TECHNOCRACY AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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ABSTRACT
The concept of technocracy is widely used but escapes a well-formed definition. While it certainly refers to epistocratic decision-making devices, its relationship to the public sphere is often ignored. Yet, as others have suggested, a widespread 'technocratic mentality' is integral to technocracy. Consequently, I argue that technocracy can only be fully understood by accounting for a potential technocratic bias within the public sphere itself. Specifically, I argue (1) that a technocratic bias is present even in participatory conceptions of democratic decision-making due to the maintenance of an untenable, if only functional distinction between spheres of means and ends. (2) Moreover, by looking at the Dewey-Lippmann debate, I argue that even without a functional distinction of spheres, the bias persists if cognitive competence is seen as a necessary condition for valid political judgments. (3) Lastly, I argue for an Arendtian corrective to a Deweyan understanding of public decision-making, that renounces any conception of epistemic problem-solving in favor of a conception of democratic deliberation as perspectivist world-building. Accordingly, technocracy needs to be understood not only as rule by expertise but rather as a vicious circle arising out of the inability to look at the world politically.

KEYWORDS
Technocracy, democracy, political judgment, Dewey-Lippmann debate, Hannah Arendt

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, emerging technocratic tendencies have been often diagnosed within many late industrial democracies. At the same time, technocracy is hardly ever publicly endorsed and is held in contempt by most. Yet, it is rarely analyzed in depth. This analytical gap, I argue, is due to an incompleteness of the concept, which fails to capture the 'public' dimension of technocracy, reducing it to the 'mere' overstepping of boundaries by administrative bodies. Arguably, this failure is in itself no coincidence and is rooted in the way we conceive of democratic decision-making. As Hannah Arendt pointed out, "the reduction of the political to administration [...] imposes itself, whenever the political sphere is approached from

the standpoint of truth". (Arendt, 2012, 369)[1] My contention is that technocracy is always incompletely understood, if it is understood only in terms of administrative vs. political sphere. Rather, it represents a vicious circle prompted when the public sphere approaches the political 'from the standpoint of truth', reducing the political to expert problems with right and wrong answers. Due to this, fully appreciating technocratic tendencies and their coming about is only possible if they are understood as a phenomenon encompassing not only administration and government, but also the public sphere.

With this paper, I aim at providing such a concept of technocracy and its relation to the public sphere by telling a backwards story from Habermas to Dewey aimed at analyzing how technocratic decision-making relates to deliberative and pragmatist conceptions of the public sphere. Thereby, I aim at showing that both are liable to an implicit and unwanted technocratic bias in their paradigm of ideal public decision-making. Specifically, I will proceed in four steps: (1) I will briefly discuss the concept of technocracy itself to clarify its relation to the issue of public decision-making; (2) I will argue with Habermas for the impossibility of a distinction between truth-based means and value-driven ends within the political sphere; (3) I will turn to the Dewey-Lippman debate to establish the inevitability of a bias towards technocratic decision-making, if an epistemic criterion remains key to political decision-making; (4) and I will finally suggest an Arendtian corrective to a Deweyan conception of the public sphere, characterized by the central role of world-building instead of epistemic problem-solving as basis for public decision-making.

THE CONCEPT OF TECHNOCRACY

In the wake of the financial and euro crises the public use of the concept technocracy has certainly increased, however not much scholarly work has followed this trend. (Esmark, 2017; Friedmann 2020, 1-31) Nonetheless, a fundamental common characteristic is easily identified. Technocracy is approached as a concept dealing with decision-making and aimed at putting holders of expertise in charge by virtue of their ability to guarantee maximum efficiency of policies. (Fischer, 1990) Roughly, following Lenk (1994), we might identify four meanings of 'technocracy': (1) expert rule; (2) rule coerced by technological imperatives; (3) rule by reaction to factual constraints; (4) trend towards a surveillance state. (Dries, 2013) All these meanings doubtless express symptoms of technocratic tendencies within a democratic system. Where do these tendencies come from, however? While there is at least general agreement as to what constitutes technocratic decision-making, its causes and ways of advancing are not as clear.

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[1] Translation from the German by me. This passage is not present in the shorter English version of 'Truth and Politics'.

One approach, going back at least to Habermas is to view technocracy as a 'project', which undermines the decisional neutrality of bureaucratic structures on the grounds of a 'technocratic' quasi-ideology. (Habermas, 1987; Fischer, 1990; Esmark, 2017) This would suggest that for technocracy to arise there needs to be, if not an organized and orchestrated effort towards the establishment of a technocratic order, at least a clear conception of epistemic decision-making as desirable principle that grounds technocratic developments within a polity. While there certainly have been advocates of technocratic projects – such as Saint-Simon in restauration France or Technocracy Inc. in the USA of the Great Depression – they have rarely, if ever, exerted decisive influence. Against the 'project' thesis, theorists understanding modernity as rationalization would, arguably, understand technocracy as a possible or even necessary outcome of the process of bureaucratization and rationalization inherent to modernity in general and the modern state in particular.[2] (Weber, 1978, 220-223; Adorno et. al., 1989; Anders, 2013; Feenberg, 2017)

However, what remains in the background in both approaches is the fact that technocracy is a phenomenon not limited to the administrative sphere itself. As suggested by Miguel Centeno (1992), technocracy describes not only a heterogeneous set of expert elites in power (within and without the state bureaucracy), but also 'a widespread mentality' which holds that *specialized* experts should inform decisively all aspects of policy making by virtue of their access to epistemic authority.[3] The technocratic 'mentality' – so to speak – needs to be present not only within the government or the administrative apparatus – as suggested in the project thesis – but rather within the public sphere itself. This, in turn, means that the public sphere is not automatically antithetic to technocracy (as a simple framing technocracy within an opposition between the administrative and the political sphere would suggest). Rather, public deliberation is liable to technocratic deformations aiming at decision-making by epistemic principles – such as knowledge, expertise, and truth. Due to this, it becomes of importance to comprehend how established paradigms of public deliberation account for public decision-making both in descriptive and normative terms. Analyzing how, when and why such a technocratic 'mentality' might take hold or not obviously falls outside the scope of a purely theoretical inquiry. Nonetheless, the theoretical analysis of democratic decision-making paradigms vis-à-vis technocracy offers the chance to uncover both explicit and implicit

[2] The point, of course, is not to blur any distinction between bureaucracy and technocracy. While technocracy as a 'form of rule' means experts in power, bureaucrats in power are not actually a sufficient condition for technocracy. We would hardly describe the functionary system in Imperial China as technocratic, after all. They were no technicians or experts in the contemporary sense. Their standing as Imperial functionaries derived rather from their erudition and general (literary) culture. (Weber, 1991; Miyazaki, 1981) And the same would hold for the rulers of Plato's ideal republic.

[3] The institutional tools, through which technocratic rule may come to be, while important, are built on top of this and, hence, falls outside the scope of this paper. For a discussion of such institutional tools, see, for instance, Biebricher, 2015; and Esmark, 2017.

normative implications of said paradigms, which in turn contributes to understanding the discursive logic of public decision-making itself.

