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Authority*

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I want to defend four claims: (1) public decision-makers are inescapably dependent on authoritative testimony from experts; (2) the expert disciplines are also authority-dependent, especially when epistemic claims cross field lines; (3) authority-dependence poses a dilemma: it is presumptively rational in a consensualist world to argue from and acquiesce to authorities, but deference to authority has the effect of foreclosing debate; and (4) the demand that individuals achieve epistemic mastery of complex fields is an unsatisfactory response to the dilemma of authority-dependence.

Two Examples of Authority-Dependence

In some respects, the claims that public and disciplinary actors are authority-dependent describe a common plight. Both policy-makers and disciplinary actors must consider factual claims, draw inferences from evidence, and master literatures. And they share the predicament of authority-dependence. Two examples may illustrate this common predicament.

The first example is Thomas Haskell's (1984:xi). I might prefer the Darwinian to the biblical narrative because I have examined the fossil record for myself, worked through the details of Darwin's argumentation, and followed the debates that led up to the present version of the theory; *or*, failing to one degree or another at any or all of these tasks, I prefer the Darwinian narrative because I accept the *conclusions* of experts. That is, given the numbers and enormity of technical literatures, and the complexities within them, I accept expert testimony in lieu of inspecting evidence or hearing the arguments out. Thus, Haskell says, we believe in evolution "not because we have in mind the evidence and experience it would take to envision the process and grasp it in a fully rational way, but because we trust biologists" (1984:xi).

The second example suggests that deference to authority also arises as an expositional accident—a side effect of scholarly citation. Citation, of course, serves many functions—to acknowledge debts, identify allies and opponents, clarify and illustrate claims, display competence, and (especially in journals) to acquiesce to editors. These functions may have unintended side-effects on a par with the most explicit function of citation—as a mode of proof. Listen, for instance, to Walton (1989:60):

> Practical studies of interesting cases of appeals to expert authority in argumentation in Woods and Walton (1974), Woods and Walton (1982) and Walton (1985), indicate six requirements to be met for an appeal to expertise to be reasonable.

Next comes the six requirements, stated briefly *as if* fully defended. (I am citing Walton solely to comment on his mode of exposition, so his cited sources do not appear in my bibliography.) And later, in defending the usefulness of the logic of expert systems as ways of avoiding improper uses of authority, Walton (1989:69) argues this way:

> The Dreyfus case for inaccessibility brings out the important point that analogy is extremely important in expert reasoning, and is equally important in understanding many kinds of reasoning in informal logic. But as indicated by Eliot (1986), current research

> in AI is tackling the problem of analogical problem-solving as a form of reasoning in expert systems.

Walton is arguing, I submit, in an unremarkable, conventionally sanctioned way—an expositional method standardized in the social and natural sciences as well as the humanities.

Perhaps the most explicit examples can be attributed to the popularity of the APA citation method. It is not at all an innocuous literary technique. The parenthetical citations can stand in place of definitions—as they do in this typical passage (1989:23):

> Ordinary folk argue only if pressed by events and only enough to *satisfice* (March and Simon, 1965; see Benoit, 1981, 1982, 1983a, 1983b, 1985; Benoit and Benoit, 1987).[1]

This puts a burden on the reader. And intelligibility is not the whole problem, for the parenthetical citations function emblematically as proof. They function analogously to nonverbal communication, as in this made-up example:

> Argumentation causes a Socratic effect (Colt, 1945; Van and Eemeren, 1989) and cognitive rehearsal of counterargumentation (Doe and Roe, 1977). Thus, when people believe they are being "argued to," they become more cognitively alert and critical (Gideon and Wainwright, 1989; Smith and Wesson, 1988).

In a world of multiplying and swelling literatures, the parenthetical citation is an unexamined presumption favoring the belief that a statement has been proved. It is a pragmatically powerful presumption because of the size and scope of a field's issue agenda and the size of the literatures to which the issues are indexical. Big agendas and reading loads ensure that the reader is unlikely to investigate the parenthetical citations unless puissant suspicions are aroused. The power of this presumption is proportionate to one's reluctance to read still more.

