Skilled Rhetoricians, Experts, Intellectuals and Inventors: Kitcher and Dewey on public knowledge and ignorance

Jón Ólafsson

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Abstract
Many thinkers lament the lack of public knowledge and understanding of science, expressing doubts about the wisdom of allowing public opinion to direct policy- or decision-making. Philip Kitcher argues that "free discussion" is just as likely to produce less, rather than more, informed public views. The paper takes Kitcher to task for his analysis of public knowledge and his claims that "irremediable" ignorance poses a great difficulty for properly addressing pressing social and environmental challenges. Kitcher's assessment is compared to Dewey's discussion of democratic public engagement and it is shown that their views differ considerably. It is argued that public knowledge must be understood in connection with epistemic trust toward policy-making and social institutions. It is argued that Dewey's criticism of "intellectualistic" criteria of knowledge can be usefully applied to Kitcher's discussion of public knowledge, and that a Deweyan account of public knowledge brings a more optimistic and realistic perspective on public participation in determining policies.

Keywords: John Dewey, Philip Kitcher, public ignorance, epistemic trust, expertise

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In the last chapter of *The Public and its Problems* John Dewey outlines the alleged fallacy of "the democratic creed". According to him the fallacy is described as conflating emancipation with the capacity to rule, i.e. the capacity to make policy decisions. His point is that the power to make decisions does not entail a capacity to make good choices. Capable are those in the know, the experts who are "intellectually qualified" (Dewey 1927/1984 p. 363). The answer to

the fallacy is to propose epistocracy: The rule of experts – as Walter Lippman had come close to arguing (Lippmann 1922, 376–377). But Dewey tries to refute the argument for epistocracy. He rehearses the old platonic wisdom that the harmonious state depends on the proper division of labor, asking whether in modern society "intellectuals" should be replaced by "inventors and engineers" who are then to be entrusted with deciding what is right. But he quickly dismisses that idea arguing that if the "masses" are not fit for making decisions because of their unruly thoughts and emotions, they would not be fit for being ruled by experts either: The experts would not be able to rule them. Dewey seems to be thinking that an ignorant public would not follow the expert advice or decisions, even if they would in fact make the best decisions. His conclusion is therefore that the public must be qualified to rule. It is just as impossible to have experts lead the ignorant in making plans and policies as it is to have the ignorant rule themselves.

It is a curious argument. One hidden premise seems to be that knowledge cannot be equated with power. But Dewey is also thinking about dividing labor. In a short essay entitled "The "Socratic Dialogues" of Plato" he adds to the argument by claiming that the non-expert is better at knowing what is good than in knowing specifics. The expert is the opposite: "[T]he physician does not know when or why health is really a good to his patient. He does not know of the limits of his own knowledge." (1925/1984, p. 136). This is also an important part of Dewey's argument against Lippmann (Rogers 2009, p. 201). The expert and the non-expert member of the public need each other. It is the responsibility of the public not only to take expert advice seriously but also to determine its scope and use. This requires some understanding of expert argument even when decision or choice cannot be entrusted to the public. What the public must understand is something that the expert must not understand and typically does not understand: "the limits" of his/her knowledge. The public must know how to make sense of the expert's knowledge.[1]

Two things are assumed here. First, this division of labor between the public and the experts does not imply that their tasks are fully separate. The ability of the public to make the right value judgments is connected to its having or acquiring an understanding of what the experts do and how they do it. Second, there need not be a full separation between scientific and non-scientific discourse. Expert talk is mixed depending on the subject in each case. One must still ask how expert discussion and public debate should combine to improve the grounding of public decisions. There certainly remain problems about the relation of knowledge to authority or power which Dewey hardly addresses (see Rogers 2009, p. 192–193), but the point about public-expert relations is very clear.

Philip Kitcher discusses public knowledge with respect to policy-making in his paper "Public knowledge and its discontents" and describes it as having to do with (i) a predicted future state of affairs (ii) a value judgment about that state, (iii) proposals about how to seek or avoid the predicted state and (iv) value judgments about such proposals (Kitcher 2012, p. 381).

Let's assume that an expert community—a scientific community—is present in the sense that for tasks that require specialized knowledge there will exist a number of people with the relevant experience and training, together forming a community able to discuss and resolve problems at a level well above general knowledge and understanding of the problems themselves and their proposed solutions. One might think that the best way to exploit the knowledge and expertise of any such community is to wait for its relative consensus about (i) and (iii), then introduce such consensus to the public. The public might then, together with the expert community, debate (ii) and (iv). In such a case the public is shielded from scientific controversy (which according to Kitcher it could not properly evaluate anyway), but once there is a dominant view, it can be explained to and shared with the public. The public would then not necessarily be expected to have deep understanding of the issues, but it would be reasonable to expect that most people know what the received opinion is and may on such grounds be able to identify and even evaluate possible solutions.

One might want to do the opposite, i.e. expose differences in the scientific community such that the public will observe and participate (or at least be able to take sides) in pre-consensus debates. That would however, in Kitcher's view, create an excessive risk that choices will be made and preferences ranked without proper attention to reflection and factual knowledge (Kitcher 2012, p. 382). The public will be forced to make decisions on less than adequate grounds, in some cases even in ignorance of what kind of knowledge would be required in order to be able to make a decision.