Fittingly, the relevance of public decision-making paradigms for understanding technocracy has been pointed out, albeit with different aims, in the recent work on 'technopopulism' by Bickerton and Accetti. (Bickerton and Accetti, 2021; Urbinati, 2019) As the term they coined suggests, however, their work pays attention to how technocratic themes and devices can be deployed through and employed by populism, with the final aim of elucidating the populist phenomenon. To better understand technocracy and its coming about *per se*, I wish to shift the focus away from its specific decision-making devices and their distinction from 'genuinely' democratic institutions. Instead, I will look at how different paradigms of the public sphere can imply a potential for technocratic deformations. To this end, I will conceptualize such paradigms as possible articulations of the relationship between democracy and truth. In other words, how does technocracy relate to the public's very ability to formulate political judgments? If the technocratic mentality denotes the desire for decisions to be taken by virtue of truth, the relationship between democratic decision-making and truth is the conceptual nexus wherein to make sense of that mentality in both its nature and causes. After all, this connection is showcased very well also by talk of a Post-Truth era pinning technocracy as the opposite of populism.[4]

The very paradigm through which we account for the possibility of public decision-making expresses what role we believe the public can play in contributing to the democratic decision-making process beyond formally established procedures. Specifically, any dominating conception of democratic decision-making postulates a supposedly correct division of labor between citizens and experts. This division is exacerbated in favor of expertise when technocratic tendencies arise. Accordingly, the conceptual basis for the functional distinction between citizen and expert becomes key in explaining how the public sphere itself – which should naturally represent the citizens' side of such equation – can turn technocratic. In other words, understanding the theoretical distinctions underpinning the decisional 'division of labor' in democracy can provide a conceptual framework against which the spread of a 'technocratic mentality' might be diagnosed. In this vein, I now turn to contemporary paradigms of democratic deliberation and how they envisage functional distinctions of decisional labor between means and ends. Thereby, attention will need to be focused on the principles underlying such distinctions, even if they are always provisional, and how such principles impact the decisional logic of public deliberation.

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[4] A useful historical account of 'Post-Truth' is given in Rosenfeld, 2019. Within the young but extensive theoretical literature on post-truth most authors focus on its connection to populism. There are, however, notable exceptions ascribing a larger role to expert discourses. See, e.g., Zerilli, 2020; Vogelmann, 2018.

BY THE PEOPLE OR FOR THE PEOPLE?

As Abraham Lincoln's famous phrase has it, democracy, the 'government of the people', is at once 'by the people' and 'for the people'. These two features of a democratic polity, however, do not coexist easily. Their implicit tension has been a topic at least since the Aristotelian distinction between good and bad forms of government, which, after all, expresses at its core the very real experience that a government *by* somebody is not necessarily *for* that same somebody. The implicit and never quite resolved tension between these two requirements for the government of the people lies at the heart of the relationship between democracy and truth. While this dichotomy is certainly at the core of the possibility of technocracy, it doesn't imply only that risk. It also implies the risk for the 'government by the people' to become a government for only a part of society against the other – a risk well documented and against which we are often warned (regardless of such warning's effectiveness). However, this risk is of secondary importance for the aim of this paper. Instead, I will concentrate on the risk that some sort of objective 'government *for* the people' should take precedence over the people's government: the technocratic risk in short. When looking at the twofold structure of popular government, I will, hence, not pay attention to the first risk but only to the second, the technocratic risk.

Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to flesh out things conceptually and to gain a clearer definition of what the government 'by' and 'for' the people means. As Nadia Urbinati has pointed out, these two intuitive features of democracy equate to a normative commitment to democratic pluralism, on the one hand, and an epistemic commitment to finding the 'best' solutions for the *demos*, on the other. (Urbinati, 2014) In normative terms, the main actor of the democratic polity should be the people. Through the institutions of the public sphere, the citizens in their plurality should at once inform and be informed about politically relevant processes and events. This should culminate in institutional procedures formalizing the active participation and decisional authority of the people 'making' their own government – the government by the people. The epistemic commitment, in contrast, is wholly indifferent to its agent. Epistemically, democracy will not be judged by how far its citizens are involved in decision making processes but rather by how well they, both individually and as a society, will be faring. The democratic state, in short, should have the capabilities to technically realize complex projects, quickly gather information and react to any sort of inputs or challenges it might encounter. Of course, especially within mass democracy, this means that the democratic state needs to have complex bureaucratic structures and to fill its ranks with specialized experts. This apparatus will endow democracy with the epistemic capability of better understanding its problems, of better designing solutions and of quickly reacting to external inputs. And by so doing, increase the chance that its population will actually be faring better in life thanks to the enacted policies – the government for the people.

It is, indeed, unavoidable to judge a system also by its epistemic virtue and, hence, by its capability to be – for the lack of a better word – successful. After all, a democratic polity unable to survive or to provide at least the most basic services to its citizens will hardly be able to stay around long enough to be judged. It is, however, precisely this epistemic criterion of evaluation that can often stand in contradiction with the freedom of choice implied in the normative ideal of democratic participation. The institutional tools of democracy cannot guarantee that the people will choose the best possible policy, and, indeed, going further, cannot even guarantee that the worst possible policy will not be chosen. If one sticks with the epistemic standard of judgment, soon the public as locus of democratic deliberation will be identified as the most obvious weakness of democratic systems vis-à-vis their capability for success (as opposed to consensus). (Saffon and Urbinati, 2013) This opposition remains at the core of much debate in democratic theory, especially in the wake of the recent success of neo-identitarian populist movements. As a counter to what are often perceived as irrational and constitutionally threatening political movements, various authors have argued for strengthening epistemic checks to democratic decision-making or have argued for the epistemic aim of deliberation itself. (Estlund, 2008, 2009; Landemore 2013, 2017; Chambers 2019) Such positions are countered by authors holding the normative commitment to plurality in decision-making radically incompatible with the epistemic side of things. (Lafont, 2020) While the ideas espoused are fundamentally different, they all share a common conception of the two sides in need of functional balancing – even if their balancing is always of a complex nature due to the indistinguishability of the two sides in absolute terms.

In a nutshell, the opposition between uncertain public deliberation and informed, rationally designed policies illustrates the paradoxical nature of the public as locus of democratic deliberation. The key contention is that the citizens-voters have little cognitive grounds to take their participation and voting decisions. If the competence of citizens as members of public opinion and as voting political subjects of democratic decision-making processes is insufficient for grasping the complexity of technical and specialized issues, democracy is not guaranteed to implement the best possible policy. Confronted with this issue, result oriented justifications of democracy need to explain why we should bother with public opinion and voting in the first place. At the same time normatively oriented justifications of democracy need to explain why the outcome of plural and inclusive decision-making process might trump an epistemically better-informed policy. (Serrano Zamora 2020) While various solutions to the issue of balancing both elements are on the table, virtually all of them share the very idea of the balancing of two different democratic commitments – normative and epistemic, as spelled out by Urbinati.