These examples speak to the shared predicament of public and disciplinary actors. Darwinianism is both a general intellectual topic and a passionate public issue debated in legislatures, courts, schools, town meetings, and torch-lit rallies. And proof-by-citation is a mode of argumentation one finds in disciplines and public assemblies alike. The authority-dependence of disciplined and ordinary discourse may differ only in degree—which means that in appreciating the authority-dependence of each, we go far toward appreciating the authority-dependence of the other. The two predicaments are of a piece.

The Problem of Authority in the Public Sphere

The public decision-maker's dependence on authority is most apparent when we consider that most decisions are inferences drawn from facts—or, more accurately, drawn from testimony interpreting facts. I elsewhere (Willard, 1989c) consider the case of the City Council member weighing pro- and con- testimony about a university's proposal to build a recombinate DNA lab in the city. Central to my point is that the public decision-maker is an elite, not one of H. L. Mencken's great unwashed. The demographically typical civic leader comes from business or the professions, is college educated, and relatively prosperous—in other words an opinion leader and an elite. But despite this, the decision-maker is profoundly handicapped vis-a-vis the expert:

> How do I assess the benefits and risks? I am untutored in molecular biology—and likely to remain so, for I am a typical public actor whose deliberations span multiple subject matters. Next week I will need knowledge of economics, business, sociology, and engineering. This breadth distinguishes public from disciplinary agendas and ensures my continuing dependence on experts. Thus, since predictions of benefits and risks depend upon technical and specialized knowledge and intuitions, I will turn to experts.

> The experts present me with a mess. The pro-experts paint a picture of scientific necessity, of the possibility of dramatic breakthroughs in vital areas including cancer research. The anti-experts paint a doomsday scenario: cancers crossed with virulent viruses—malignancies as contageous as the common cold—escape by unforseen routes into the general population. I am confronting two kinds of relativity—the dispute between the experts and the gulf of incomprehension that divides me from both camps. The former relativity puts me in the position of adjudicating among competing experts; the latter ensures my incompetence (Willard, 1989c).

It is beside the point to say that I might in principle acquire the needed expertise—my ineptness is a pragmatic fact—and one not remedied by popular science writing. A political elite is presumably conversant with the language of general intellectual discourse, and can read essays in the *Atlantic*, *New York Times Magazine*, and *Omni*, or, at a higher level, trade paperbacks dealing with the quantum domain and biotechnology:

> But even if I am conversant with the contents of half a dozen popular books on quantum physics, no one would think that I am on equal epistemic footing with Bohr, Heisenberg, and Pauli—or in fact even ready to become a student of quantum physics. And reading a hundred more popular books on biotechnology will not improve my position. Given the limits of general writing, there are only so many slogans, metaphors, and images appropriate both to the general audience and to the specialized knowledge. Popular science writing will prepare me only for the mode of testimony I am likely to receive. [Even a political elite is a general public to the experts. If they are competent communicators, the experts] will frame their testimony in a language fitted to public capacities. They will adopt slogans, metaphors, and images which, though misleading (that is, not fully accurate representations of the scientific facts), may come close enough to get their ideas across. They put me, in other words, in the position of choosing among authorities. If I am lucky, there will be ten Nobel laureates on one side and only a few on the other. I cannot evaluate an expert's virtuosity, but I can acquiesce to the expert community's evaluations. Or I can align my thinking with the prevailing expert consensus. And, of course, in addition to acquiescing to authority, I can seize upon the slogan or metaphor that catches my fancy. But no matter how much popular science writing I read, I cannot adjudicate the differences between the experts (Willard, 1989c).

A recent illustration of this handicap is Trefil's (1989) essay in *The New York Times Magazine*. "Beyond the Quark: the case for the supercollider" is a splendid instance of popular science writing—one worth attention as a exemplar of the art and of its ultimate limits. Given the limits of the medium, it is hard to imagine how Trefil's essay can be improved. Trefil, who is a physicist, lays out the issues, defines obscure terms, and does justice to the disputes dividing scientists. But he is forced to do so not in the language of physics but in general political prose. The competing positions are cast in broad popular generalizations. Thus, he ultimately rests the matter on his own authority. A fair gloss of his exposition is that authorities *X* believe *N*; authorities *Y* believe not-*N*; I conclude that the preponderance of evidence favors *N*.

