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TECHNOCRACY, GOVERNMENTALITY, AND POST-STRUCTURALISM

ABSTRACT: *The technocratic dimension of government—its reliance upon knowledge claims, usually in scientific guise—is of great importance if we wish to understand modern power and governance. In Power Without Knowledge: A Critique of Technocracy, Jeffrey Friedman investigates the often-overlooked question of the relationship between technocratic knowledge/power and ideas. Friedman’s contribution to our understanding of technocracy can therefore be read as a contribution to governmentality studies, one that introduces the possibility of adding normative solutions to this critical tradition.*

Keywords: *collaborative governance; deliberation; Foucault; governmentality; knowledge-power; post-structuralism; technocracy.*

In *Power Without Knowledge: A Critique of Technocracy* (Oxford University Press, 2019), Jeffrey Friedman investigates the important but often overlooked question of technocracy in democratic systems. He notes that while political theorists have been preoccupied with the ends of politics—the fair, the just, and the desirable—they have directed little attention to the issue of how to realize the political goals that are established by

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popular rule. Thus, the chief concerns of political theorists have become alienated from political reality, because most areas of public policy are in fact technocratic by nature, and technocracy focuses on means, not ends.

Friedman's definition of a technocracy is "a polity that aims to solve, mitigate, or prevent social and economic problems among its people" (5). This recalls the role ascribed to policy experts and political analysts during the 1980s, namely, that of "speaking truth to power" (Wildavsky 2017)—articulating the truth about the causes of the people's problems, so that the powerful can solve, prevent, or mitigate them—along with the importance of evaluating public policy and programs, which is an agenda that has been advanced by Evert Vedung (1997). In this, its epistemic aspect, technocracy lends itself naturally to governance by elite scientific advisers to politicians. The involvement of knowledge in policy processes, public programs, and politics have been topics of major interest for public administration and policy scholars for quite some time, comprising an ongoing research agenda that includes such issues as how to implement evidence-based policies and how to resolve wicked and complex problems (Clarence 2002). A researcher working in this tradition might inquire, for example, when and why politicians and policy makers are prepared to take into consideration existing knowledge in the effort to resolve social and political problems (Head 2013; Lundin and Öberg 2014). Insofar as such research appears to regard knowledge as consisting of objective and neutral facts, it accords with the tenor of Wildavsky's discussion. Friedman's agenda is quite different, though. He seeks to problematize the notion that technocratic knowledge is something readily available to politicians and experts that makes it possible for them to craft programs and reforms that can mend social ills.

Alternative Views of Technocratic Knowledge Problems

The foundation of Friedman's position is the view that human beings are individuals who possess complex sets of ideas and beliefs, so it is difficult to create incentive structures that will shape their behavior in predictable ways—which effective public policy must do. In this conception, the expertise of experts may not suffice to produce good policy advice. On the other hand, Friedman emphasizes that the involvement of politicians at all, even as the recipients of expert advice, indicates the participation of the politicians' constituents in the technocratic project. Thus, "epistocracy" is not the only form of technocracy; there is also "democratic

technocracy,” which includes members of the general public as “citizen-technocrats” when they share the goal of solving social problems, and when they make knowledge claims about how best to do so. Thus, working immanently, from within the means-end logic of technocrats themselves, Friedman arrives at a broad definition of technocracy as a regime in which either experts or ordinary citizens (or both) claim to know how to solve the people’s social and economic problems, even when the people’s knowledge claim amounts merely to the conviction that a certain politician has the people’s interests at heart and can therefore be trusted to solve their problems. A technocracy is thus defined by its problem-solving end, and our theoretical focus can be on whether it is likely to have the epistemic means of achieving that end.