Such an idea is founded on a distinction that in its ideal-type version results quite intuitive. Plural and inclusive decision-making, as the key feature of democracies,

should steer clear of specialized issues, leaving them to institutions cognitively equipped to deal with them. On first sight, this sounds convincing of course: expert interventions are supposed to not challenge the 'ends' of political action, but only the 'means'. The public will debate and then decide upon the goals the democratic polity sets itself, while the state apparatus should choose the *best* possible path to reach these goals mandated by the public. In other words, the public should debate long-term ends that are general enough not to require specialized knowledge as such. Meanwhile, the means will be in the hands of those who know how to best devise them – the specialists.

Such distinction is, however, never quite as clear as it appears in an ideal-type setting. Not only, in the obvious sense that a means-ends distinction will always be messy and multilayered. But also, because of the difficulty in making sense of the foundation grounding any real-life application of the distinction.[5] Accordingly, the issue of concern is what kind of distinctions can be made regarding the required cognitive competence to judge upon means, on the one hand, and ends, on the other. If ends can be decided upon by non-experts, the cognitive competence required to decide upon them needs to be different than the one required for deciding upon the means. In fact, the fundamental assumption about the nature of the competence required to participate in the decision-making process about both means and ends is rarely fully expressed as such. The common assumption, of course, is that taking decisions requires cognitive competence and, naturally, the average citizen's cognitive competence is extremely limited compared to that of experts in any given policy field. However, when the overarching goals of governments or policies are concerned such specialized cognitive competence is not required anymore. The reason for this, however, is not apparent.

How do we distinguish between means and ends and why does the cognitive competence required for judging upon the two differ so much? The traditional reply to this query would be to point towards a dichotomy between facts and values. However, even without getting into the intricacies of discussing the legitimacy and nature of the concept of values, this model is doomed to failure. If a special kind of competence enabling us to judge values is accepted, it will be very hard to distinguish objective means from normatively laden ends. As already Max Weber showed, the 'neutral' point of view the specialist will take on will be thoroughly determined by the normative worldview she espouses. (Weber, 2012; Henrich, 1952) Yet the problem persists. If, on the contrary, a special brand of judgments based on values is denied, it will be impossible to legitimize the qualitative difference in cognitive competence required for judging upon means and ends. The distinction itself becomes increasingly questionable.

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[5] Critical Theory's classical discussion of the means-ends conundrum and of its impossible solution can be found in Horkheimer 1947, 3-39.

Moreover, a conceptual shift from metaphysically conceived values towards individual 'opinions' simply moves the contradiction onto a different level, which instead of opposing two type of cognitive objects, now opposes cognitive objects and meaning. (Landemore et al., 2018) And the same which held true for the concept of values, holds true still: if opinions are of such nature as to enable competent judgement regarding ends, then they would color all 'objective' specialized knowledge regarding the means. If, on the contrary, opinions are not different enough to allow for a special kind of judgement, it will not be clear why judging upon ends should require a *qualitatively different* kind of cognitive competence. Such central issue about the very nature of opinion (or of values) and of its relation to political competence often remains in the background. For the nature of the relationship between truth and democracy is rarely framed outside of the question of an equilibrium between epistemic and normative commitments. What is mostly at stake in the discussion is the right mediation between two clearly defined poles – epistemic authority and value or opinion, understood as subjective point of view – with the aim of reaching their right equilibrium.

After all, if the opposition is unsolvable through a special kind of judgement, then the only possible path is that of an unresolved equilibrium between the two poles, as Habermas convincingly pointed out already in his early work. He understands this bipolar structure as resulting from an unsolvable opposition and separation between 'science' and 'politics'. By so reframing the problem, he explicitly advocated an equilibrium between the two as the ideal paradigm for public decision-making. For the opposition of science and politics allows only for three possible solutions: two undesirable 'polarized' models, plus a third and only desirable one that aims at an equilibrium between the two poles. (Habermas, 1987) The first model is the 'decisionist' one, wherein informed or uninformed politics should always take precedence over science, which should always stay subservient. Opposed to this is the 'technocratic' model, wherein, on the contrary, science should dictate both means and ends politics should pursue. Both models are problematic in Habermas' view and lead to a continuous crisis of legitimation. (Habermas, 1988) In other words, the same type of paradox described above comes to the fore. Unable and unwilling to resolve it through a clear separation of means and ends – and, hence, the introduction of a special kind of judgement for the ends – Habermas turns to a 'pragmatic' model to solve the issue. (Friedman 2020, 2-4) Within this model, the separation between science and politics is not resolved, however. It is countered by continuously instigating a cross-insemination between the two fields. (Habermas, 1987; Feenberg, 1993)

However, while Habermas accepts the unclarity of the means-ends distinction, he still holds on to the distinction itself. On the one hand, Habermas' pragmatic model prescribes that politics should maintain an influence over scientific or expert modes of operation within the government, the administration, research centers,

and so on. Hence, the autonomy of the specialist seeking a scientific answer to a given problem or set of problems should be limited by the political sphere. On the other hand, however, the pragmatic model certainly implies that decisions should at the very least be grounded in knowledge and, hence, taken by knowledgeable people. However, what exactly constitutes knowledge and how knowledgeable people should take or influence decisions is by no means clear. This model, consciously, doesn't solve the issue in a fundamental way and relies on the assumption that what logic should take precedence in any given case will become more or less evident immanently. Neither does it introduce a different type of judgement, nor does it abolish the separation between ends (politics) and means (science). (Flynn 2014)

Nonetheless, since no real pacification between the opposites is possible, Habermas' path seems indeed the only viable one: a pragmatic balancing of the two poles. However, the weakness of said supposition becomes evident in times of crisis. The balancing itself seems only possible if radical disagreement about the distinction between means and ends is absent – in other words, if there is not fundamental disagreement about the distinction between facts, their interpretation and possible goals. As soon as debate erupts about the basic area of competence of the scientific and the political, as is for instance the case with the debt crisis or climate change, it remains unresolvable.[6] By choosing the pragmatic model, the separation is engraved for good and as soon as a conflict between technocratic and populist tendencies erupts it remains unadjudicable.

At the end of the day, this means that equilibrium can only be maintained as long as there is basic agreement about the distinction between acceptable means and ends. If this distinction, however, is questioned, as is often the case in times of crisis, we are left with no tools for making sense of the relationship between democratic decisions and epistemic authority. The space for technocratic symptoms widens, as the public is once again thrown back onto its standing as epistemically incompetent, while the specialist will be tempted and maybe called on to force certain ends onto the democratic public.

A different way of framing this is to recognize the basic ambivalence of truth within the (democratic) political realm, which entails a refusal of a hard distinction between ends and means even in functional terms. As long as truth is reduced to knowledge in a basic sense, the exact shape how it should enter public deliberation might be debated, but its need seems rather intuitive. However, when talking about truth within the political sphere its meaning, as became apparent through the previous discussion, is always also encompassing the cognitive competence needed to rightly assess, acquire, and apply knowledge, which itself implies adherence to

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[6] A similar issue has been pointed out by Carlo Invernizzi Accetti's (2021) discussion of the difficulty of politicizing environmentalism, trapped between the populist denial of climate change and a set of undebatable technocratic policy approaches to the problem.

scientific models and, more generally, to specific conceptual schemes. It is due to this second dimension that the simple dichotomy between means and ends remains unsatisfying, even if taken in its pragmatic, case-by-case version.[7] As efforts to distinguish cognitive competence concerning means and ends are doomed to fail, we are thrown back onto the unpalatable choice between the two models Habermas' rightly considered as undesirable: either a decisionist approach, ignoring specialized competence concerning possible means, or a technocratic approach, ignoring political decisions concerning ends in the name of a supposed higher cognitive competence in making out those same ends.