So expert discourses have coopted the public sphere for a good reason. Decision-making is fueled by facts; facts come wrapped in authority. Hobbes foresaw this predicament in *Leviathan*, though he thought it a simple difference between accepting a position on its merits versus accepting it because of its advocate's merits. Early fallacy theorists followed suit.

The theory of argument fields (Willard, 1982, 1983, 1989a) puts a different face on the matter. The field theorist holds that we assess a claim's meaning and merit by the niche it occupies in an intellectual ecology and by its fit with the judgmental/veridical apparatuses of its relevant field. Our judgment of its substantive merits thus cannot be disentangled from our faith in the field. Facts do not speak for themselves. They

take their intellectual authority from their status in a field's ecology. In the political sphere, they get their legitimacy from the authority of their advocates—this authority being awarded by virtue of the advocate's position in a field. So someone always speaks for the facts—someone with interests and goals, assumptions, prejudices and pieties.

Disciplinary Authority-Dependence

I take it that I have proved that public decision-making is reliant on authority. The question now is the degree to which this picture holds for disciplinary discourse. Some readers may dismiss this question out of hand. Perhaps they feel that intellectuals are more reflective than ordinary folk or that disciplines by their nature work against authority-dependence. I share both of these beliefs, but I still think we cannot be confident that the disciplines are immune to authority.

The difference between disciplinary and public authority-dependence may be, as I said, one of degree, not kind. I don't, for instance, equate the presumptions favoring authority in public discourse with authority presumptions inside expert domains. Expert domains achieve balances between prevailing views and pressures for innovation that are unique to their conceptual ecologies. These balances are possible because conceptual stability (preserving the prevailing consensus) and innovation (importing outside ideas) are not—as many philosophers seem to think—activities and attributes of a single audience; they are activities involving different people (Willard, 1989a). Big disciplines benefit from a division of labor: within them, we expect to find piety and rebellion, conservativism and progressivism not as Ying-Yang qualities of a single mind but as public positions taken by field actors.

There are three reasons to think that disciplines are susceptible to authority-dependence: (1) *de facto* interfield differences; (2) literary density; and (3) pragmatic relativity. These three phenomena may operate separately or synergistically, like toxins and carcinogens. Intractable disputes, unmanagable disagreements, and enigmatic misunderstandings may be obvious or deeply submerged in *de facto* differences or beneath unmanageable literatures. They may stem from many causes, including differences in substantive beliefs, procedures, traditions, and conventions.

De Facto Differences and the Luxury of Indifference

To say that the disciplines are segregated is not necessarily to invoke an incommensurability thesis. Folk beliefs in rural Georgia may be incommensurable with the beliefs behind one of Clifford Geertz's Balinese cockfights, but their more important difference is that locals by definition don't travel. They go their own ways, mutually unconcerned and unaware. The most energetic anthropologist may fail to rouse their mutual curiousity.

The academic landscape is likewise marked by disciplinary compartmentalization and fragmentation. Like all complex organizations, professions may contain multiple, overlapping, redundant, and competing disciplines—that may themselves be further subdivided into research traditions (Laudan 1977, 1984). These subdivisions get the advantages of small scale and specialization—chief among them the fact that actors in compact communities become adept at catching errors in each other's work (Faust 1985) and are more likely to achieve mastery of relevant literatures.

Competence and deftness come with focus. So does holism, for innovations may shake each strand of small corporate webs, though they might be unnoticeable in bigger ones. But focus is prone to hermetic closure. The density that enables local suc-

cess impedes communication with a broader public—making it difficult for a researcher to explain the relationships between her work and work coming from other fields. Herein lies the advantage of using the organization construct to define thought systems (see Willard, in preparation). Though it is popular to speak of disciplines as closed systems (usually to explain rivalries among them), or as Quinean corporate wholes within which the effects of innovations are felt along every fiber of the web, disciplines are better seen as organizations whose structures and practices channelize the movements of ideas. Holism is thus like community: it waxes in small fields and wanes in bigger ones except when rescued by totalitarians. But where totalitarianism makes for epistemic health in small domains, it breeds political despotism (masquerading as theoretical purity) in bigger ones.