This broad definition of technocracy points to a promising approach that can supplement current discussions concerning the analytical and ideological shift from government to governance (Rhodes 1997; Larsson 2013; Larsson 2019b). Along with other scholars, Friedman notes that ever more aspects of modern societies and democratic systems are controlled, or at least influenced, by the technocratic dimension of social and political issues. However, this has led to an impoverished public debate, marked by the claim that there are “no alternatives” to technocracy—i.e., epistocracy—such that ordinary citizens are sidelined by experts (Torfing and Triantafyllou 2013; Larsson 2019a). Theorists who follow in the footsteps of Jürgen Habermas, for example, and criticize the undemocratic nature of epistocratic technocracy, are, in Friedman’s view, too external to the instrumentalist logic of technocracy to be able to interrogate epistocratic knowledge claims (20). Because Habermas was primarily concerned with the illegitimacy of undemocratically chosen ends, he failed to question the efficacy of technocratic means to those ends.

However, it is worth noting that in contemporary circumstances, technocratic politics may favor the means over the ends in a different respect than the one problematized by Friedman. Although political leaders and bureaucrats may know what is required to address a specific social and political problem, they may deem it to be either too costly or unrealistic to address it, given a lack of public support. Since the means available for solving, mitigating, or preventing economic and social problems are limited in times of austerity, tax cuts, and budget deficits, we are a long way from the satisfactory solution of certain problems, even when we possess substantial knowledge of how to solve them.

However, an *unwillingness* to address such problems constitutes a non-epistemological issue, in contrast to the issues treated by Friedman.

Power Without Knowledge is welcome in that epistemological questions are highly political, as has long been pointed out by scholars devoted to social constructivism (Larsson 2018). Consequently, I will seek to connect the book more closely to this line of scholarship, including the ongoing debate concerning knowledge, power, policy, and the post-truth society (Fuller 2108). For instance, Deborah Stone (2002) has argued, like Friedman (291), that perceived facts derive from social and political theories rather than direct observation. This places great importance upon the social dimensions of knowledge, since there would be no foundation for these perceptions without reference to theoretical premisses. Knowledge claims, for the most part, follow an infinite regress through previous, theoretically mediated claims. We are also substantially influenced by a person's race, appearance, social manners, reputation, and credentials as we assess any information or facts they provide. While a skeptical approach regarding factual claims is generally advocated in the media and educational institutions, fact resistance comprises an acute problem today insofar as the truth and facts are politicized (Stone 2002, 320–23).

Steve Fuller (2018) argues, similarly, that we are living in the era of post-truth, in which the facts presented by policy makers are not always based on trustworthy sources, having been gathered to fit pre-selected policy solutions regardless of whether or not they reflect public opinion and sentiment. The choice of facts and knowledge claims are thus elements of social and political processes, and they do not reflect honest and rational procedures for attaining truth. Frank Fischer et al. (2015) note that such questionable facts and claims undercut the previous—and flawed—ideal of speaking truth to power. The new task facing social scientists who explore politics and policy making is rather to problematize and make explicit the entanglement of ontology, epistemology, and the manner in which knowledge follows from certain perspectives and premises that not everyone shares.

Post-truth society does not pose a fundamental problem for post-structuralists and constructivists, but rather for those who believe in neutral facts and objective knowledge. The critical tradition of policy scholars has already accepted the social and political construction of “reality” on the basis of knowledge and constitutive causality (Larsson 2018; Fischer 1998; Yanow 2000; Fischer et al 2015; Morcol 2002).

Instead of fighting against multiple perspectives, we thus need to accept and embrace the co-existence of multiple and contradicting facts, which can provide us with more comprehensive approaches to understanding social and political problems. The conclusion to be drawn from these insights is not that we should forego deliberation in the face of inadequate knowledge, but that deliberation is now more important than ever insofar as knowledge and facts are contested, with technocracy having become a key element of our political existence.

However, Friedman's primary message does not concern deliberation, or voice, but rather the importance of creating voluntary exit options for individuals. What is the motivation for this position, and is the latter a viable and desirable alternative? In order to fully understand Friedman's conclusion, we must first recapture the reasoning underlying his arguments.