What needs to be further investigated, hence, is not how to create a balance between two poles, which end up being very hard to distinguish precisely when we would need this distinction most – in times of crisis. It is the very notion of separated cognitive competences concerning means and ends that needs to be made away with. Only by disentangling the basic structure of what cognitive competence the public might or might not have, which would apply at once to both ends and means, will it be possible to understand the very conflict about truths within a democratic setting. This motivates the move back to the Dewey-Lippman debate, which highlights how renouncing the means-ends distinction is a necessary but not sufficient condition for avoiding technocratic biases.

THE TECHNOCRATIC BIAS

If a lasting equilibrium between scientism and decisionism is impossible, the way in which we understand the ultimate indistinguishability of means and ends becomes key to understanding the possibility of a technocratic public sphere. By turning to the Dewey-Lippmann debate, I aim at showing that even if there is a clear refusal of any means-ends distinction (functional or otherwise), a participatory conception of democratic political decision-making can still bear the possibility of a technocratic bias. The 'debate', which took place throughout the 1920s, was rather one-sided, as Lippmann never directly addressed Dewey's interventions. (Friedman 2020) Nonetheless, it is representative of the need to make sense of the widespread feeling that democracy was unable to put forward the best solutions to the growing and complex problems of modern society such as employment or education. Lippmann – a socialist in youth and an increasingly disillusioned progressive in adulthood – advocated the rule by diversified specialist groups maintaining democratic institutions only to counter the sedimentation of elites. Instead, Dewey championed a participatory model based on collective problem-solving involving both specialists and citizens. (Westbrook, 1991; Mason, 2017; Frega, 2019; Le Goff, 2019)

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[7] Indeed, the question of competence is also immanently problematic within a technocratic setting. In other words, who adjudicates a possible conflict between two specialized areas? (Friedman, 2017)

Nonetheless, also Dewey agreed in his review of Lippmann's *The Phantom Public* (1925) that the complexities of modern societies made it necessary for at least a part of government to be 'carried on by non-political agencies'. (Dewey, 1984a, 217) The issue was to which extent this was necessary.

Dewey and Lippmann approached a radically new kind of democratic condition, which only the possibilities of the late industrial age had made possible. This new reality was the modern, industrialized mass democracy – identified at the time through the term 'great society', following British sociologist Graham Wallas.[8] (Latour, 2008; Stiegler 2019) To both Dewey and Lippmann this situation had a clear political connotation: the United States becoming a 'great society' meant first and foremost that the ideal of the Jeffersonian town-hall republic had irrevocably been superseded by a mass democracy. (Bybee, 1999; Menand, 2001; Seyb, 2015) Old solutions did not apply anymore. As Dewey summed up: 'the answer of Aristotle 'that the community must be kept simple and small' is no longer possible of realization'. (Dewey, 1984a, 215) The technologically advanced industrial economy and the geographically broad interrelations they implied made modern bureaucracy indispensable to manage intricate networks of interdependencies. Professionally trained experts were increasingly becoming the backbone of government. Within this context the USA had become a 'great society', a modern mass democracy.[9] Public opinion was taking on a completely new and unexpected shape that both Lippmann and Dewey sought to understand. Thereby, they addressed a number of topics. However, the issue of the relationship between the public sphere and truth was, arguably, the central nexus of their conceptual exchange and represents in any case the point of interest for the purpose of this paper. As I will argue, the debate highlights how a 'technocratic bias' within the very structure of modern public opinion can be present even in a participatory and pragmatist conception of democracy

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[8] See Wallas (1914). It is worth noting how the term obtained a mostly a positive connotation, after it was used in the 1960s by the Johnson administration in the US to describe its own reform agenda. Instead, between the wars it was at best ambiguous. For Wallas, the term 'great society' described an advanced industrial society, wherein sufficient supply could only be achieved by highly complex and always increasing interdependencies. Both Dewey and Lippmann took over the terminology to refer to the new post-WWI condition of American society.

[9] Paradigmatically, one could say, that just as the Prussian post office represented the ideal paradigm for the bureaucratization of society at the turn of 20th century, the American society of the 1920s (through the combination of bureaucracy and a mass democratic public supported by its media industry) represented the ideal paradigm for the massification of democracy. (Graeber, 2015) It is no coincidence that many authors looked at and traveled to the USA to understand the coming about of modern democratic culture. (Offe, 2005) For Max Weber, who was among them and who in other areas believed US society to be less thoroughly rationalized than European ones, the US-American party system represented the most 'rationalized' form of political contest. (Weber, 1978, 1443-1449)

as held by Dewey – regardless of its intention of countering Lippmann's distrust of public decision-making.[10]

Through the juxtaposition of the reality of mass democracy and the ideal model of the town hall republic – encircling a small community of relatively equal individuals – Dewey highlights the problem of his time's democratic public as a completely new and qualitatively 'intellectual' problem. (Dewey, 1984b, 314) The 'intellectual' problem was, in short, that, within mass society, problems had become too complex for the public to grasp. In the town hall republic such an 'intellectual' problem was unknown. For the amount and availability to citizens of epistemic tools was almost unproblematic within a small and relatively simple community. In other words, in the town hall matters debated by the public were accessible and comprehensible for everybody. This fundamentally changed with the advent of mass democracy. In mass society, problems become so complex that the 'intellectual' problem of their public accessibility and comprehensibility becomes the main issue at stake when reflecting about the character and function of public opinion. Overcoming the idealized vision of town hall democracy made it impossible to ignore not only the extensive availability of knowledge. Rather, also the intensive-qualitative availability and comprehensibility of information for the citizen became questionable at the very least. Not only had it become impossible for a citizen to *know* what was going on in the entire country, it became impossible for them to *comprehend* what was going on. The complex processes and interrelations constituting the institutional and economic reality of a 'great society' could not be understood without specialized knowledge, which, as much was clear, was available only to specialized experts and not to citizens at large. (Lippmann, 1993, 32-43; Dewey, 1984b, 319-323)

The split between the political role of citizens as policy makers and their cognitive competence first became fully apparent. However, if the public itself could not be informed properly, then what was left of the republican ideal, the USA had been founded upon and both Dewey and Lippmann saw themselves in the tradition of?

By deconstructing how the ideal citizen – able to acquire and process knowledge for all relevant policy areas – could be reproduced within a mass society Lippman excludes any proposed solution: eugenic (breeding perfect citizens), educational (educate them), ethical (a moral code, which fits all situations), populist (more democracy still) or socialist (class consciousness). The problem with these solutions, is that they "all assume that either the voters are inherently competent to direct the course of affairs or that they are making progress toward such an ideal". (Lippmann, 1993, 28-29) The ideal of the omnicompetent citizen itself is not the problem, it is its attainability, which Lippmann (and Dewey) consider unrealistic. As discussed in the previous section, it is at this point that a functional distinction between means

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[10] This was not because either Dewey or Lippmann held technocratic positions, but rather because they were debating the coming about of the very conditions of a technocratic understanding of the public as such. (Marres, 2007; Russill, 2016; Friedman, 2020)

and ends is often brought into play and the paradox of the public is reduced to the question of equilibrium between science and politics.