So it is that research traditions proceed unilaterally—divided less by disputes than by preoccupation, isolation, and indifference. Specialism and expertise require focus, immersion in particulars, so Chaos Physics goes its way, Particle and Atomic physics go theirs; Freudians go their way, Constructivists and Behaviorists go theirs.

Sometimes the disciplines are brought into overt conflict by substantive claims—a fascinating recent case being the 1989 collision of Physics and Chemistry occasioned by the chemists' claim to have achieved cold fusion. Otherwise, their likeliest points of contact are bureaucratic disputes. The intellectual world is a Quantum Domain encased in a fossilized Newtonian outer shell. The bureaucratic structure of academic departments and professions lags behind—and may be in some respects irrelevant to—current confederations, methods, and problem foci. The point is not just that old genres have blurred (Geertz 1980) but that intellectual activities thrive in small communities.

Disciplines coalesce around problem foci, as Toulmin says. Relatively broad fields may contain an indeterminate number of disputes, positions, even smaller schools of thought. Peripheral communication may vary from group to group within a discipline.

The fragmentation problem may also be appreciated by considering the problems that arise when policy-makers attempt to set priorities for science spending—as the National Academy of Sciences has asked Congress to do. The question is, "can scientists in one discipline evaluate the significance of work by scientists in other fields?" (Cordes 1988:1). To many science-policy experts, Cordes says, "the idea of the academy—or any group—actually trying to rank priorities makes them nervous, particularly if that means comparing one field to another" (1988:A24). Who decides—and by what criteria—that a $4.4 billion supercollider is more cost-beneficial than, say, several thousand modest research programs spread across a range of fields?

Literary Density

I have elsewhere called this the ignorance of the splendidly educated. It is not a point about H. L. Mencken's "great unwashed" but about *competent* disciplinary actors. Think of it as a problem of literary management. To pose questions about public interests and discourse is to flop oneself across the expanse of the social sciences and a hefty chunk of the humanities. Exponentially expanding literatures proceeding along multiple paths make for a frustrating indefiniteness. One never knows whether one has fully heard a position out, or seen it in its best form, for there's always more to read.

Michel Serres says that the new architectonic field may be library science—a striking proposal in a consensualist world. If a consensus can be a bibliographic artifact, a matter of persisting fame, then the *well-foundedness* of a consensus may be an effect of a statistical drift (Fuller 1986) in a

community's awarenesses of ideas and fascinations of the moment.

Rorty (1979) by no means argues by slogan, but his expression "keeping the conversation going" is used so often that it is sometimes mistaken for a solution. Keeping the conversation going is a worthy political slogan, but an empty epistemic ideal. The point is not just that scholars live in and are known by their footnotes but that the state of consensus in a field may not be an outcome of a single conversation, or a fully coherent one, and thus cannot be reliably assessed. If something on the order of 200,000 theorems are proved annually in Mathematics (Ulam 1976), "no one is surveying the mass as a single conversation" (McCloskey 1987:486). Indeed, "the marketplace of scientific ideas is so crowded that most scientific papers are ignored; most are seldom, if ever, cited . . . (Gilbert 1976:294). In Chemistry, for example, only one paper in a hundred is cited more than ten times. . .(Small 1978:330)" (Gross 1987:494).

One would like to think that selective citation reflects a qualitative winnowing process separating good from bad work, but a substantial literature suggests otherwise (Redner 1987; Bohme 1977; Kenny 1986; Kohn 1986; Mullins 1968; Price 1963, 1965, 1970; Taub 1986; Zaltman 1968). Big Science bashing may be overenthusiastic, but the point that dense literatures shield sheninanigans, that citations may reflect politics and favor-trading, cannot be ignored.