Methodological Individualism, Subjectivism, and Collective Institutions

Any investigation of society should identify the ontological premises that support it. Friedman is very clear concerning the ontological premises of his own analysis, explicitly stating that he builds his theoretical position upon "the individualistic ontology of ideas" that he has "drawn from [Walter] Lippmann" (149). He develops this position, in part, through a critique of Charles Taylor's methodologically collectivist version of hermeneutics, as expressed in his influential essay on "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man" (Taylor 1985). Friedman's critique of Taylor paves the way for his own view, "epistemological individualism," which "unites four elements: methodological individualism, the fallibility and potential ignorance of individuals, communication among individuals, and the possibility that their ideas will be heterogeneous" (149). This methodological posture determines and conditions much of the argumentation in *Power Without Knowledge*.

For instance, a holistic view of society would maintain that institutions and discourses subsume the players. If individuals either act or resist in accordance with what is socially expected of them, at least in respect to their social capacities, desires, and beliefs, then we may analyze society from the top down and produce systemic theories of society (Hollis 1994, 18). In contrast, a fully individualistic approach would proceed in

the reverse direction. If meanings, ideas, and knowledge are primarily subjective, becoming intersubjective only through mutual effort and agreement, then institutions and social systems arise as a result of individuals' actions and interactions (*ibid.*, 19). The fact that Friedman also wishes to "complexify" human behavior and beliefs renders it even more difficult to analyze, predict, and plan for human interactions, although this does not per se rule out the ideal of deliberation and intersubjective meaning-making.

Friedman argues that "ideas," including perceptions, beliefs, and interpretations, "along with hypotheses, theories, strokes of inspiration, and assumptions, implicit or explicit," are individual and subjective, although they may be intersubjectively communicated (140). The connection to technocracy is that the reception of communicated ideas is likely to be somewhat heterogeneous even in a mass society, producing heterogeneous webs of belief across the population whose actions technocrats are trying to control in the interest of solving social and economic problems. Insofar as any of the ideas in given agents' webs of belief or ideas may contribute to the agents' interpretation of their own circumstances and, consequently, their reactions to these circumstances, technocrats attempting to predict the agents' actions may have different webs of belief than those they are trying to predict, leading to erroneous predictions. Thus, Friedman writes, there is bound to be some degree of "unpredictable interpretive heterogeneity among the agents whose actions technocrats are trying to predict, and, even more crucially, between these agents and the technocrats themselves—all of whom are human and thus subject to heterogeneous ideational inputs" (*ibid.*). Thus, epistemological individualism is compatible with enough ideational heterogeneity that technocrats' predictions may go awry. If we do not know the actor's subjective perceptions and interpretations (which Friedman groups under the rubric of ideas), we may be unable to predict the resulting actions.

Although I agree that individuals are complex, and that their sets of ideas have multiple sources that result in a unique composition at the individual level (an issue referred to as intersectionality in identity studies), I see a danger in overemphasizing the importance of subjective ideas and knowledge claims. As a post-structuralist, I am more inclined to take into consideration the linkages that exist between institutions, discourses, and collective entities, including how intersubjective and shared understandings influence individuals, rather than what separates

them. In a previous publication in these pages, I have argued that ideational scholars such as Colin Hay (2017) and Vivien Schmidt (2017) overly emphasize the ability of individual actors to navigate, oppose, and even change societal institutions, particularly if we regard institutions as intersubjective and collective in nature (Larsson 2015). Although *Power Without Knowledge* does not discuss institutions and institutional change, its analysis of what guides human behavior and how individual actions generate stable patterns that form informal institutions, such as societal norms, are relevant to this debate.

The danger is that placing too great an emphasis upon individual perceptions and an individual's ability to change social and political institutions could be said to fall prey to voluntarism. Friedman suggests that it is at least possible that each individual has such a unique set of ideas, beliefs, and interpretations that it is basically impossible to govern and predict their behavior in any meaningful way, although he denies that we can know if the "magnitude" of ideational heterogeneity (being dependent on variable and contingent processes of belief communication and assimilation) is likely to be as great as that (171). As we cannot know in detail the composition of each individual's web of beliefs, we arrive at a conundrum, of uncertain magnitude, for technocracy. I believe that this way of reasoning too quickly turns methodological individualism away from general patterns of behavior, overstating individualism while downplaying holistic and societal institutions that may generate patterned behavior (Larsson 2018).

