but their lack of certain resources—chiefly expert knowledge and political interest, but also, in some accounts, any experience with or knowledge of the topic of the panel. Indeed, it often seems that prevailing conceptions of the lay citizen build on Christian notions of innocence, naiveté, and the impurity of knowledge, as though lay forums were participatory models of the Garden of Eden. Alan Irwin (2006, 315) thus notes that discussion of public engagement efforts in the United Kingdom "prioritizes the 'open-minded' (or 'innocent') citizen over those with existing views (the 'activists')": This conception of the lay citizen is an ideal, of course, and during collective deliberation participants inevitably bring their previous knowledge and experience to bear on the topic. They also acquire new knowledge and experience through the process itself. But it seems likely that conceiving lay citizens in terms of their lack of knowledge shapes not only who participates but also the character of the ensuing deliberation.

Conceived in this second sense, lay citizens have neither formal nor substantive authority. They are neither in authority nor on authority. Their authority, such as it is, is constituted by an absence: absence of both substantive knowledge and formal certification. Some commentators and organizers apparently associate these absences with an absence of bias and an openness to new views and perspectives on the topic of deliberation. Absence of bias, in turn, confers a certain kind of discursive power to persuade. Lay citizens have discursive power, because unlike the politicians and experts who dominate public debate, they have no personal or political agendas. They have a certain "wisdom from the mouths of babes", or what one might call the power of innocence. In this respect, conceiving lay citizens as those who lack relevant knowledge or experience defines them in opposition to experts. This conception of lay citizens thus reproduces liberalism's categorical division between subjectivist politics and objectivist science, popular sovereignty and governmental competence. Darin Durant thus rightly asks, "Is not the effort to find something special in the lay public, in order to validate their involvement, analogous to the claim that we should trust scientists because of their special access to the truth?" (Durant 2008, 18). In this respect, the prevailing view of lay authority simply inverts the traditional view of expert authority.

In decision making contexts, of course, a lack of knowledge may confer power by providing an alibi for avoiding responsibility or refusing to act. Those who wish to avoid taking action with regard to a problem like, say, global warming, strongly claim that existing knowledge is not sufficient to justify action. They call for "further studies" on the problem. And since further studies inevitably produce not only answers to old questions but also new questions, the production of knowledge also produces non-knowledge, making it possible to defer action endlessly (Hilgartner 2001). Within the current discourse of lay participation, in contrast, a lack of knowledge confers power and authority to advise others.

Put in the terms of "reflective modernization", the prevailing discourse on lay deliberation conceives the lay subject as constituted through popular knowledge or belief about knowledge. Defining the lay citizen with reference to a lack of knowledge only makes sense in a highly skeptical context, where both experts and expertise are widely mistrusted, where people know that experts are biased. People must believe that knowledge about a topic is likely to hinder genuine understanding of that topic. In this sense, the prevailing view of the lay citizen challenges the liberal rationalist faith in science. At the same time, however, defining lay citizens with regard to their lack of knowledge conveys considerable skepticism about the deliberative capacities of laypeople. It thus reproduces liberalism's epistemic division of labor.

Conceiving lay people in terms of their utter lack of knowledge and experience poses a number of problems. First, it obscures the differences among lay participants with regard to experience, knowledge, skills, and other deliberative resources. Laypeople's existing knowledge and experience may initially seem to have no relevance for the topic at issue, but such resources may become relevant during deliberation. A registered nurse, for example, might not have any experience with debates over nuclear power but might be able to raise questions regarding the health risks of nuclear waste that would not occur to others. Moreover, as Harry Collins and Robert Evans (2007) have argued, and as suggested previously, a person may well possess the knowledge required to understand and evaluate technical expertise without yet being able to contribute to it.

Second, viewing laypeople in terms of their lack of knowledge obscures the transformation in knowledge and understanding that deliberation aims to bring about. Even if participants start out completely ignorant of the topic, they may become relatively expert through deliberation. In some respects, this newly developed expertise may make them less representative of the general population than when they started participating, even if it also makes them better advocates of other people's interests (Epstein 1996, 287-294, 350-353).