The humanities may not equal the natural sciences in bulk, but they have not been silent. *The Philosopher's Index* (Bowling Green State University Press), for instance, lists 15,000 articles in U.S. journals, 12,000 English language articles published abroad, and more than 5,000 books published between 1940 and 1976. Sisphyus had it easy.

To ask about the current status of the Eve Hypothesis in Anthropology or of Chaos theory in Physics is to hope for a coherent answer: A plebiscite among Anthropologists and Physicists yields thus and so result. But the authoritative status of some ideas is ambiguous. Among a multiplicity of voices, the Eve Hypothesis and Chaos Physics are being listened to; they command an audience; they're no longer lunatic fringe. Nor are they fully accepted. They stand—as many ideas do—midstream in a debate whose outcome is unpredictable.

Indeterminacy and ignorance are not confined to disciplinary specialists. Decision-makers who translate disciplinary content into questions of public and corporate policy, though we call them *elites*, are less equipped to confront literary density than disciplinary actors. Most scholars define elites *in contrast to* the masses (Mills 1956). But public elites can also be contrasted to disciplinary elites. The standard description of elite political leadership can be rephrased so that the elites are on the business end of a paternalistic relation with the authorities on whom they depend for knowledge. We can see decision-makers as if they are the masses—kow-towed to, cynically manipulated, and paternalistically led by a higher elite—Occam's "simples" in three-piece suits. Complexities must be reduced to simple slogans; disagreements with a discipline must be downplayed to outsiders.

The issue is partly that competence is more elusive with the proliferation of literatures, but also that the idea of competence itself has changed. Where Jefferson and Aristotle asked elites to master knowledge to guide decisions, we do not now expect decision-makers to master the facts of expert fields. We no longer assume that decision-makers stand in any sort of relation to the facts. Public decision-making doesn't *use knowledge*, it uses testimony—a tapestry of positions maintained by authoritative representatives of knowledge domains who presumably bridge the gap between disciplines and public decision-making. These bridges are contained in

argumentative positions that interpret current disciplinary developments and suggest policy applications and that are packaged in language and images strategically selected for an audience. Some of these strategies are credibility-enhancing—by hook or crook—which leaves decision-makers in the peculiar position of either accepting or rejecting testimony whole hog. The claim of objectivity, e.g., is seeable both as a disciplinary claim (the speaker's discipline may in fact abide by scientific standards of test and critique) *and* as a rhetorical ploy (one may be testifying about a subject that has not been subjected to the rigor and care normally associated with one's science or be giving advice about policy matters that are not themselves open to scientific disciplines [Albury 1983]).

Pragmatic Relativity

What follows is a brief glimpse of how an epistemic scholar—not an epistemologist—views relativity. In differentiating epistemics from epistemology (Willard, 1987a), I argue that relativity is but one element in a complex of problems. That is, human differences—in the many forms these differences take—arise alongside, and are synergistic with, the proliferation of literatures, discussed above, the closure and despotism of commensurating discourses (e.g., cost-benefit analysis), political competition among authorities, and the long term effects of misunderstandings.

This thinking leads to a particular picture of *public knowledge*—namely that it is a package of discourse competencies that aim at the appraisal of expert discourse. By appraisal I do not mean deciding whether experts are right or wrong—that is what experts are for—but deciding how expert testimony shall be taken. Thus public knowledge includes, inter alia, knowledge about the social dynamics of expertise. How do disciplines designate and monitor experts? How are intradisciplinary meanings, claims, and understandings translated into interdisciplinary or public claims? How do claims that are disputed within a field get translated into public claims (does their controversial status get concealed as they are transformed into public ideas)? Under what conditions do appearances of objectivity, or an expert's ways of insisting upon objectivity, get in the way of evaluating testimony? These questions, in turn, imply comparative questions, for each order of question can be translated into a concrete matter of how competing disciplines stack up. In such cases the decision-maker is not claiming equal epistemic footing with an expert on the expert's grounds. Rather, the expert has come onto public ground occupied by people who are reflective about how expert testimony works.