Think of the following situation. You have decided to go for a Black Friday sale at the hardware store to get a bargain deal on a set of tools. Due to poor planning and bad luck, you arrive only shortly before the store opens and there is a long queue of other bargain hunters. I think it is safe to assume that despite stinging disappointment you are likely to take the last place in the queue in order to play by the informal rules of queueing. However, if you arrive at the store and there is no queue but rather a tight gathering in front of the doors, you may go so far as to push your way through the crowd to make sure you get your hands on the tools you wish to buy. Behavior is situational, and this makes it quite easy to manipulate if technocrats know the situation.

Government agencies may invent an app through which to sign up for benefits. You may not wish to register, but in order for you to get your child care you simply have to register, and you do. In the Swedish municipality in which I live, the school board decided to buy a managerial

system called “Unikum” for all communications between the schools, the pupils, and the parents. Despite my fierce desire to resist starting an account on this inferior and low-tech website, in the end, I had to cave in because of the inconvenience of the alternative. I believe that there are many such examples of how individual complexity and heterogeneity in the composition of ideas and beliefs matters little in how technocratic and, more broadly, societal developments change human behavior. Thus, while complexifying human agency is important, this endeavor must not overlook the linkages between, on the one hand, the collective and intersubjective elements of society, such as institutions and norms, that may enable technocracy to efficaciously regulate individual behavior despite heterogeneous ideational resistance. A social science as such should thus investigate the shared meanings, collective elements, and institutions that shape and regulate human behavior.

Friedman recognizes this need, and in fact devotes Part II of *Power Without Knowledge* to an exploration of whether technocrats can “judiciously” discover, case by case, the balance between the unpredictable force of individuals’ ideas and “homogenizing behavioral counterforces to the heterogeneity of people’s ideas.” These counterforces, such as shared norms that override people’s unruly ideas, may cause “slippage” between heterogeneous ideas and the behavior people actually display (169). Thus, even if people do not share “homogeneous beliefs in general,” they may share

specific normative tenets (norms) that they view as obligatory in their situations, as they interpret them—despite the fact that, apart from this shared interpretation of their situations, their webs of belief may be wildly heterogeneous. Shared norms can act as a counterweight to the heterogeneous behavior that would otherwise be expected to issue from such webs of belief. The intercession of shared norms, then, may create a gap between the (presumptively great) frequency of anonymous others’ unpredictable ideas and the frequency of their unpredictable behavior. (Ibid.)

However, this does not necessarily mean that technocracy is back on track. Given the existence of ideational heterogeneity across individuals, one cannot deny that technocrats may produce unintended consequences by mispredicting people’s behavior. Thus,

If theorists of technocracy could demonstrate on second-order grounds that, for example, technocrats should be reliably able to determine the

effects of various superordinate norms (or other homogeneous or behavior-homogenizing ideas), as well as being reliably able to discern the limits of their knowledge of the predictability conferred by such homogenizing factors, then we could expect that technocrats might be reliably able to predict people's behavior in those cases, despite the presumptive heterogeneity of human ideas. This might reduce the magnitude of the unintended consequences caused by ideational heterogeneity, rescuing technocratic legitimacy. Otherwise, we would have established, I think, that technocrats cannot justifiably claim to know that the benefits of their actions will outweigh the costs. (171)

However, I am not convinced by this conclusion. I doubt that any technocrat ever believed that they were able to fully control human behavior. Governance is never total in that sense.

Neoclassical and Behavioral Economics

Three specific questions emerge from the way in which Friedman presents the epistemological problems of technocracy, and potential solutions: why not nudge, why not deliberate, and why not Foucault?