When we are dealing with complicated issues where subtle differences of opinion exist and it is not clear that there will be a consensus among experts, key considerations may not be accessible to the layman. In such cases Kitcher argues, "[t]he only plausible way of resolving the controversy responsibly is to envisage a group of deliberators, none of them interested in "winning the fight," well-tutored and mutually concerned, and representing different human perspectives." Such a group can "look for a way of proceeding, in a mixed evidential situation, that can be acceptable to all" (ibid.). That is to say, if a certain part of the public, gets the opportunity to discuss and deliberate given the necessary information and environment, such a sample will represent informed public opinion better than just some random sample of the public.

Dewey and Kitcher differ in the level of trust in the public. While Kitcher believes that well selected representatives of the public can under the right conditions find their way in a mixed situation, where things are not settled and it is necessary to both understand differences and be able to work out solutions, "massive ignorance" about many of things that affect "citizens' projects" worries him (Kitcher 2012, p. 383). The problem is that in many respects (Kitcher is specifically concerned about climate change) even "thoughtful people" may easily be confused by "skillful rhetoricians" and therefore be unable to evaluate contradictory claims, even though they in principle do have the necessary training and background knowledge. In the case of the climate debate Kitcher believes that many or most members of the public will not be able to clearly understand that arguments coming from one side (from so-called climate change deniers) are phony and that there is no real controversy among scientists on climate change. So, the "raw public" will get into difficulty. Dewey does not have any similar fears. While he is concerned that the public may lack the discursive environment, media and political sophistication to deal with some central issues in political decision-making, he does not think that such impediments are permanent, and indeed he considers it to be one of the main tasks of his public philosophy to motivate the public in being an active and informed force.[2]

In the last chapter of *The Public and its Problems*, Dewey is concerned with the level of public knowledge, and with the effects of knowledge on understanding and problem-solving in different situations. He is aware that the consequences of increased public knowledge are not fully predictable. He also points out that the kind of solutions proposed in any concrete situation will depend on "the prevalent culture of the period" (Dewey 1927/1984, p. 358). The question is what kind of thinking can be expected from the public. Dewey is optimistic: He does not think that the public is so ignorant that it must first be educated before it can be listened to. His view is rather that through public advocacy and activism the public is just as capable of making good choices as leaders are, and probably better. To argue that "the public", because of "massive ignorance", cannot make plans, evaluate projects or make decisions misses the point from a Deweyan perspective.

It seems to me that the Dewey–Kitcher controversy provides an enlightening perspective on a central problem in political epistemology: Kitcher's claim is that the ignorance of the public severely limits its ability to form reasonable views in difficult matters unless experts present a more or less unified position. Dewey on the other hand sees the public as rising to face challenges. Conflict or disagreement is the kind of challenge that can increase public awareness and understanding. Scientific controversy should therefore not be shielded from the

public, but must be played out in public if it is to improve ways of dealing with conflict situations.[3]

In the remaining sections of this paper, I will argue that Dewey is right and try to show why that is important. I will first discuss a certain aspect of public choice where lack of trust rather than ignorance explains why the public may prefer a worse solution to a better one – even when it is generally understood to be worse. I then discuss relations between public opinion and scientific consensus and argue that ignorance is not necessarily the reason for dissonance. A discussion of public education follows, where I show that Kitcher's understanding of public knowledge rests on a narrowly individualistic epistemology and finally I show that Dewey's conception of communication provides a reasonable account of public discussion where more openness and more public discussion, even in the absence of narrowly defined standards of what counts as evidence, should not be seen as a danger to reasonable choice.

Reasonable Choices and Reasons Not to Trust

When one tries to evaluate the chances that good, rather than bad, opinions become dominant among the public, not only background knowledge or ability to understand complicated issues is at stake. One must also take into consideration the necessary level of trust in leadership, government and expertise as well as the expectations that proposed governmental policies raise. A little thought-experiment may help seeing the issues here more clearly. Imagine a Western country where most of the middle class finances the purchase of housing with mortgage loans, and the rental market for apartments is relatively small.[4] Due to economic instability in the past, such loans have been inflation indexed in addition to carrying high interest rates. When, due to complicated series of events in the financial world, the country takes a bad economic hit, its main financial institutions go bankrupt and a national bankruptcy even seems unavoidable for a while, inflation soars and consequently people with inflation indexed mortgage loans experience a monstrous difference between increases in their salaries (very small) and increases of their loan capital (huge). The consequences are obvious. Even after years of paying, people will experience that they owe more rather than less. The capital amount of their loans has risen dramatically due to these events. To make it even worse, they might not be able to pay up mortgages by selling their houses and apartments because real estate prices have gone down.

After a few years of back and forth about how the situation should be dealt with, the government is left with two options. One option is to restore justice and "correct" the changes in mortgage loans using a special tax on banks to pay down the loan capital in individual cases thereby lowering the debt of many homeowners considerably. This will have a clearly felt immediate impact on homeowners with large

mortgages. The other option is based on macroeconomic considerations. It means explaining to the public that an immediate correction of mortgage loans will in all likelihood backfire. Since it requires huge transfer of money from private enterprises and state funds to the public, it will temporarily exhaust the government's fiscal possibilities. It is therefore rather likely that it is going to have detrimental effects on the financial health of the economy for the next few years, inflation will be higher and within three to five years homeowners will have lost what they gained by the correction. Their situation will in fact be worse, since instead of working on making the financial environment healthier and creating conditions where loans can be offered on better terms, inflation indexed loans could be refinanced and the conditions for buying a home are generally better, such problems will not have been addressed seriously, but only delayed.