Third, associating lay citizens with a lack of knowledge may increase the potential for organizers to manipulate the process. At least one study suggests that lay participants tend to hold orientations that fit relatively well into a small number of established positions on the panel's topic— for or against regulation, pro-business or pro-labor, and so on. Lay participants may not be aware of their basic orientations, but it may be fairly easy for organizers to use biographic and demographic information about the participants to predict them, thus influencing the outcome by the specific individuals they select to participate (Hogg and Williamson 2001, 4-5).
Finally, defining lay citizens by their lack of knowledge ironically models the lay citizen on the view from nowhere promised by the traditional image of expertise. It suggests that a distinctive "lay perspective" lacks any particular perspective at all; that laypeople are free of interests, biases, or preconceptions — in short, that they approximate the standard image of an ideal scientist. In this sense, widespread ambivalence about the idea of "the lay citizen" suggests a similar ambivalence about technical expertise.

Many accounts of lay deliberation bring together the two senses of "lay" discussed here by suggesting that the absence of knowledge and experience is a necessary pre-condition for intelligent deliberation and judgment. The idea seems to be that the deliberative judgment expressed in a citizen panel's report should emerge solely from the process of the panel itself, untainted by the participants' prior knowledge or experience. In some cases, this notion might reflect the ambition of panel organizers to retain as much control as possible over the process. Like a jealous lover who cannot stand to hear stories of his or her partner's former entanglements, some organizers want their participants to start the process pure and innocent. Then whatever the participants might have learned by the end can be attributed to the organizers. The linkage of these two views of the lay citizen thus suggests a highly ambivalent conception of lay deliberation and its relationship to expert deliberation.

Lay deliberation is conceived as both the opposite of technical expertise and an approximation of it. On the one hand, to be a layperson means to express distinctive "lay values" or a "lay perspective", defined in opposition to the factual evidence provided by scientific experts. This is perhaps part of the reason why organizers establish a separate expert panel to advise the lay panel. On the other hand, to be a layperson means to lack any perspective at all. Technical expertise provides a model for the lay citizen, and it also offers a constitutive counter-image, against which people conceive the attributes of the layperson.

3. Integrating Lay and Expert Deliberation

One potential way of counteracting this ambivalent conception of both technical experts and lay citizens would be to integrate lay and expert perspectives in deliberative forums. Keeping experts and laypeople apart gives laypeople both too much and too little credit. In addition to the considerations just mentioned, it seems to be motivated in part by the assumption that lay participants will be intimidated by experts, which is certainly possible but probably no more likely than that some headstrong laypeople will dominate those less outgoing. The solution commonly applied to the problem of headstrong participants, a skilled facilitator, would probably also work for the problem of intimidating experts. Moreover, as discussed previously, the knowledge of most experts is so specialized that they are effectively laypeople with regard to issues beyond their immediate area of expertise. As members of the professional class, all experts may share a certain social perspective, but there is no lingua franca among experts. Experts on science advisory committees, for example, usually have to formulate their statements in terms that experts from other disciplines — and hence, potentially, laypeople as well — can understand. Put differently, government advisory committees require both laypeople and experts to adopt the perspectives of the others (Bohman 1996, 64).

The view of lay knowledge prevalent in the discourse on lay participation in technical controversies, in contrast, conveys an implicit skepticism toward participants' capacities for making informed judgments through collective deliberation among diverse perspectives.

Segregating laypeople and experts also reinforces an idealized image of science, implicitly suggesting that experts have the task of giving laypeople a univocal and apolitical statement of the facts. This image may be conveyed despite the efforts of panel organizers to include a diversity of (implicit) political perspectives on the expert panel. When lay participants find themselves confronted with conflicting substantive views among experts, combined with a procedural division between experts and laypeople, they might well think that someone has tricked them into joining yet another round of the realism-relativism debate. The institutional arrangement conveys a realist (and empiricist) view of science as a univocal representation of nature, but the process of selecting experts with diverse political leanings suggests that expertise is in part relative to politics. Far better to include a few experts on the panel itself, allowing them to articulate their particular professional perspectives (e.g. microbiologist, theologian, pollster) in dialogue with the various social perspectives of the lay participants (e.g. homeless person, African-American, oil tycoon).