This is where the debate starts showing its singularity compared to the current narrative: any even only functional distinction between means and ends is ruled out by both Lippmann and Dewey. (Lippmann, 1993, 21-23; Dewey, 1984b, 238-241) It is never even seriously considered, as democracy is understood from the outset as a place of conflict: conflict not only about what goals and policies to pursue, but also about how to understand information. (Le Goff 2019) It is due to this that both are deeply aware of how the issue of the political role of experts deviates from more traditional narratives and questions stemming from the Platonic ideal of philosopher-kings. (Dewey, 1984b, 363-364) The issue is not anymore how to correlate ability and rule. It becomes how to correlate knowledge and rule. The Imperial Chinese functionary or Plato's ideal philosopher king were both universal intellectuals – their erudition is ideally omni comprehensive and as such proof of talent, not of specialization.[11] The expert of the great society, on the contrary, is highly specialized. They do not need to know anything beyond their own area of expertise and, most importantly, just as any other citizen they also cannot possibly know everything relevant at the highly specialized level necessary. (Dewey, 1984b, 312-319) The epochal break is characterized very effectively by Dewey, who recognizes that "[t]he problem of a democratically organized public is primarily and essentially an intellectual problem, in a degree to which the political affairs of prior ages offer no parallel". (Dewey, 1984b, 314)

To avoid renouncing a 'democratically organized public' altogether, only two options seem possible. The first option is to re-empower the citizen as such individually. Access must somehow be guaranteed to all or at least most of the information relevant to political processes and the cognitive competence of each citizen has to somehow be guaranteed. However, leaving aside eugenic dystopias, this seems only imaginable if the political body were to be shrunk back to a premodern size – in other words, by going back to the townhall republic. (Lippmann, 1993, 67-70; Dewey, 1984b, 323-324) If the first option – to epistemically re-empower the individual citizen – is off the table, the second option is to give experts a specific role within the body politic and so to allow for some kind of mediation between the public and specialized knowledge. However, how exactly to implement such a view is not obvious and it is precisely at this intersection that the technocratic possibility arises. All threads rejoin here – let's resume: (1) The public needs epistemic empowerment to be organized democratically. However, (2) such epistemic empowerment is dependent on highly specialized competencies and knowledges and out

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[11] Arguably an exception can be made in the case of the military functionaries in China, whose examinations were related to their 'specialty'. However, since political rule laid in the hands of civilian officials, the general argument holds. Again, see Miyazaki (1981).

of reach of any individual citizen. Hence, (3) experts need to play some sort of mediating role for the public to still be democratically organized.

Mediation is sought to allow retaining a positive participatory moment in democracy – while the citizen will not completely fill the knowledge gap separating them from the expert, they will have 'enough' data to base their decisions on. However, even if we grant that experts can function as mediators between public policy deliberations and the democratic public, it remains unclear not only how but especially *what* exactly they mediate. This leads back to the problem of identifying a set of normative problems that are for one or another reason evaluable based on a different type of epistemic ability. As was discussed above, this represents an unsolvable conundrum: either they are of the same kind as 'epistemic' problems – and then more epistemic preparation automatically equate to better grounds to judge – or they are of a different kind and then it is not clear what type of problems they are.[12] Against this backdrop, Lippmann's point is simple: mediation between experts and citizens within the public sphere is impossible. In other words, Lippmann dismisses any decisional division of labor as fictious. Dewey largely agreed with Lippmann's diagnosis but did not share his pessimism. To fully appreciate this, however, Dewey's radically different insight into the nature of collective decision-making must be understood.

Dewey – true to the Pragmatist anti-metaphysical insight – aims at abolishing not only the means-ends distinction as a metaphysical remnant, but also the very distinction between epistemic and normative/political problems.[13] This is what makes him of interest in the contest of this paper: Dewey does not envisage functional distinctions either between public opinion and administrative sphere, or within public opinion itself. (Stiegler 2019; Frega 2019) Instead, a collective kind of 'inquiry' – modeled on experimentalism – is presented as the paradigm for public decision-making. (Dewey, 1988)

It is on these grounds that Dewey reacts to Lippmann's criticism of mass democracy. Agreeing with Lippmann that cognitive competence cannot be 'mediated', he offers a notion of epistemic social mediation alternative to the ones Lipmann ridiculed in *The Phantom Public*. According to Dewey, it is not cognitive competence that is to be conveyed to the public through mediation. For mediation cannot be understood as an activity involving an active pole – the expert conveying knowledge – and a passive one – the citizen obtaining enough information to decide upon normative issues. The impossibility of every individual obtaining enough information in all specialized areas relevant to policy is precisely what led to the conundrum in the first place. Dewey, hence, recognizes mediation as an organic process, which

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[12] This is the reason why all means-ends distinctions are, after all, always only functional.

[13] Of course, also Habermas would agree with such a distinction. However, he and most contemporary democratic theory commit to a functional distinction of systems. (Flynn 2014) This, in turn, leads to the problem of equilibrium discussed in the previous paragraph of this article.

can be best understood in the form of a collective 'social inquiry' through a continuous dissemination and interaction of data, interpretations and opinions in media. Dissemination is carried out not only by experts, or by journalists, but also by citizens at large. It becomes both the vehicle to convey specialized knowledge to the citizen by combining it with particular interests or values and the vehicle to make hidden interests (overlooked by the expert consensus) visible to expertise. By having inquiry and dissemination entering the public sphere already on the local level, Dewey hopes for the 'Great Society' – the highly complex industrialized mass democracy – to be supplemented by a 'Great Community'. (Dewey, 1984b, 365) A public sphere that will replicate on mass scale the conflict culture based on debate, which he envisaged for the ideal town hall republic. The so conceived 'inquiry' allows Dewey to envisage a space for an active participation of the public without having to fall back onto the ideal situation of the town hall entirely. In the townhall republic, the citizens had enough competence and knowledge to deliberate over local matters, which they could often literally touch with their own hands. Collective inquiry and its dissemination do not allow the citizen to regain the same kind of individual epistemic authority *vis-á-vis* political issues. However, Dewey recognizes that if there is no distinction between epistemic and normative evaluation, then the public's participation is possible regardless of their individual epistemic authority. (Dewey, 1988) Inquiry includes both expert and non-expert in an experimental identification of problems and probing of possible solutions, wherein specialized knowledge plays a role as well as group interests or values within society. (Dewey, 1984b, 366-369) Nonetheless, both inquiry and its dissemination maintain a quasi-cognitive vocabulary: inquiry (while not being tied to specialized experts) aims at finding the *best* solution to any given problem. Of course, the picture is a complex one: there isn't a neutral, epistemic dimension of problem solving removed from the conflictual process of identifying problems through the interaction of competing interests and values within a society. Yet, the paradigm remains that of problem solving. Doesn't this mean that the privileged position of cognitive competence is, after all, maintained when possible solutions are debated? And doesn't the debate surrounding possible solutions itself influence the experimental identification of problems? If that is so, it is debatable if Dewey's position is in fact fully immune to Lippmann's critique.