We can assume that the macroeconomic consequences of each course of action are more or less uncontested and experts have been employed to explain to the public why it would be more rational to take the second option, thinking about long term effects rather than short term. The question is then what the public will do, if it is to have the opportunity to decide which course should be taken, e.g. through a binding referendum. Suppose that in a referendum or an opinion poll, or through a landslide election victory of the party advocating the first option, that option is indeed chosen. Such a decision might be described as taking the worse option, and one might argue that it would show how public ignorance, and an inability to take complicated economic consequences into account, makes it unwise to entrust decisions of that sort to the public. This shows, one might argue, that public opinion is capricious, instant gratification will always be a stronger incentive for it than delayed results, not to mention results delayed many years into the future.

On Kitcher's analysis some conclusion of this sort would have to be drawn, i.e. the choice would have to be explained with public ignorance or public caprice. But is that fair? It seems at least based on certain contestable assumptions. One such assumption is that the choice must be interpreted as the expression of belief in one of the two options, rather than as trust in long-term government policy. One good reason for ranking the first option over the second option however is distrust in long-term policies.

Trust is an essential good in any society. We must—at least to some extent—trust our fellow citizens as well as (at least some) key institutions in our society. Distrust usually comes in degrees, so does trust. Trust does not require believing everything or being sure the right course of action will always be taken, but rather that this will as a rule be the case. To trust absolutely is naïve and full distrust complicates interaction to an intolerable degree. Epistemic trust implies

a strong inclination to believe claims and statements from sources representing better knowledge. There can be many non-epistemic reasons as well to not trust officials or institutions such as a history of "unjust social relations" – i.e. histories that reveal systematic bias against or in favor of one group or another (Grasswick 2014, p. 548). Epistemic trust must be based on both epistemic and non-epistemic reasons: We cannot isolate knowledge production from the social context of institutions.

In my example, many of those who prefer a worse option to a better one lack faith in the capability of government to act on policies that follow from taking the better option. This is not mere distrust in the ability of governments to make good things – it reflects a relation to government that is both darker and more complicated. On the most general level the system of representative government makes it impossible to guarantee policies beyond election cycles. One government can only to a limited extent make sure that its successor continues its policies through strategies that make policy-shifts more difficult in certain areas. Bipartisan alliances will be necessary to ensure stability. Policies, which are both controversial and easy to change, are therefore always potentially doomed.

The fact that governments nevertheless adopt and proclaim policies that suffer from this inherent weakness—they are permanently instable—creates an additional reason for distrust. Citizens have good reason not to trust leaders or governments who claim to be able to guarantee what a political system on the whole may render impossible. The dissonance between declarations of will, on the one hand, possible scenarios on the other is a further source of distrust evoking the familiar stereotype of the hypocritical politician.

In the deliberative model of liberal-democracy, institutional structures are meant to provide the political stability that the election system lacks. But, as many thinkers have pointed out in recent years, trust of institutions is stratified: different social groups have different reasons to trust or distrust institutions. There are many good reasons for black people in many areas of the United States not to trust the judicial system, e.g. (see Aviv 2015) similarly there may be good non-epistemic reasons to distrust policies, which may undermine the ability of scientific institutions to communicate "sound and reliable knowledge" as Heidi Grasswick has argued.

She points out that scientific institutions are expected to provide "knowledge directly relevant to important policy decisions in a timely manner" (Grasswick 2014, p. 548) – a task all but impossible to fulfill in a complicated and politicized environment where all claims may be contested. When institutional discourse, moreover, fails to question generalizations, which unequally represent social groups, trust in policies is further undermined (see Tuana 2013, p. 28).

These concerns create reasons for skepticism about Kitcher's ignorance problem: The public is not open to misleading rhetoric and propaganda because of ignorance, rather the social and political environment does not provide a background that can sufficiently deal with mixed epistemologies or skillful rhetoricians. As a result, a governmental commitment to hand funds out immediately is simply more attractive than long-term fiscal policies.

Both the public in general and marginalized groups in particular, may have good reasons to prefer the immediate handing out of funds and from that perspective be entirely right in choosing that option, even though it is the worse option when social policies as such are compared. Ignorance does not explain the choice. It points to a much deeper problem, which may be unavoidable in representative systems: Trust requires stability over time, which representative systems, where power regularly changes hands, seem continuously to undermine. My example is different from the widely discussed case of climate change doubts or denials, but there are similarities.

In both cases the public is told on the basis of superior knowledge to accept hardships. But in order for the necessary trust to be created some deliberative exercise is necessary. This deliberation (see Code 2014, p. 674) would not focus on the scientific education of the public but rather on reasons of trust and distrust in institutions and social and political systems. It's trust that's at stake, knowledge to a much lesser degree.

Expert Knowledge and Public Opinion

In the example the public may be smart and able to understand policies yet doubt them as grounding a credible plan of action. Therefore, the less good, but simpler, option may be chosen. Although John Dewey does not treat examples of this sort in the *Public and its Problems* his discussion of public/government relations addresses a closely related problem. Dewey wonders whether one could think of democracy as a transitory stage in social development, the phase where power has been removed from the old kings and oligarchs, but not yet given to their heirs – the expert community (again the reflection is closely connected to Lippmann's work, see Lippmann 1922, p. 370). In a democracy one could then expect to encounter a confused public overwhelmed with tasks that it cannot adequately deal with, waiting to be relieved of them. But he insists that this is not the case and that the public in democratic societies, given the proper background, can have the means to make the final verdict also in the most complicated cases (Dewey 1927/1984, p. 365). Dewey is a pessimist about government, but not about public knowledge. Therefore, he does not argue that improvement of policy depends on reducing public ignorance. Kitcher on the other hand, thinks that if the (ignorant) public can be replaced with a

sufficiently reflective microcosm better conditions would be created for public consultation about policy- and decision-making (Kitcher 2012, p. 386).[5]