As conceived in contemporary political theory, social perspectives emerge through interaction between structural relations of power (such as class, race, or gender) and the individual experiences and self-conceptions of individuals (Young 2000, 92-102). Similarly, one might say that professional perspectives are shaped by interactions between professional standards and cultures on one hand, and individual ideas and goals on the other. In either case, perspectives encompass the questions, concerns, knowledge, and worldviews of particular social and professional groups. Perspectives are always intertwined with interests and opinions, but they are less determinate in their content than the latter, and thus more conducive to open-ended deliberation in which participants change their views, in contrast to bargaining among fixed positions.

It is important, of course, to remain aware of the differences between lay and professional perspectives. Efforts to increase the diversity of social perspectives in public deliberation aim in part to remedy long histories of systemic discrimination against socially disadvantaged groups. They also seek to provide symbolic representation of these groups, in part to encourage political engagement by group members. These justifications for the representation of diverse social perspectives do not apply to scientific disciplines. Moreover, the structural relations of power that shape social perspectives usually play a less direct role in the creation of disciplinary perspectives. Nonetheless, placing lay and expert perspectives in the same category has the advantage of emphasizing their shared deliberative orientation, in contrast to the decision-making orientation of interest representation (Mansbridge 2003; Young 2000, 136-14).

4 This discussion draws on Brown (2008).
Indeed, one common justification for increasing the diversity of social perspectives in deliberation is that doing so promises to improve deliberation’s epistemic quality (Bohman 1996, 27). Both technical experts and interest group representatives long involved with a particular policy area tend to develop blind spots that may be remedied by including laypeople with relevant knowledge and experience. In this respect, the inclusive representation of both professional and social perspectives fosters a more impartial – in the sense of more complete, less biased – assessment of sociotechnical problems. Both scientific disciplines and social perspectives are lenses on reality that condition without determining what a person sees (Young 2000, 112-115).

In practice, of course, social and professional perspectives often shape each other, and they are each shaped by considerations of direct or abstract interest. Indeed, different types of perspectives and interests may be represented by a single individual (e.g. a liberal female biologist employed by an environmental group). Moreover, to argue that advisory committee members should represent perspectives rather than interests does not mean that interests should not be articulated in deliberation. Critics of rationalist approaches to deliberation have often pointed out that the interests of disadvantaged groups usually diverge in part from those of the majority, so excluding the expression of interests from deliberation is biased against disadvantaged groups. Deliberation should illuminate not only commonalities but also conflicts of interest (Mansbridge 1992, 36; Williams 2000, 134-135). As long as the promotion of individual or group interests is justified with reference to public interests – for example, it may serve the public interest to promote the direct interests of disadvantaged groups – expressing interests can enrich deliberation as much as social perspectives and professional expertise. Moreover, both technical experts and interest group representatives are more likely to participate in deliberative forums, and their deliberation is likely to be more creative, when much is at stake and they see possibilities for advancing their goals (Fung 2003, 345; Hendriks 2006). And yet, although representing interests is obviously an important part of any political system, modern democracies are institutionally differentiated. Different institutions make different contributions to democratic representation and thus have different normative purposes (Brown 2009 b). The purpose of advisory institutions is arguably to seek consensus – or, failing that, to elaborate the reasons underlying competing positions.

Another reason to put lay and expert perspectives in the same category is that the experts who sit on advisory committees are not, in that capacity, engaged in the "specialized discourses" of the sciences (Bohman 1996, 44, 57). The procedures, problems, and audiences of policy relevant expertise differ considerably from those of basic science, even if the differences are matters of degree rather than kind. Among other things, expert deliberation aimed at providing advice is less formalized, and usually more interdisciplinary, than the deliberation involved in basic science. At the same time, however, advisory committee deliberations are more formalized than the "anonymous publics" theorized by deliberative democrats. One might conclude that advisory bodies are best located somewhere on a continuum between unstructured deliberation in civil society and the specialized discourses of scientific subdisciplines.