The issue is more complex still. The second relevant shift, Dewey wishes to operate, is that from individual to collective epistemic ability. This shift allows Dewey to envisage an organic decision-making process not based on procedures (separating administrative/epistemic and public/normative spheres), but rather on collective inquiry through trial and error. (Bohman, 2010; Stiegler, 2019) The epistemic ability enabling such inquiry is not tied to the individual but rather to the collective. This allows to disentangle the problem of cognitive competence as it was presented in Lippmann, and as it hangs over much (contemporary) theory, when it focuses on

the divide between epistemic and normative commitments of democracy. The pragmatist substitution of experimental validity for truth aims precisely at undercutting the dominance of fixed (social) scientific models and, in so doing, at supplying an alternative for the lack of a meta-theory able to organize compartmentalized specialized knowledge. (Bohmann, 2010; Frega, 2019: Stiegler, 2019) This means that on a collective level the distinction between epistemic and normative rationality all but disappears. Dewey points out how evaluations and opinions arise not only out of a supposedly neutral intellectual sphere but also out of the emotional sphere and the contingent interests citizens represent and the values they espouse. Thus, no single epistemic consensus underpinning expertise can be expected to take into account all relevant interests without an organic public debate. (Dewey, 1988) Both public and experts underpin each other and are the basis for the evaluations of possible policies in a democracy. Opinions and evaluations of any kind coming from the public enter a continuous process of interaction with expertise, which is geared at identifying problems and evaluating possible solutions. So understood, the public can truly become a 'Great Community'.[14] Mediation in the 'Great Community' is not only continuous, but also omnidirectional. It is not only the expert conveying specialized knowledge to the citizen, but also the citizen conveying their interests or convictions to the expert, the politician or another group of citizens. One could still object that when it comes to defining what is the case, the Deweyan picture assigns to experts a privileged position in pointing out, explaining or choosing the relevant facts and, thus, form opinions. This is, however, a wrong impression. In fact, it is precisely the collective and only the collective that is endowed with the epistemic ability to evaluate what expertise is relevant for any given problem and to decide what facts are relevant facts or not. (Dewey, 1988)

With this account, Dewey certainly offers an out from the purely processual account of public deliberation and its always provisional distinction of spheres. The key insight is the rejection of spheres altogether by recognizing the collective epistemic ability of the public. In purely functional terms, this already allows to point out how the public dimension of technocracy is integral to the very concept itself: if it is indeed the public that organizes the epistemic legitimacy of expertise. Any technocratic deformation of democracy needs to go through the public as well.[15] It is less clear, however, how exactly public decision-making as inquiry relates to the possibility of such technocratic deformations of the public.

Dewey surely intended for the 'Great Community' to express the positive function of the public in defining possible new directions and pointing out unseen problems. However, the entire semantic baggage of the very term 'inquiry' itself points

[14] Of course, the role and constitution of any part of public opinion is continuously changing. (Bohman 2010)

[15] In Habermas, a technocratic deformation of the public could only follow as a colonizing effect of an already overstepping sphere of rationality. For instance, economic rationality colonizing the life world or administrative rationality overstepping into the political (see, e.g., Verovšek, 2021).

towards an epistemic logic. The distinction between epistemic and normative rationality is abolished disallowing the expert to impose a certain interpretation of facts based on their epistemic authority. However, the overarching logic of inquiry still maintains an epistemic flavor: problems need to be identified, solutions need to be found. This is a creative process identifying new problems and new solutions. Yet, the logic remains that of finding solutions to identified problems by applying a rational process of collective inquiry. Notwithstanding the active role Dewey wishes to ascribe to the citizen, this points back to a logic of epistemic problem solving, which looks for the *right* solution to a given problem taking into account all given information. Such a structure, however, sidelines the possibility of a politically desirable solution, if it might appear less efficient from an epistemic point of view. As Dewey put it in his *Lectures in China*, the aim of democracies should be 'that of replacing the authority of tradition with the authority of science'. (Dewey 1973, 167) Fittingly, knowledge and information still play a key role in how Dewey envisages the single citizen participating in the collective process of inquiry. He warns against 'exaggerat[ing] the amount of intelligence and ability demanded to render such judgments fitted for their [democratic] purpose', but still holds onto this prerequisite. (Dewey, 1984b, 365-366) For, after all, the lack of expert ability of the citizen is supplemented by their role as sources of information themselves (they identify problems that the expert does not see, they judge the efficacity of a given solution, they bring their interests into play). Accordingly, when it comes to recommending a practical course of action, Dewey still insists on the need to simply make facts available to allow the public to judge. Again, the logic of public deliberation seems thrown back onto a principle postulating a certain kind of epistemic ability and knowledge as prerequisites for desirable decision-making or – in Dewey's vein – problem-solving. The fact that such epistemic ability now results from collective interaction, rather than being bound to individual actors, does not change this very fact. Even if it is a collective decision and nobody can judge the decision from a neutral, purely expert point of view, the field of political conflict remains that of debating the epistemic validity of different positions.

While it is true that Lippmann remains bound to a very traditional understanding of knowledge as representation, which Dewey convincingly refutes, Dewey's model of public inquiry remains bound if not to a cognitive, to an experimental paradigm of problem-solving. The epistemic ability embodied by collective intelligence remains key in legitimizing public decision-making and, hence, its decisions remain still out of reach for *legitimate* criticism that is not itself backed by an analogous epistemic authority. Nonetheless, Dewey's organic conception of problem-solving guarantees that any citizen's perspective is seen at the very least as the expression of certain interests that remain unseen within an established epistemic consensus. Yet, the privileged position of epistemic problem-solving and scientific authority is present even in Dewey – regardless of the intention to abolish the distinction between

normative and epistemic. While the normative element – not requiring specialized epistemic authority – allows to identify problems and judge solutions, the solutions themselves are understood in terms of successful epistemic problem-solving.

The continued priority of an experimental – if not epistemic – vocabulary in conceiving of public decision-making as collective inquiry highlights once again the paradox of the modern public sphere. If epistemic authority leads to better policy decisions – and Lippmann accepts this premise, as Dewey does, even if he transposes such authority to the collective level – then what does it mean for the public to be involved in the actual policy decisions at all? After all, it remains still true that the public can never be as specialized as the specialist. In this vein, Lippmann critiques the notion of public affairs altogether: "public affairs are in no convincing ways [the citizen's] affairs. They are for the most part invisible". (Lippmann, 1993, 3) Public affairs are not only too specialized to be appreciated adequately. They are in a radical sense not appreciable at all without specialized knowledge. For Lippmann, this leaves to the public only one function. Namely, that of checking that the experts do not acquire too much power through elections, which enable the maintenance of social peace by making the interest of as many social groups as possible come to the fore at the level where political decisions are made. The citizens can only follow their own interest and their democratic participation should be limited precisely to pursuing their respective interests by trying to vote into office or to oust politicians or parties, which do or do not accord with such interests. The collective action of citizenship along these lines will secure that not one interest group will appropriate government for its own benefit. (Lippmann, 1993, 115-125) They are entrusted only – if that is even the right word – with ensuring that those who do decide do not take over.