My example in the previous section was about a contested governmental policy to lower the debt of households in an imaginary country or economic system. Kitcher is thinking about the climate debate. In both cases, we see a gap between expert consensus and majority opinion. We can think about the public/expert relationship in more general terms, as involving five possible scenarios. First, we have the case where there is no consensus among experts and public opinion simply reflects that lack of consensus. Second, there is the situation where the expert community does have a consensus view, but public opinion does not reflect it, for some reason. Third is the situation where the expert community lacks consensus but there is nevertheless a dominant opinion among the public, and fourth is the situation where there is clear majority opinion among the public and a consensus in the expert community. This situation can be of two kinds. The majority may share the expert consensus, but it might also have a different opinion than the experts. The following table gives the overview:

	1. No expert consensus	2. Expert consensus
A. No dominant public view	Unproblematic	Problematic
B. Dominant public view	Problematic	(a: shared) Very satisfying
		(b: different) Very disturbing

State A1, common suspense, is per se unproblematic. It will often be the case in connection with new research or scientific innovation. There is plenty of information available about scientific research and there are many disputed areas in science. All this contributes to a healthy public interest in science where the public even to some extent shares in the scientific pursuit for answers to unsolved problems. B1 is at least a slightly problematic situation, but certainly not infrequent. It would seem that the public has been too quick to form an opinion; that it should at least wait for the experts. Kitcher argues that it is better that the public be in some way shielded from expert disagreement to avoid this situation. But it could also be perfectly harmless or even beneficial in the sense that the expert community, realizing that there exists an unsupported or illegitimate majority view might feel challenged to increase necessary work on the issue. B1 would also count for widespread folk-views about

e.g. the medical effect of certain treatments or life on other planets. Once there exists consensus in the expert community, expert opinion might affect public opinion correspondingly (although of course that need not be the case). Situation A2 is in that respect more problematic than B1. Here experts have reached consensus, but for some reason the public is not convinced. The majority might be unaware that such a consensus exists, or it might be unwilling to take it seriously possibly because trust is lacking. Whatever the reason, it must always be quite a challenge if the public is not prepared to change its behavior so as to conform with what the experts claim is true. B2 is the perfect scenario if the public agrees with the experts. It is the worst scenario if there exists a majority opinion inclining the public to do or believe the opposite of expert opinion. Surely each single case would have to be examined. One could think of cases were economists are led by some ideology to insist on market solutions but the public doesn't buy it. One might also think of non-secular societies where scientific knowledge is not held in high regard by the authorities, which may cause deep distrust in science among the public. We should not simply assume that the experts are always right and the public always wrong.

Kitcher however is not discussing the various kinds of situations: He is interested in the state of public knowledge in our Western developed societies where science ostensibly plays a prominent role in policy- and decision-making. This situation is in his view rather depressing: "Many contemporary citizens live in societies in which there is massive ignorance about all sorts of things that affect those citizens' projects" he argues. And further: "Indeed, public ignorance comes in grades with plenty of people at the most extreme grades" (Kitcher 2012, p. 383). There are two main "grades" of ignorance that Kitcher discusses: Remediable and irremediable. Ignorance is irremediable when people are unable to understand what information is needed to formulate a reasonable policy: People who are irremediably ignorant are "truly in the dark." Ignorance is directly remediable if one has the background training and knowledge sufficient to work out for oneself "the answers to the pertinent questions" (ibid.). It is indirectly remediable if one is able to "identify reliable people," those who really can provide true and relevant answers to the pertinent questions.

Kitcher concludes that in too many cases public ignorance is irremediable. The climate debate shows it: Scientists largely share the view that climate change is real and caused (at least for the most part) by human action. A large part of the public does not share this opinion with the scientific community. The reason is not that scientists have been discredited (although that also plays a role). The public has been misled into believing that scientists disagree among themselves about climate change. It is a common opinion in some countries at least that no scientific consensus exists on the matter and therefore no justification for

any kind of policies: Since the scientists don't agree, how could any responsible person have a legitimate view either way? "Skillful rhetoricians" who put confusion into the debate are partly to blame for this since they have succeeded in making the public believe that there is no expert consensus. The interesting thing here is not that public and scientific consensus diverge—what is interesting is that the public is not only wrong about there being no scientific consensus, but also about the situation. The common view might be that it is the unproblematic A1. A slightly sharper look might reveal it to represent A2. But it is in fact the deeply disturbing B2(b). The scientific consensus is that climate change is in the main part caused by human actions (which is very bad). The proper reaction to this fact is to make drastic and immediate changes in industrial practices and policies. But because no public consensus reflects the scientific consensus the public and scientific evaluation of the necessity and wisdom of taking drastic steps diverges. The public is generally not prepared to believe in such steps, and will be inclined to regard anyone who makes such a case a dangerous extremist.