The first question arises because Friedman devotes substantial space to a critique of neoclassical economic theory and the impact it has had—and continues to have—on the social sciences, particularly policy sciences. Friedman maintains that policy designed on the basis of economic theory is quickly turned into a rational-choice exercise that seeks to predict what people will do through an analysis of what they would do if they were rational, with rationality equated with what a given economist thinks would be optimal (28). Neoclassical economists, according to Friedman, efface possible heterogeneities between economic agents and the economists interpreting them by treating both as responding to objective realities rather than to their subjective interpretations of them. This critique is reminiscent of the tradition of behavioral economics, which seeks to theorize and understand “actual human economic behavior.” Richard Thaler (2015, 4) argues that a significant weakness in traditional economic models and neoclassical economic theory is that they replace human beings with a “fictional character called homo economicus,” which he terms an “econ.” In contrast to econs, humans engage in a great deal of irrational behavior that little resembles the economic and rational behavior that is described and postulated by neoclassical economic theory. Yet Friedman dismisses this tradition. His main

argument for why we should not rely upon behavioral economics for answers is that it, too, suffers from the pathology of homogenizing human behavior (conceptually) in order to predict it. Thus, while behavioral economists recognize that neoclassical economics is unrealistic, behavioral economists themselves treat actual people's deviations from neoclassical predictions as resulting from "homogeneous cognitive defects rather than unpredictably idiosyncratic ignorance" (197). While "behavioral economics complicates the simple model of predictable behavior used by economists such as [Nobel laureate James M.] Buchanan," it "does not complexify it in the epistemic sense (*ibid.*).

Of particular note is that behavioral economics has laid the foundation for "nudging," a theory and concept popularized by Thaler and Cass Sunstein. This position presumes that we can know what individuals would choose if they were fully rational, such as to eat healthy foods, save for retirement, and so forth. Once we have identified these ends and the types of human behavior that would serve them, technocrats should be able to establish a choice architecture that can assist them in making the right choices even when they are not fully rational:

A nudge, as we will use the term, is any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives. To count as a mere nudge, the intervention must be easy and cheap to avoid. Nudges are not mandates. Putting fruit at eye level counts as a nudge. Banning junk food does not. (Thaler and Sunstein 2009, 6)

In general, the examples that Thaler and Sunstein provide entail that individuals have to make an active choice to opt out rather than opt in, which involves making the "best" choices readily available to individuals rather than waiting for them to identify and actively seek them out. For example, it has been shown that informing given households that they have the highest electrical consumption in the neighborhood is a better way to encourage behavioral change than raising the price of electricity (*ibid.*, 129).

Nudging is a way of governing that takes into consideration the actual behavior of humans, not econs. It preserves the right of individuals to make poor choices, and it does not imply that all individuals will make the same decision even though it is based upon behavioral economic theory. Nudging simply suggests that deliberate choice architecture

will help certain people to make better decisions. As such, it is an instrument of technocracy that relies upon “knowledge of how to control human action effectively” (4).

The nudging literature suggests that society is not completely ungovernable. More important, it suggests that it is possible to employ a technocratic instrument of governance that is normatively justifiable insofar as it permits individuals to freely opt out of preselected schemas and does not seek to ban undesired behavior. Choice architecture causes no harm, and its intent is to provide assistance to actors rather than dominate human behavior. It would be informative to know, then, why Friedman does not take nudges or choice architecture into consideration as potential resolutions of at least some of the problems that mark a defective technocracy.

My own doubts regarding nudging are that it appears blind to competing normative concerns and outcomes and seems to assume that all actors involved in a given area would be equally happy to support the choices that are promoted. In this regard, we need to take into consideration the fact that a broad set of actors make very substantial profits today from individuals’ poor economic choices. This is very likely an important reason why, for example, we see junk food at eye level, with fruit near the back wall of the store or next to our feet. We thus cannot assume that all actors involved in complex governing systems are equally inclined to choose desirable political ends, and we likely need to complement the discussion of nudging with critical theories that address the issue of conflict among various groups and actors.

In democratic and capitalist societies, we have to take into consideration the fact that private actors may have a much greater influence than the state upon the lives of citizens. For instance, many scientific studies have shown that obesity rates and a variety of other health problems are on the rise among the poor, who are being pushed toward unhealthy diets because healthy choices are much more expensive. Technocratic solutions to such structural and systemic problems could well involve addressing how they are sustained by the economic interests of private companies instead of seeking to alter individual behavior. Such issues provide examples of the many social ills about which we possess substantial knowledge in respect to both problems and desirable normative solutions, but lack the political will or resources needed to act.