Indeed, if at the end of the day epistemic ability remains the foundation of competent political decision-making and judgment, Lipmann's point still applies. The function of the public might be symbolically embellished, understood as central and meaning endowing as Dewey does, but how does it actively contribute to political *decisions*? It seems the public is at least a source of information within the collective problem-solving process and at most the instance that collectively chooses what expertise to trust – however always on the basis of its collective epistemic insight. This, in short, is the conceptual root of the very technocratic possibility arising out of the encounter between democracy and bureaucracy. If one takes Lipmann's critique seriously, one must realize that by accepting the premise that epistemic principles are the basis for better judgements about both means and ends, one also needs to accept that the public deliberative aspect of democracy will always lack something when it comes to envisage actual political alternatives. Such an understanding of the democratic public seems technocratic in the very literal sense of the word. The *demos*, after all, is only relegated to legitimizing the real locus of *kratos*, the administration or technostructure, which is holder of the *techne*.

AN ARENDTIAN CONCLUSION: WORLD-BUILDING INSTEAD OF IN-QUIRY

If a technocratic bias is present even in pragmatist conceptions of democratic decision-making, it becomes clear how a technocratic mentality can arise especially in times of crisis. If crisis in this context is the breakdown of an accepted distinction between acceptable means *and* ends, any political debate in times of crisis risks becoming a conflict about the epistemic establishment of truths. (Rosenfeld, 2019; Moore et al., 2020) Possible political ends and not only means are treated as matters that only the specialist can decide upon. Such a scenario, however, represents precisely the spread of a technocratic mentality, which denies the legitimacy of different aims that are arrived at using different criteria of judgment. The more such a mentality is established, the more it creates the fundamental presupposition to establish also actual institutions of technocratic flavor.

Dewey – who coincidentally wrote in such a time of crisis – avoids the problem at this level by spelling out clearly how collective decision-making works. Nonetheless, even his notion of collective inquiry still seems to imply the priority of an epistemic approach to problem-solving. Due to this, his convincing functional depiction of public decision-making as inquiry, could profit from an Arendtian corrective to its model of collective problem-solving, which points towards a process not semantically bound to an epistemic outlook form the start.

If an epistemic principle remains the paradigm of decision-making, scientific cognitive competence risks becoming the only measure of good political decisions. For any accepted functional distinction between means and ends as areas of competence of experts and citizens remains always at risking of breaking down in favor of the epistemic sphere of expertise. After all, the epistemic criterion remains decisive in defining what decisions are all about to begin with. This, however, leads to a vicious cycle difficult to escape: the more such a decisional principle is widespread, the more technocratic decision-making will become possible, and the more technocratic decision-making will be implemented, the more it will prompt such a mentality. Technocracy is deeply misunderstood if it is reduced only to an ideological project or to a deformation of bureaucratic structures. Rather than equating technocracy to bureaucratic rule, we need to conceptualize it as rule by epistemic authority enabled by the public. As long as epistemic authority remains the safe haven the public seeks shelter in, technocracy is always a risk. The only other route available is that of understanding political decisions as devoid of clear decisional criteria altogether: neither knowledge, nor value. This is something that Dewey's conception of the Great Community seems to imply, but at the same time undermine by holding onto an epistemic understanding of decision-making as problem-solving. Arguably, it is such a situation that Arendt had in mind when she wrote that "the reduction of the political to administration [...] imposes itself, whenever the political sphere is approached from the standpoint of truth". (Arendt, 2012, 369)

The Arendtian framework allows to capture that judging politically relates one to the world not in terms of knowledge and cognitive competence but in a qualitatively different manner, which does not aim at epistemic solutions but rather at what Arendt would call world-building. (Zerilli, 2015) To briefly point out the Arendtian insight, it is useful to think of political decisions not as solutions to issues that need solving but rather as the expressions of a continuous effort to maintain a shared space of appearances. Ideally, this should allow each citizen to contribute to a changing but commonly shaped world, which is the end in itself of the political as such. For without the political sphere there would not be a space for the citizen to appear, act and be anything beyond the confines of their private life.[16] Due to this, understanding other citizen's points of view has not only an epistemic aim, but is in itself an effort to understand somebody else's public expression as such – contributing already to the establishment of a common world. Therefore, according to Arendt, one of the main political virtues is representative thinking, which denotes the effort to think from somebody else's point of view, without any epistemic aim. (Arendt, 1992, 69-72) The so constituted plural world is where political decisions are taken. But while epistemic concerns are certainly always relevant in such decision, they are always geared towards the plural expression of citizens through opinion and action. This is the reason for the centrality of the notion of action in the Arendtian account of politics. (Markell, 2009) Action – so understood as a plural activity aimed at maintaining a shared space of appearances – is the end goal of politics and therefore escapes any logic of problem-solving – which always implies a goal outside of politics itself. While in functional and institutional terms Arendt would probably have agreed with much of Dewey's idea for a Great Community, her account of politics stresses how the public cannot be understood as a force dealing with problem-solving, but rather as a force concerned with continuous world-building through representative thinking and collective action.

The root cause of technocracy is the breakdown of this way of accessing the world. To avoid the abyss of reconstructing a commonly accepted horizon distinguishing possible means and acceptable ends, the possibility to view facts in light of different and diverse opinions is increasingly negated. The larger this denial becomes, the less democratic institutions will be able to capture and process the politically relevant way in which citizens view the world – even if it seems factually flawed. The problem is not exclusively an educational or communicational one, as many would have it. It is rather the technocratic bias of mass-democratic decision-making imposing itself and foreclosing the ability of different political goals to be legitimately present in the public forum.

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[16] Of course, this equates to a very broad notion of the political, including arts and literature among other things. Such an account of the political is, however, not limited to only Arendtian political theory. See Marchart 2007.

What becomes clear by highlighting the technocratic bias implicit in the relationship between truth and democracy, is that not only bureaucratic expertise but also mass democracy is one of the fundamental conditions of technocracy. After all, if technocracy were in place as an authoritarianism of experts – it would in all consequence mean that somebody would wield the discretionary power of the political sovereign. It is only if the public wishes for epistemic principles to be the foundation to setting the political agenda that political judgement and the political sphere are effectively undermined if not altogether eliminated.[17] Technocratic symptoms, hence, cannot be understood as results of a project coming from outside democracy and directed at undermining the decisional dependence of the administrative sphere from the political, rather it should be understood as a possibility implicit even participatory and deliberative conceptions of democratic decision-making.[18] This leads to my main contention. To avoid a technocratic bias both the means-ends distinction and any epistemic goal or principle of public decision-making need to be recognized as illusory.