Once a person knows that scientists largely agree on climate change, how exactly would that affect his/her opinions on what should be done? On Kitcher's account one might say that when the public (by and large) and the scientists share a view on what the facts are (the climate is being severely affected by human action) and about the evaluation about this state of affairs (it is very bad). The scientific consensus might then also be shared with the public (CO_2 emissions must be reduced very much and very fast). In such a case, there is agreement between public and scientists on the situation, there is unity in how the situation is evaluated and there is a common view on the necessary course of action. But it may fail to translate into support for policies proposed to respond to the situation. The public would not necessarily support the corresponding governmental (or corporate) programs. It might conclude that it is unlikely or impossible that such programs will be carried out with sufficient integrity or in a way that would really have the intended effect. Indeed, the public—disillusioned with failed policies of the past and cynical about the role and influence of special interest in government will be highly suspicious that the very substantial sacrifices now demanded will have any effect at all. So, in the end, the distrust of government might, just as in the case with how the government should deal with economic crisis, lead to public reluctance (for legitimate reasons) to prefer the better option to the worse. Since this reluctance translates back into not only distrust of government intention but doubts about the credibility of its claims about either climate change itself, or the necessary reaction or both, we now have the unfortunate situation where distrust is easily created among the public for reasons that have nothing to do with ignorance, but are rather fueled by public assessment of government behavior.

One therefore has to conclude that public reluctance to acknowledge the existing scientific consensus on climate change, and its openness to claims made by "skillful rhetoricians", does not yet give us reason to believe that the public suffers from "irremediable ignorance". Many other issues are involved. The question is what kind of engagement is likely to motivate the public to support better decisions rather than worse or none.

Educating the Public

Kitcher argues that since the value often put on "free discussion" seems to be based on "individualistic epistemology" according to which "citizens suffer from directly remediable ignorance" we may be deeply mistaken in our belief that free discussion will lead to better informed decisions, the idea that we can assume that such a connection exists is "far from reality." Even assuming that ignorance is generally indirectly remediable is idealistic: "Irremediable ignorance abounds" (Kitcher 2012, p. 383) and for that reason free discussion is as likely to be abused as not. The "skillful rhetoricians" will always be able to exploit a "mixed evidential" situation for the purpose of promoting "a chimeric epistemology" (p. 384), where scientific, non-scientific, pseudo-scientific and religious arguments are mixed together. One should assume, according to Kitcher, that since most people are not able to reject chimeric epistemologies, very few will be able to appreciate the meaning of expert consensus, and continue to follow the rhetoricians, whatever the scientists say.

A "suitable microcosm" might in such cases create more reliable social environment to discuss options and reach a conclusion according to him. Free and open public discussion is not likely to bring a reasonable consensus about situations, forecasts and action proposals, or provide good solutions to real problems. Kitcher suggests that the opposite is more likely: "[T]here are conditions, apparently present in contemporary societies, under which public discussion actually threatens the freedom of citizens, and thus undermines the values most basic to democracy" (Kitcher 2012, p. 385). Channels have to be set up where citizens "can be brought to understand the consensus achieved by experts" and such efforts may eventually create conditions where free public discussion can promote democratic ideals. This will be a long process. Kitcher believes that a "Deweyan program" of public education should be implemented to affect a long-term change.

The idea that public ignorance is directly remediable rests on the classical but widely discarded assumptions of individualistic epistemology according to which adequate access to information is a sufficient condition of knowledge for sane and rational persons who only need to follow the correct method (Kitcher 2001, p. 110–111). Kitcher and other authors have shown convincingly that many other factors have

to be taken into account and that traditional individualistic epistemology is far from giving a satisfactory account of knowledge. We can neither expect the average rational person to have sufficient previous knowledge and analytic skills to correctly evaluate scientific information and even if we could, biases connected to group thinking would make it impossible to assume that each individual will eventually come to the correct belief (Goldman 2011a, p. 29–31). This Kitcher seems to consider obvious. Less obvious is what he also considers true, that ignorance is not even indirectly remediable, i.e. we cannot assume that the public is on the whole likely to be able to distinguish good solutions from bad. One does not have to believe that ignorance is directly remediable to believe in free discussion, it suffices that it is indirectly remediable, that is to say, that individuals are on the whole able to realize the limits of their understanding and have a conception of what kind of knowledge would expand it. Consequently, they would be able to select the proper authorities to consult and believe. Since the public, according to Kitcher, on the whole submits to chimeric epistemologies, we cannot expect better to be correctly distinguished from worse, thus free and open discussion is at best useless.

Kitcher's pessimistic evaluation of the current state of public knowledge as well as his view about gradually educating the public rest on a conception of public knowledge and education that differ substantially from a Deweyan understanding and, interestingly, this difference shows how in the end it is Kitcher himself who fails to abandon "individualistic epistemology." It follows from his idea of educating the public and by managing public discussion through "deliberative microcosms", that the state or quality of public knowledge depends on individual ability to process information. One has to understand his claim that free discussion is likely to make decisions worse rather than better as implying that too few individuals possess the necessary skills required in order for knowledge to guide public opinion. Therefore, in order to have the public think together one would have to make sure that a critical mass possesses the skills. This is something that might be possible for a smaller group—the deliberative microcosm—rather than for the public at large. The microcosm conception of public consultation has been developed in recent decades in interesting ways e.g. to create deliberative assemblies which make it possible to understand how public opinion would develop if the public had all the necessary information and time to deliberate the issues (see Fishkin 2009). There is no doubt that such exercises can improve public policy. But Kitcher sees them as a way of managing public discussion and protecting it from the influences of the ignorant or manipulative, which is a little different, and seems to suggest that consultation through deliberative microcosms should at least temporarily replace free and open public discussion.

Kitcher thus assumes that the apparent failure to communicate truths suggests an inability of the public to understand truths. It is therefore not unfair to conclude that on Kitcher's account we are forced to expect that unless most people are able to make a distinction between properly scientific arguments and arguments that are partly or wholly based on non-scientific beliefs (such as religious beliefs) we will have to accept that inability is the main reason for this failure. Kitcher is not arguing that the presence of religious belief alone makes a person irremediably ignorant. It is the inability to draw the proper distinction between the two kinds of belief, religious and scientific, that makes ignorance irremediable, or in other words inability to distinguish epistemic reasons form non-epistemic.