Back to Habermas

Friedman notes on the very first page of *Power Without Knowledge* that Isaiah Berlin and the young Jürgen Habermas displayed scant interest in the means of technocratic politics. Berlin even suggested that questions of means are “unworthy” of political theorists insofar as they are “not political,” regarding them as technical matters “capable of being settled by experts or machines” (Berlin 1958, 118). Habermas remarked, half a century ago, that the scientific knowledge that technocrats possess enables them to craft efficacious policy means towards given political ends, exemplifying rationality in an instrumental sense. He thus favored a version of technocracy in which “scientific experts advise the decision-makers and politicians consult scientists in accordance with practical needs” (Habermas 1970, 66–67) so long as these needs, as Friedman says, are “democratically determined” (2). However, Habermas may have been overly strict in dichotomizing technocratic means and ends. Collaborative governance arrangements, for example, are co-managed and influenced by public and private stakeholders who jointly, through either consensus or conflict, seek to influence both political means and political ends through pragmatic bargaining. Such new governance arrangements move political disputes from the public arena into more concealed and intimate locations where stakeholders attend to public problems, often with a technocratic outlook, in an effort to resolve social and political problems through the pragmatic utilization of existing knowledge (Erikson and Larsson 2019; Larsson 2019b).

Although most political action, including the crafting of the ends of politics, now takes place during the implementation phase of public policy, in what may be framed as the technocratic sphere of the state, this may have a negative effect upon the realization of a given policy, restricting the possibility of holding politicians accountable for outcomes (Weale 2011). Thus, collaborative governance may serve not only the purpose of democratizing the selection of ends but making the selection of means more effective. Collaborative governance arrangements possess the potential to increase the participation of ordinary citizens, give rise to deliberation regarding multiple perspectives on difficult or wicked problems, make possible further critical scrutiny of public rule and public elites, and mitigate the problematic aspects of liberal/elite democracy. Such concerns associate the technocratic aspects of the polity with the

normative ideal of political participation in order to identify common solutions to common problems in a way that merely being left alone, to exit the voice option, does not. As Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright (2003, 3) put it,

As the tasks of the state have become more complex and the size of the polities larger and more heterogeneous, the institutional forms of liberal democracy developed in the nineteenth century—representative democracy plus techno-bureaucratic administration—seem increasingly ill-suited to the novel problems we face in the twenty-first century. Democracy as a way of organizing the state has come to be narrowly identified with territorially based competitive elections of political leadership for legislative and executive offices. Yet increasingly, this mechanism of political representation seems ineffective in accomplishing the central ideas of democratic politics: facilitating active involvement of the citizenry forging political consensus through dialogue, devising and implementing public policies that ground a productive economy and healthy society, and, in more radical egalitarian versions of the democratic ideal, ensure that all citizens benefit from the nation's wealth.

In this vein, many scholars have now advanced various forms of collaborative governance on the basis of a wide range of similar concepts, such as co-governance, associative governance, participatory governance, polycentric governance, mosaic governance, and collaborative governance. What unites these variants is the concern that the institutions of liberal democracy have become inadequate and thus need to be supplemented by governance reforms that make possible the participation of a greater number of actors, voices, citizens, and stakeholders. The aim is to attain pluralism in terms of both input and output regarding political reforms by means of expanded deliberation among the various actors on the basis of thoughtful and sensitive discussion that takes into consideration the perspectives, interests, and arguments advanced by the actors involved. This normative concern for increased political participation and the construction of intersubjective knowledge stands in stark contrast to “the relatively genuine (albeit very imperfect) expertise that we each have regarding our own lives,” which is Friedman’s reason for preferring exit to voice whenever possible (331).