Given this picture, how does pragmatic relativity subject the disciplines to authority dependence? My answer is captured in the catchphrase *The Balkanization of Authority*—which doubtless interacts with literary density. Goodnight (1982; Farrell and Goodnight 1981) describes two examples. The pro-nuclear power technologist refuses to be accountable to any standards apart from those of Nuclear Engineering (Fisher 1983). Faced with outside critique, she claims special privilege by retreating into the shell of the field's special assumptions and practices. Only Nuclear engineering can credential arguers to speak about nuclear power safety; only a reasoned consensus in that field can testify to the adequacy of evidence about safety; the lay public *and* the putatively elite decision-makers are thus to take the proclamations of the field as arguments-from-authority. They are to lay aside their doubts when certainty is impossible, just as Catholic Theologians of the 12th and 13th Centuries laid aside their doubts by appeals to final earthly authority.

The cost-benefit analyst is at risk only to objections couched in the language of fiscal costs and benefits—a requirement that

guarantees invulnerability to moral or ethical critique (Willard 1983a; Goodnight 1982). This gives cost-benefit analysis a position of special privilege in discussions of competing political values. The human effects of political decisions are easily downplayed. Misery is hard to quantify. Starvation counts for little if the lives lost are of little value.

Imagine a Rawlsian original position whose participants in fact choose distributive justice, but must do so in a language that predetermines the distribution—or a Habermasian discourse in that everyone is free to speak, but forced to use a language that predetermines what they may say. Because cost-benefit analysis is both a commensurating discourse and a litmus test of "rationality," it exemplifies the "principle of attention" (Willard 1983)—that says that a key to understanding the openness of a field is understanding the ideas it decides merit attention. Cost-benefit analysis's principle of attention insulates it from critique not by proscribing value claims but by stipulating the forms they may take. Once the analyst retreats behind the shield of cost-benefit analysis' special assumptions, the possibility of outside critique foregone.

Conviction, not deviousness, causes such retreats. The retreat to one's field is a preeminately rational move—one both logical and proper. Indexical claims imply ground. Challenged speakers go to ground. They seek proof where they expect to find it—in authoritative fields. They confront their interlocutors with facts and take it for granted that refutation must comport with the standards of their's, not their interlocutors' field. They assume this not from fear of criticism but from the self-rightousness born of competence: I'm right; my opponent is wrong. The Creationist doesn't insist upon the admissibility of personal revelation out of malice or as a rhetorical trick, but because it is true.

The Dilemma

The dilemma posed by authority-dependence is by now, perhaps, obvious. On one hand, arguing-from-authority and accepting claims on authority are the 20th Century's definitive epistemic methods. In a consensualist world, the state of consensus in a field is relevant to the truth of a claim. Because it is neither practical or possible to evaluate all epistemic claims that engage our attention, it is presumptively rational to acquiesce to a disciplined consensus.

This authority-dependence is more noticable in ordinary public discourse. In a complex, specialized world, the nonexpert's deference to authority is presumptively rational (Stich and Nisbett, 1984)—routinely the prudentially, morally, and legally preferred course (Willard, 1989a). This has prompted a change in fallacy theory. Fallacy theorists no longer argue that the subordination of logic to mere sociology is the intellect's treason against itself. Instead, fallacy theory has increasingly expanded the range of cases in which it is sound to argue from or acquiescence to epistemic authority. The result is a reversal of ancient wisdom: ignoring or disregarding experts is the fallacy, not the reverse.

On the other hand, the Medieval logicians' chief reason for seeing the argument-from-authority as a fallacy still holds: to invoke authority is to abort debate. Medieval and Renaissance writers may have seen this as an anti-scholastic position, though now we might easily speak of three similar fallacies: the *Rortyian* (cutting the conversation short), the *Habermasian* (keeping the dominated conversation going), or the *Foucauldian* (keeping the dominated conversation going without realizing it, thus making delusional claims of critical mastery).