In his interesting discussion of Dewey's work *A Common Faith*, Melvin Rogers shows how piety can be seen as having an important role in critically assessing the discursive environment in which public decisions are made. The discussion is relevant to Kitcher's criticism. While he considers it to be a necessary condition for ignorance to be remediable that many or most people are able to avoid chimeric epistemologies, democratic piety as Rogers describes it is a commitment to retrospectively deepen "our apprehension of the present" (Rogers 2009, p. 109). Piety here coincides with trust. We should not be overly concerned with intellectual ability. Intellectual commitment and engagement are trust-creating practices, which can create piety towards decision-making processes because they are open and inclusive. Open discussion in other words becomes a sine qua non for public decision-making.

So, Kitcher's measure of irremediable ignorance is unsatisfactory. One may ask whether in an individual case, the inability to understand why x is true makes it impossible to know x or know that x is true. It raises obvious difficulties to claim that the lack of such understanding precludes knowledge. Knowing about conclusive evidence and knowing from relevant trustworthy experts/authorities that it supports various scientific claims can be sufficient for regarding them as known without actually evaluating the evidence supporting them or even being able to fully do so. (see Goldman 2011b, p. 114–115). The claim that some widely accepted scientific truth is actually a falsehood kept alive by a "powerful lobby of atheists" scheming to deceive the public, and that evidence supporting it is simply fabricated, may or may not be taken seriously. Is this important new information or just some anti-scientific demagoguery? Should one immediately dismiss the claim because of the conspiratorial and religiously motivated idea of "powerful atheists"? Such evaluation has more to do with one's social world—the state of debate about science and public knowledge—than with intellectual ability at any given time. The evidential situation is mixed and because different vocabularies clash, scientific rhetoric may be contested. Kitcher resents the presence of "mixed" arguments and laments that

they continue be seen as passable. But questionable communication need not be explained by a flaw in the receiver. One might simply have to accept that in a mixed evidential situation communicative strategies must be designed accordingly. The way suggested through the concept of piety is different since it makes strategies of selecting a trustworthy source of information rather depend on a general assessment of narrative experience than a particular logical or epistemological ability.

The mixed evidential situation then does not reflect public ignorance or a denial of science. It is partly caused by value pluralism, which may legitimately place epistemic value on qualities that science cannot clearly capture. One such quality is trustworthiness: The reasons we may have to trust or distrust certain claims and explanations. Distrust—or prejudice—may lead to a situation where scientific results are doubted as argued above. One might be tempted to think that such doubts are legitimate only if made on scientific grounds. But it seems clear that social and intellectual limitations of expert knowledge, as well as doubts that action will submit to policy decisions, especially in the long run, generates other legitimate reasons as well.

Knowledge and Trust

I have argued that Kitcher's description of irremediable ignorance in open and democratic societies rests on a narrow conception of public understanding, where the necessary conditions are rather strict. On Kitcher's view to understand a claim requires the ability to distinguish valid arguments from invalid in respect to that claim. This is a rather strict requirement – especially when it follows that the public can be said to be irremediably ignorant unless many or most people individually fulfill it. Contrary to Kitcher it is a widespread belief that it is sufficient for the knowledge of truths that one know about them from some relevant authority. If this is allowed one may be said to know x even if one is not able to autonomously assess the arguments that support or oppose competing claims in the sense of seeing clearly why one set of arguments is illegitimate while another is not – i.e. we might always need some help in making that distinction. In other words, we would not be able to determinately distinguish the chimeric from the pure (see Goldman 2011b, p. 112). On this much less strict requirement the idea of irremediability disappears. Instead knowledge/understanding can be based on "epistemic trust" – i.e. confidence that public knowledge reflects problems and solutions in a more or less unprejudiced way.

While we can readily acknowledge that many subjects are too complicated or technical for the non-expert to really understand the deeper reasons for expert conclusions, one would still want to say that any potential knower must be able to understand why one thing follows from another, given a rational—if simplified—explanation. It seems like going too far to argue that understanding will not suffer from the

absence of such minimal logical ability. Thus, if Kitcher's distinction between those who have a certain ability and those who don't is too demanding, leading to the conclusion that most people are irremediably ignorant unless they receive specific training, it seems not demanding enough to make reasonable choice of authority alone sufficient for removing ignorance. The idea of epistemic trust is important here to complement lack of information, specialized understanding and knowledge of specific abstract concepts. For the individual believer, some leap of faith seems most often necessary in order not to be constantly resigned to suspension on many vital issues.

The question is whether an intermediary account exists that might provide a more plausible measure of public knowledge, or to use Dewey's term, social knowledge. I think Dewey does have a more interesting way of doing this, but before I discuss the Deweyan understanding of social knowledge I want to say a few things about Kitcher's assessment of public ignorance. His evidence is anecdotal. Since generally speaking the majority of US citizens seems not to understand the difference between the science of climate change on the one hand, and the various "chimeric" claims about climate issues on the other, Kitcher feels justified in making a judgment about general cognitive ability (which needs to be improved, according to him and certainly can be improved). But one may also point out that the failure of communicating scientific results in areas where they are under attack from many different groups, is no indicator of general cognitive ability. One reason is that it may simply require some time to communicate truths of this kind since they have deep moral and economic consequences that may be difficult to grasp even for the well informed. Kitcher seems so concerned about dangers that "skillful rhetoricians" will successfully manipulate public opinion that he overlooks the fact that free and open public discussion with freely available information and analysis is very likely to be on the whole and in the long run educative for those who follow it or participate in it. Temporary victories of special interest are regrettable, but hardly ever final. The "non-finality" of public discussion is taken for granted by pragmatists such as Charles Peirce for whom truth is a final result in an unending process (see Putnam 1992, p. 73–74). From Dewey's point of view epistemic and logical restraints may also be subject to change – the main thing being their sensitivity to experience and new information. This implies also critical re-evaluation by experts and non-experts. Hence there can be no such thing as a final truth (Dewey 1938/1986, p. 458–465).