This raises the question of whether solutions to problems associated with contemporary technocracy run counter to the ideal of deliberative democracy. Joshua Cohen (1997, 67) defines deliberative democracy as “an association whose affairs are governed by the public deliberation of

its members ... that treats democracy itself as a fundamental ideal and not simply a derivative ideal that can be explained in terms of the values of fairness or equality of respect.” The normative concerns that have produced governance reforms aimed at encouraging increased pluralism and deliberation have frequently been based upon the mature Habermas’s theories of communicative action, rational argumentation, and deliberation as providing means for arriving at an enlightened consensus (Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones 2000; Lenoble and Maesschalck 2003; Beaumont and Nicholls 2008). This may provide a foundation for reforming technocracy, governance, and societal planning insofar as communicative rationality comprises a means for mediating among strongly divergent interests. As John Pløger (2001, 223) puts it, technocratic governance can in this way become

an arena for conversation among “equals” in a normative sense building upon, at the very least, equal argumentative rights or opportunities. In order to secure this equality, planners and other experts, on the one hand, need to work on producing power-reducing procedures and, on the other, they constantly have to be critical of their own dialogical practice and its institutional form. ... Habermas in fact introduces the discourse ethic as a precondition to develop intersubjective commonly accepted rules and ways of judgment based on moral principles on “how to communicate democratically.” This power-equalising communicative practice is ensured by having a procedure where all claims are evaluated through commonly accepted principles of judgments, which, according to Habermas, should be the comprehensibility, integrity, legitimacy, and truth of statements.

Thus, I wonder if it is correct to say that “political theorists’ chief concerns have become detached from most areas of contemporary politics and government: those that are technocratic” (9).

Policy and governance research, too, is concerned, to a great extent, with finding the right balance between realism and normative ideals in designing and evaluating governance systems, including their democratic viability. Even if the researchers involved may not term themselves political theorists, they are nonetheless interested in normative questions related to technocratic solutions and how governance could and should be re-designed. They have also brought Habermas along with them on this crusade.

Technocracy and Governmentality

Another giant who comes to mind when discussing power and knowledge is Michel Foucault, who appears only at the very end of *Power Without Knowledge*, in the Afterword, in a discussion of the rise of technocracy—labeled by Foucault the rise of “the art of government”—in sixteenth-century Europe. The underlying principles of this art concerned the welfare of the population, including ameliorating social conditions, increasing wealth, and improving health, suggesting an ever-expanding technocratic agenda (348).

One of Foucault’s main points was that technocracy and the governance of society are explicitly tied to knowledge claims. The fact that he regarded knowledge and power as inseparable serves to illustrate the novelty of his way of theorizing power beyond the formal model of sovereign power. Friedman appears to follow the spirit of Foucault’s concern for how scientific knowledge both makes possible and informs the ways in which governance and technocracy are conducted. Greater engagement with Foucault and the Foucauldian tradition of analysis that has emerged since the 1980s, which sharply contrasts with the Enlightenment conception of knowledge as promoting the ideal of emancipation, could have been fruitful for the overall argumentation in *Power Without Knowledge*.

Foucault maintains that the knowledge of human beings, as social and biological creatures, refines and intensifies the exercise of power. It fosters the disciplinary effects of self-governance and self-control instead of providing a corrective for the repressive mechanisms of power and control that are present in, for example, hospitals, schools, military facilities, airports, and workplaces. The techniques of governance do not stand in opposition to technocratic knowledge claims, but are rather based upon them: knowledge makes possible a granular control of human actions and interactions in the governance of things, places, populations, and target groups (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016). Knowledge thereby promotes the exercise power in a more refined, “concentrated,” and “formalized” manner (Foucault 1980, 226).

Foucault regards power and knowledge not only as mutually reinforcing, but as inextricably bound to each other. Rather than speaking of power and knowledge as independent concepts, the notion of “power–knowledge–discourse” more accurately reflects the intrinsic

connection between them. One of the key aspects of how Foucault approached and developed the connection between power/knowledge and governance involves identifying programs and practices that are focused on directing or correcting the behavior of specific subjects. In particular, the principal strengths and contributions of this discourse follow from an emphasis upon political rationalities and technologies of rule, which forms the analytical framework and unfolding tradition of governmentality studies (Burchell et al. 1991; Dean 2010).