So authority-dependence is a dilemma, not a personal frailty or skill deficiency. This dilemma, it seems to me, draws epistemic scholars into the discourse of

critical theory. Authority-dependence is an important part of the crisis of modernity and it also exposes a weakness in postmodernism's positive program—my fourth and final claim: the demand that individuals achieve epistemic mastery of complex fields is an unsatisfactory response to the dilemma of authority-dependence.

Authority-Dependence and the Crisis of Modernity

Postmodernists see authority-dependence less as a fallacy than as a tragic flaw in mass political life. This dependence has been thought to be a crisis at least since the 1930s when the Beards decried the cult of the expert, and a modernist crisis at least since Bernstein and Habermas (and in Argumentation, Cox and Goodnight) have diagnosed the problem of public discourse as the want of unity between Reason and Praxis—the intervening villain being authority-dependence.

Unfortunately, the unity of Reason and Praxis is more a slogan than a proposal. Goodnight (1982), for instance, wants to revive the art of deliberative rhetoric which, Atlantis-like, has sunk beneath specialism, expertise, and authority. He underscores the tendency of expert authority to dilute skepticism and coopt critique. The *point* of invoking authority is to transform inquiry into action, to let deliberation yield policies and decisions. But one wonders about the particulars behind the slogan: what is it about the lost deliberative art that will amend or lessen the public sphere's dependence on experts?

This vagueness infects the pedagogical rationales of Argumentation, Informal Logic, and Critical Thinking. Consider the following passage, which advocates a move from authority to autonomy:

> While submitting to the authority of what has been attained and established by scientific enlightenment—the formal and technical disciplines—the person should reach through education, a level of understanding, independent judgment, and creativity, at which the scientific-technical values and norms are established. Only at this level the person can become competent to understand the rules, and their embodiment in concrete social life, and be in a position to pass an autonomous social judgment and engage in a free debate (Mickunas, 1987:336-337).

I submit that this position is typical: it, or a position much like it can be found in most standard texts, or in Habermas, who asks us to acquiesce only to fields whose epistemic operations are transparent, or Bernstein, who insists on the need for epistemic control; or in many postmodernist tracts.

Still, the position presumes more than it proves. If it puts a burden on individuals that no individual in the late 20th century can discharge, then it is an empty posture—a kind of arm-waving in the face of the problem of modernity.

Mickunas' reasoning might pass from slogan to prescription if one can specify the features of the reflective competence that give the decision-maker leverage against the expert. Otherwise why should we think that a reflective awareness of the basis of authority will weaken the deference to technical authority? McKunas presumes that we know in most cases, or have a principle for describing, how much authority is due technical discourses. He also presumes that if technical discourses are conceded the authority due them, there is a lacuna in their authority—something is left over for the individual.

Incidentally, I think there *is* a lacuna in the authority of technical discourses—the breadth of their jurisdictions—the public jurisdiction always being broader than the epistemic jurisdictions of technical fields (Willard, 1989a).

But Mickunas doesn't use a view of jurisdiction. Dare we assume at the outset that every expert who gives public testimony somehow violates his field's own rules and that, if we can catch him at it, we

achieve autonomous judgment? Whether this solution overcomes the presumption established by the problem depends, it seems to me, on the concrete particulars of examples.

And what does *autonomous judgment* mean? Must individuals stand alone against a discipline like a showdown in a spaghetti western? If decision-makers acquiesece to the epistemic hegemony of Nuclear Engineering vis-a-vis technical questions of nuclear safety, how do they then "pass autonomous judgment" by virtue of understanding the ways technical competence is valued? Or do we have a competing field—a dialectical opponent for Nuclear Engineering—authorizing the individual's counterclaims?