Advisory bodies that incorporate both lay and professional perspectives do cross the boundary between science and politics, nor the boundaries between professional disciplines. What they do is provide a forum for constructing these boundaries in ways that facilitate public deliberation and decision making. In STS and science policy studies, such institutions have been conceived as "boundary organizations", because they provide a place where scientists and political actors can work together to reach decisions across the boundary between politics and science, while preserving the legitimating functions still served by that boundary. Boundary organizations facilitate agreements on which elements of a controversial decision will be left to experts and which to politicians and lay citizens (Guston 2000). Moreover, integrating laypeople and experts in deliberation should not imply that they are equally qualified with regard to any particular set of concerns. Understanding the experience of a cancer patient, for example, requires a layperson's perspective, while understanding how to treat cancer requires technical expertise. But integrating lay and expert participants in deliberation conveys the idea that expert and lay perspectives deserve equal respect. And it offers an institutional bulwark against the problematic dichotomy associated with romantic conceptions of “the lay citizen”.

4. Conclusion

Pielke notes that because Honest Brokers draw on diverse perspectives to integrate scientific knowledge and policy options in contexts of uncertainty, they usually take the form of interdisciplinary advisory bodies rather than individual experts (Pielke 2007, 151, 154-56). Similarly, whereas liberalism's epistemic division of labor has tended to focus on the epistemic capacities of individual experts and lay citizens, the approach articulated here emphasizes the institutional mediation of lay-expert communication.

This approach has also been apparent in some recent discussion of bioethics advisory bodies, which locate bioethics expertise not primarily in the professional capacities of individuals, but in institutional mechanisms that mobilize a wide range of epistemic resources. A revealing example of this focus on institutions appears in recent efforts to expand the range of academic disciplines involved in bioethics (Brown 2009 a). Whereas professional bioethics was long dominated by professional philosophers and natural scientists, it increasingly includes a role for social scientists, legal experts, and lay citizens. There are at least two distinct versions of such efforts. Some endorse the idea of interdisciplinary bioethics but argue that philosophy should remain at the center (Fox and Swazy 2005, 366-68; Rasmussen 2006, 129). This approach effectively transforms philosophers into ethical decision makers and members of other disciplines into their advisors, a setup that seems unlikely to facilitate cooperative deliberation. Others argue, in contrast, that bioethics is a "second-order discipline" of a "fundamentally interdisciplinary nature" (Kopelman 2006, 624). This was the approach of the U.S. President's Council on Bioethics, which despite generating public controversy over its allegedly conservative bias, also introduced several important
procedural innovations into American public bioethics (Briggie 2009). From this perspective, public bioethics is best understood in terms of the institutions that bring together the various professional and social perspectives relevant to any given issue. In sum, liberalism’s epistemic division of labor — in which value-neutral experts provide technically efficient means for implementing the unreflective preferences of lay citizens — rests on the mistaken assumption that lay citizens can never effectively evaluate expert claims. It also underlies an image of representative government that confines citizens to the role of occasional voters and leaves little room for lay participation and deliberation. Considerable evidence suggests, however, that under appropriate institutional conditions lay people are capable of making reasonable judgments about expert claims and their relevance for lay concerns. The most promising institutional designs appear to be those that integrate lay and expert deliberation. This is not to say that all advisory bodies should take this form, and representative democracies arguably require a diversity of expert advisory institutions that each fulfill different advisory functions (Brown, Lentsch, Weingart 2005). Moreover, further empirical research is required to identify the specific risks and benefits of lay-expert deliberation in interdisciplinary advisory contexts. This paper suggests that such research has the potential of enhancing both scientific innovation and representative democracy.

References


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Mikropolitik des Wissens. Macht und Geltung in interdisziplinären Gremien

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Die folgenden Ausführungen gehen von der Annahme aus, dass das Gebot der Interdisziplinarität in der Praxis Spießfelder eröfnet, auf denen Anerkennungskämpfe um Wissensansprüche ausgetragen werden. In interdisziplinären Zusammenhängen konkurrieren die verschiedenen Disziplinen und Wissensformen um Einfluss. Das gilt in Prinzip für ganz unterschiedliche Kontexte der Wissensproduktion, sowohl für Forschung als auch für Expertise. Interdisziplinarität wird damit aus einer dezidiert machtanalytischen Perspektive zum Thema.1