Due to the necessity to understand the world in the variety of ways in which different people might view it, Hannah Arendt identified truth as the limit of politics – as truth does not allow for a variety of point of views. (Arendt, 2002, 390-392, 420) The political judgements we make are impossible to discern in their elements of knowledge and of opinion. They are in themselves expression of a way of relating and, possibly, acting in this common world. Indeed, as already discussed, it is impossible to separate means and ends, so that we could clearly separate a judgment of preference (opinion) from a judgment of fact (knowledge). For anything that is political is already geared towards the common world of plurality. In other words, judging politically expresses both an opinion about how things are or how about things should be. But, also, they are an expression of world-building in and of themselves. Any political view and judgement always at once refers to a common world and aims at changing it in some way or another to allow for an expression of whoever is judging and acting politically (thus contributing to the evolving plural construction of the common world itself). There can be no clear identification of the epistemic foundation on which a specific judgment is made – no hard distinction of what is knowledge and what is opinion behind any given judgment can be made.

This does not immediately solve all issues connected to political judgement and democratic decisions, but it enables one to envisage the problem in new terms. Political opinions and political judgements need to be understood as a way of relating to the world. They express an aspect of said world and maybe aim at changing it in

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[17] Of course, they would be eliminated also in an authoritarian context, but due to different reasons.

[18] While the populist risk implicit in democracy has drawn much attention in recent years, not the same can be said about technocracy. Such a mismatch has been diagnosed also by others. For instance, in Urbinati, 2014, or Müller, 2014. See also Bickerton and Accetti, 2021.

a specific manner.[19] (Arendt, 2006, 235-237) This means that any information or string of information entering the public sphere is always already bound up in what it intends to express and represent and to whomever expresses it. For instance, to choose a controversial topic as example, the basic facts of child carriage and birth in relation to abortion issues, might mean very different things not only to who holds different political views, but also simply to who can or cannot bear children, and to those who have or have not. In any case, however, and that is the fundamental point: in the public sphere information is always conveyed from a specific perspective which expresses something real about the common world and which remains inaccessible and inexpressible from a different point of view.

This is still in line with Dewey's idea of collective inquiry. However, it is precisely at this conjunction that the possibility of a technocratic mentality becomes apparent. If we hold onto an epistemic model aimed at finding solutions to problems, it might always push us towards identifying a set of knowledges or a set of cognitive competencies, which are to be excluded from the public debate altogether because of their (at least alleged) falsity or inaccuracy – possible solutions are to be tested by epistemic standards, after all. This tendency risks becoming endemic, however, if in times of crisis there is a breakdown of an accepted distinction between means and ends, facts and aims. If the way the world is viewed is already politically relevant, excluding any view altogether amounts to disallowing for the expression of a politically relevant way in which the world is viewed. While keeping in mind Dewey's failure to get rid of an epistemic or technocratic bias altogether, his argument for responding to the complexities of mass democracy by wishing for a 'great community' to supplement it, still holds. Yet, precisely because such a process would necessitate us to make an effort to "understand [...] our next door neighbor", it seems intuitively to also necessitate us to allow for the neighbor's view to count for something even if it is epistemically unsound to us or at all. (Dewey, 1984b, 368) This, however, does not mean that these points of view need to be included only for the sake of their hidden epistemic value. That is, they should not only be included for the sake of what such point of views might be understood as symptoms of – for instance, as anti-vaccination public opinion might be a symptom of widespread skepticism towards vaccines and prompt policies aimed at incentivizing vaccination. The point of view itself must be allowed into the public forum without being decried as irrational from the start – only so, we might argue from an Arendtian perspectivist point of view, might the position itself be opened up for change.

Instead, when the public looks for 'undebatable' truths in defining the horizon of possible decisions – and so wishes to simply exclude irrational positions – the ground for technocracy has been laid. Such fixture of truths, as Arendt pointed out,

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[19] It is not by chance that the current crisis of representative democracy is strongest in regard to those intermediary bodies, which are supposed to politically interact with and pass along how citizens view the world. (Urbinati 2015)

very banally delimit the realm of change or of the political itself (as truth cannot be changed). (Markell, 2009) The point is not that truth disappears from public opinion, but rather that the insistence on truth and facticity impedes the entrance of other perspectives onto the same public sphere. (Arendt 2006, 259-263) Politically, there is no hard distinguishability between truth and falsity. As James Conant has pointed out, such a perspectivism yields a notion of 'plain, harsh truth' that names things as they are, but stands in utter contrast to any objectivable and absolute criterium of truth. (Conant, 2006) If this is forgotten, the viewpoint of whoever or whatever is considered holder of the *techne* becomes the only one admitted to the public forum – even if we understand this something as the collective epistemic ability of the public. Instead of being the locus of political debate and conflict, the public is forced into conformity when the technocratic bias is unchecked.[20] This delimitation, however, blurs any distinction in plausibility, veracity and competence of all the views that are thereby excluded from the public forum. This in turn might raise the chances of even a conscious denial of factual truths. In Arendtian terms, we could say that if expert truth and specialized competence become too large a limit to the expression of different viewpoints onto a world politics aims to change, then politics will radically escape the limitation of truth – leading to all the dangers such a situation might involve.

If, instead, the public is supposed to have a larger role in democratic government than just that of guaranteeing a plural distribution of power, the very premise of the relationship between epistemic principle and better decisions needs to be questioned. Renouncing the premise that epistemic competence leads to better decisions does not necessarily mean renouncing 'truth' or factuality completely, in favor of a decisionist conception of politics.[21] But renouncing the premise means that we have to reconsider what it means to take a (better) decision without referring to an epistemic criterion at all, which is what we do when we regard knowledge and cognitive competence as absolute discriminants in taking better decisions. The Arendtian alternative to this is constituted by world-building through representative thinking and action. The central consequence of such an assumption is that if – as it should – truth, factuality and specialized competence enter the picture of a political judgement, it can never be as an external factor preceding the judgement itself and transforming judgement into a process of subsuming empirical data into pregiven conceptual schemes. (Zerilli, 2015, 55-82) If there is anything like a political judgement, it will treat facts and competence in a political manner already: taking into account the point of view they come from and what they express about the world that the judger cannot perceive from their point of view.

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[20] The incompatibility of democracy with a uniform public is evidently an issue that transcends the narrower issue of the relationship between the public and truth. See, for instance, Marchart, 2007, 154-159.

[21] See, for instance, Zerilli, 2020; Vogelmann, 2018.

It is only such a perspectival conception of truth within the political sphere that allows to rightly frame the technocratic phenomenon. We cannot understand technocracy fully if we do not see its roots as a possibility implicit in mass democracy itself. The very indistinguishability of means and ends within the political explains what Arendt has termed the never-ending struggle to balance two dangers: "the danger of taking [facts] as the results of some necessary development which men could not prevent and about which they can therefore do nothing and the danger of denying them, of trying to manipulate them out of the world". (Arendt, 2006, 259) Popular will and epistemic efficiency cannot be separated, they are by the very nature of the political itself always intertwined and inseparable. As soon as we try to externalize truths from politics, as the technocratic bias always tempts us to do, we end up with a growing inability to view and debate the world in a political manner. However, it is precisely when an accepted horizon of possible 'ends' breaks down, that political debate is most needed. A 'Great Community' allowing for the communication between different political worldviews might indeed be the only democratic alternative to technocracy – as Dewey thought. However, if we wish to establish a truly political 'Great Community' allowing for a common political world building, we must abandon the comfort and reassurance of non-political truth.

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