Finally, how omniscient is the reflective thinker supposed to be? Knowledge claims often arise in complex organizations whose size and scope preclude the intellectual mastery presupposed by the critical theorists. Habermas' demand that we acquiesce only to fields whose epistemic operations are transparent is an exaggeration of our abilities and a misdiagnosis of our problem. Given the number of knowledge claims that are made, given the number of claims that we might decide are relevant to our own claims, and given the differences in background knowledge they presuppose, it is impractical—indeed Sisphyian and counterproductive—to try to evaluate each claim.[2]

This standard position, in sum, is both impossible to obey and inadvisable. Individuals can't fully understand a technical field, concede to that field the proper measure of authority, and yet also transcend the field by an autonomous judgment. Moreover, given the number of different fields, and the number of epistemic claims they make, an attempt to evaluate each claim would be wasteful of the division of labor in complex fields.

The exaggeration of individual epistemic responsibility is also misleading, for it blurs over the degree to which acquiescence to authority is the preferred course. Modernity can as easily lay claim to the unity of Reason and Praxis as its critics. Technologized, specialized, and expert discourses *are* unities of reason and practice—and better suited to special problems than the discourses that preceeded them. They are, to use Stephen Jay Gould's expression, "splendid local adaptations." The rifts between these discourses are symptoms of their problem-adaptedness and local successes. Cardinal Newman's dream of a university community speaking a common language enabled by a shared religion has been replaced not only by discourses in different niches but by multiple ecologies. So whatever its disaffection with our reliance on authority, postmodernism, like fallacy theory, must accommodate to the fact that expertise is indispensible.

Summary

I have argued that public decision-making is reliant on expert authority. Action needs facts; decision-makers are dependent on the custodians of facts, the disciplines. As it is impossible for public actors to acquire expertise in the range of subject matters that confront them, we need to rethink the very ideas of public knowledge and competence.

Argumentation and Informal Logic pedagogies won't come to much unless based on a coherent stance toward authority. They are premised on rhetorics of mass enfranchizement that often do not square with their commitments to acquiescence to expertise, and—more important—they build a naive picture of the competent citizen. Because both pedagogical traditions are influenced by epistemology, they focus on a individual's mastery of subject matters.

There can be such a thing as competence in public knowledge, but it involves a kind of meta-epistemology for decision-making. The most disciplinable public knowledge, I argued, is about expertise itself and about

the optimum corporate division-of-labor—which the U.S. Congress in fact attempts to employ. What has to be abandoned is the Greco-Roman ideal of the competent citizen. The model is too individualistic—because decision-making occurs in complex organizations, competence is often a group achievement—and hyperbolic in that it asks individuals to do what is both impossible and undesirable.

And the disciplines are in some respects as authority-dependent as public decision-makers. This is why the problem of authority goes deeper than the mass-democracy or populist program suggests. However successful mass enfranchizement programs may be (or we may want them to be), political elites and disciplinary actors are authoritydependent in ways that cannot be ignored by programs seeking to strengthen public discourse.

Disciplinary actors and public decision-makers alike face a dilemma: in a consensualist world, acquiescence to authority is the rational thing to do—indeed often the preferred course; yet the medieval logicians' chief reason for seeing the argument-from-authority as a fallacy is still plausible. The *effect* of authority is to arrest dispute. And authority-dependence pulls us into institutions, organizations, and language games—Foucauldian traps, as it were—whose undercurrents we ignore only at our own risk.

This essay, of course, has been long on diagnosis, dark on prognosis, and short on therapy. Still, my general description of public knowledge—as a reflective sensitivity to the social-rhetorical dynamics of expertise—may be a useful starting point for students of disciplined discourse. In considering concrete examples—which is the next step—we can problematize all imaginable relationships between speakers and claims. And we are already better equipped to deal with this problematic, for if the exposition here is convincing, we can never again see speakers as neutral vehicles for institutionalized claims. Rather, as Dewey teaches, we must start from the assumption that ideas, practices, and advocates exist in symbiosis.

Notes

* I have benefitted from opportunities to present various versions of this paper at the University of Windsor's Conference on Informal Logic, at the Center for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences and Humanities in Wassenaar, Holland, at the University of Amsterdam, and at the Universitat des Saarlandes in Saarbruken, West Germany. I have also benefitted from Steve Fuller's criticism and suggestions.

1 Because they are merely illustrations, these citations do not appear in this essay's bibliography.

2 I owe this way of putting the problem to Steve Fuller.

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