Foucault provided two similar and informative definitions of governmentality: as “the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument” (Foucault 2007, 108), and as “the way in which one conducts the conduct of men” (Foucault 2008, 186). Noteworthy here is the emphasis upon the technocratic aspects of society, namely, how knowledge, at times incorrect or incomplete, informs the programs by which technocrats and experts seek to “conduct the conduct of men.” Friedman argues in a similar vein that a given technocracy presupposes reliable knowledge of human behavior if it is to be successful, and he appears to be equally interested in the conduct of conduct, which is what technocracies attempt to achieve by creating systems of penalties for bad behavior that are designed to internalize the norms of good behavior.

It is important to add that the focus regarding how to resolve problems of a social, economic, or political nature has recently been shifted from social and economic structures to individuals, which may be termed responsibilization (Rådestad and Larsson 2018; Erikson and Larsson 2019). Against this background, it is unfortunate that Foucault is discussed only at the end of *Power without Knowledge*, for I believe that Friedman should be read as a contributor to the tradition of governmentality studies.

Exitocracy: Liberal or Socialist?

The inescapability of power can be highlighted by taking into consideration the relational understanding of power that Foucault advanced. The most extensive account of his view of power/freedom is presented in *The*

History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge, originally published in French in 1976, where he states that

Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization: as the process which, through ceaseless struggle and confrontation, transforms, strengthens, or even reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutionalized crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (Foucault 1990, 92–93)

Friedman argues that the creation of an exitocracy, understood as a technocracy with extensive exit options, constitutes a means for resolving some of the difficulties associated with technocratic solutions that suffer from an imperfect knowledge of human behavior and imperfect knowledge of responses to incentives. He presents this solution in the last chapter of *Power Without Knowledge*, and although it initially seems attractive, it raises several questions that require further discussion.

The first of these is whether it is indeed possible and normatively justifiable to exit from various aspects of social and political life, insofar as this type of alternative appears to rely upon a liberal misconception of a space or life outside power relations—contrary to Foucault—along with a notion of the individual as socially and politically primary.

A second issue is that, as Friedman points out (322, 340–41), exitocracy would require a substantial political and societal organization and, paradoxically, technocratic knowledge and judgment. If we find the idea of an exitocracy morally justifiable, and at least to some extent organizationally plausible, we would thus immediately run into significant problems concerning precisely how it can be organized.

Similarly, Friedman briefly discusses the fact that an exitocracy would require an “egalitarian socialism” insofar as

exit opportunities will more often than not require economic resources. Only economic resources can allow one to enter into alternatives to the situation from which one would like to exit. Thus, if the experimentation promised by the exit option is to be possible for more than the rich, economic redistribution is called for. (335)

How could an economic redistribution that appears more ambitious than the most generous forms of the welfare state be put in place? How could we tax the rich in order to create exit possibilities for the poor? Would there be the risk of capital flight made possible by globalization, or a free-rider problem among the recipients of exit options? As Friedman argues, “The administration of an exitocratic Difference Principle would require the administrators to make behavioral predictions that nobody—no matter how judiciously attentive to ideational heterogeneity—is well positioned to make” (340).

Friedman maintains that

An exitocracy is a regime in which the policies of government are, wherever possible, power conferring—or, more conventionally put, where the policies are conducive to roughly equal positive freedom ... but where the rationale for these policies is not a liberal goal, such as the maximization of freedom or equality as an end in itself, but the technocratic goal of minimizing human distress. By conferring equal power on people to solve their problems in the private sphere, an exitocracy would live up to the egalitarian premise of all forms of utilitarianism and of socialism, too. (324)

I am eager to see how such a collective system can follow from the methodological individualism and subjective understanding of knowledge that were discussed above. Also valuable would be a further discussion of how collective knowledge could make possible a generous project of welfare distribution that sustains exitocracy without generating distrust among citizens.

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There is much of value in *Power Without Knowledge*, not least in that it highlights the importance of technocracy within the democratic system. Friedman pointedly reminds us that we need to direct greater attention to the means of politics, not merely the ends. Perhaps most importantly, Friedman calls us to engage in a discussion of how questions of ontology and epistemology underlie and shape our political imagination concerning the types of polity that we can regard as in fact possible to construct.

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