The "non-finality" of public discussion is of central importance for pragmatists such as John Dewey and Charles Peirce, since in their view truth is a value as an ideal goal rather than as a practical and attainable result. The experts are never in a position simply to deliver consensus to the public. They can only engage in a dialogue.

The claim that the current state of public knowledge suggests or shows that public ignorance is "irremediable" is based on the additional (unwarranted) assumption that public discussion itself is unlikely to channel new knowledge and understanding to participants and spectators. Kitcher's conclusions about ignorance and dangers of free discussion suggest that he is trapped by what Dewey condemns as an "intellectualistic" standard of knowledge. On this view to have knowledge is to possess a stable and fully formed picture of reality, and to assume that reliable sources of knowledge are essentially detached from social factors. For Dewey, this view should be abandoned as "intelligence" replaces "reason" in our understanding of knowing (Dewey 1933/1986, p. 52). Social knowledge appears when experts and non-experts alike are part of public discussion where no absolute distinctions are made between "insulated branches of learning" (Dewey 1927/1984, p. 342). To be sure, Dewey agrees that to "appeal to an ignorant, fickle mass whose interests are superficial and trivial" and who is at best genuinely confused about how to deal with complicated questions of public policy, is unwise. But appealing instead to some "intellectual aristocracy" will not serve us any better according to him (Dewey 1927/1984, p. 362). He suggests that considerable interaction must be required between the public and experts just as between the public and authorities in order that public views are sufficiently informed and based on sound reasoning, rather than on misinformation and deception. Thus, the Deweyan view is not so fixated on necessary conditions (whether e.g. individuals are able to observe a clear distinction between pure and "chimeric" epistemologies). People may in one case be able to make the proper distinction but then fail in another case. The main concern should not be special interest or the skilled rhetoricians Kitcher worries about, but extremist governments. "The world has suffered more" Dewey points out "from leaders and authorities than from the masses" (Dewey 1927/1984, p. 365). The problem here is again the lack of trust rather than inability to adhere to non-chimeric epistemologies. Clearly the lack of trust may seriously delay the formation of an informed public opinion, and even (as in the imaginary debt reduction case discussed earlier in this paper) block the transition from understanding a situation into supporting the appropriate action given that understanding (Christiano 2012, p. 47–49).[6]

Epistemic trust is not a conception we find in Dewey's writings but it can easily be accommodated in his thinking. In order to account for social intelligence—the ability of the public to communicate and evaluate public knowledge—it is helpful to discuss necessary conditions of epistemic trust. I will argue that epistemic trust is impossible in the absence of fully free and open public discussion.

Dewey does not submit to a populist idea of free discussion according to which the public will thus expressed is always beyond criticism.

He does not doubt that "methods and conditions of the debate" need to be radically improved. His view is that improvement can only be achieved by the experience itself. The question is not of intellectualizing the public but of making explicit the relations between expertise and problem-solving. This will improve the understanding of expertise and may increase the trust in available public responses. Dewey concludes: "[W]hat is required is that [the many] have the ability to judge the bearing of the knowledge supplied by others upon common concerns … Until secrecy, prejudice, bias, misrepresentation, and propaganda as well as sheer ignorance are replaced by inquiry and publicity, we have no way of telling how apt for judgment of social policies the existing intelligence of the masses may be" (Dewey 1927/1984, p. 365–366). The point is not to create small deliberative fora or deliberative microcosms, but to learn by doing – by working to improve conditions of communication and information. This is to acknowledge what Dewey calls "embodied intelligence", or "social intelligence" i.e. the expression and use of social knowledge. He says: "A more intelligent state of social affairs, one more informed with knowledge, more directed by intelligence, would not improve original endowments one whit, but it would raise the level upon which the intelligence of all operates" (Dewey 1927/1984, p. 366). The question for Dewey is how to improve skills within a particular environment, which may then be used to improve that environment, but cannot necessarily be abstracted from it. His opposition to any kind of individualized epistemology is clear when he claims: "The notion that intelligence is a personal endowment or personal attainment is the great conceit of the intellectual class, as that of the commercial class is that wealth is something they personally have wrought and possess" (Dewey 1927/1984, p. 367).

The crucial difference between Dewey and Kitcher shows itself in Dewey's unwillingness to treat public knowledge or ignorance as a state that can be determined or judged, like an illness would or a handicap. Kitcher's use of the terms remediable/irremediable suggests a process of curing a patient. Dewey claims simply not to know whether the masses can sufficiently judge social policies, and therefore he is not seeking cure for a patient. Kitcher's ideal of "well-ordered science" envisions a system where there exist independent sources of information and representative groups of citizens monitor and scrutinize their "certification procedures," supervise them, adjudicate and appraise. The public trusts their channels of information and although ignorance need not be directly remediable, it is not to any serious extent irremediable.

For Dewey, the question is rather how to create conditions where the public *must* think, assuming that when thinking and reasoning is needed it is also available. It is here that epistemic trust can be seen as indispensable for public knowledge: Public discussion is the necessary source of important claims and arguments – in fact relevant claims and

arguments must be elicited in public discussion, rather than simply received by authority or expertise. This leads us to a metaphor which frequently appears in Dewey's work, when he uses a failed routine or unexpected confusion, such as something breaking down or one's being lost in a literal sense, e.g. "lost in the woods" (Dewey 1907/1983, p. 83–84) to capture the situation where thinking is needed – and to illustrate the difference between "pure reason" and "intelligence". These situations generate a need for new approaches and cause past experiences to be reactivated and reorganized (Dewey 1922/1983, p. 127–128). Demagogues, charlatans and "skilled rhetoricians" carry convictions of certain kinds, rather than incentives to independent thinking and in that sense they delay thinking and make it more difficult. It is not that we should assume that the intellectual capacity of the public is reflected by successful disinformation. Therefore, Dewey does not have to go as far as Kitcher in suggesting ways to improve public discussion. The results would be more immediate. Dewey does not describe learning as the way from ignorance to enlightenment but rather as engaging in an activity suitable for moving from a situation of being lost to having found a way.

From this Deweyan position a new account of public understanding emerges: We should not seek to identify or evaluate minimal logical skills for remediable ignorance, but rather the proper description of the situation where the public is forced to think. Whatever the dangers of skillful rhetoricians, charlatans or magicians having their way, free and open discussion about important issues seems necessary to create such a situation. Thus, the Deweyan view of public ignorance is more immediately practical: Instead of the intellectualistic resignation Kitcher offers, one should engage in improving discussion, debate and flow of information, in short, communication.

The difference between Kitcher and Dewey on public ignorance helps understand some central aspects of Dewey's democratic theory. Although Dewey was no anarchist he does share with the anarchists a clear disdain of authority and this makes him less interested in institutional reform that emphasizes how the public must be "brought to understand" one thing or another. What drives political action according to Dewey is "social conditions and needs" (Dewey 1933/1986, p. 67). This he thinks certainly concurs with a strong support of "scientific method" (Dewey 1944/2008, p. 257). But even more so the "democratic faith" is the belief in open, free and unforced public discussion. Dewey does not show any signs of fearing that free and open discussion might be dangerous. He is more concerned with the possible effects of governments and regimes being driven by dogmatic and oppressive ideologies such as Stalinism and Nazism. Dewey's use of "faith" and "piety" in such contexts is no coincidence: He clearly sees religious commitment to free society as one of the most fundamental assumptions for

democracy (Dewey 1942/2008, p. 172–174). Resistance to authority, including the authority of experts, can be seen as a necessary condition of meaningful reform, which then provides reason for trust in public institutions as well as for social and political processes. Seen in this way, Dewey's democratic ideal is close to a republican conception of democracy (Honohan 2006, p. 206). It follows that for Dewey, just as for republican thinkers, participation comes before institution building, and consequently, while being aware that free and open yet interdependent discussion carries risks in any particular case, in the long run it is the most likely channel to increase and improve public information, communication and reasoning skills.

Conclusion

It is easy, from a standpoint of superior knowledge, learning and science to lament public ignorance. But such lamentations rest on a mistake and Dewey's account of "social intelligence" makes it possible to see why. Although Dewey believes in scientific inquiry as a superior approach to problem solving he is not uncritical of science. Both the public and the experts face limitations that must be overcome for social knowledge to thrive. Dewey argues that expert knowledge is severely limited when social issues are at stake (Dewey 1927/1984, p. 364, see also p. 340–341).

Taking the argument beyond Dewey's discussion, the difference between public ignorance and knowledge can be approached with the help of the concept of epistemic trust. For Kitcher the ignorant public will always be just as likely to be misguided in trusting or distrusting political leaders – therefore free and open public discussion can make things worse. From the Deweyan perspective only public discussion and collective problem solving will in the long run eliminate epistemic prejudice, i.e. opinions inert to experience. But that requires engagement in the practices of discussion and problem-solving Trust is in the end a central concern. In a world where deliberative and participatory approaches to decision making—problem solving—are, as a rule, preferred to epistemic authority, public discussion generates policy- and decision-making processes trusted and relied upon as a method rather than as depending on a particular vision, ideology or world-view.

University of Iceland
jonolafs@hi.is

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NOTES

1. Thomas Christiano makes a similar point about the division of labor in representative democracy: "…expertise is not as fundamental to the choice of aims as it is to the development of legislation and policy. Citizens are capable in their everyday lives of understanding and cultivating deep understandings of values and of their interests" (Christiano 2012, p. 34). See also Rogers 2009, p. 201–202.

2. Neither Kitcher nor Dewey discusses representative democracy as the way of dealing with the public ignorance/expert knowledge divide. Lippmann does so. His goal is to show how representative government should receive "facts" from the experts who in that sense provide the premises for decisions (Lippmann 1922, p. 31). Kitcher might be of the opinion that representation does not solve the problem since politically selected representatives are more (or at least not less) likely to represent special interest than public interest.

3. Dewey's admittedly Hegelian account of "affirmation and negation" as opposed to an Aristotelian account is instructive about the centrality of conflict in Dewey's thinking. See Dewey 1938/1986, p. 185–186.

4. My example is based on a recent situation in Iceland. It is presented here as fictional however and does in certain respects deviate from the case by which it is inspired.

5. I do not criticize the idea of deliberative microcosms in general, only Kitcher's idea that they are the only remedy to the hopelessly ignorant masses.

6. About distrust see also relevant discussion in Dewey and Tufts 1908/1978, p. 424–425.