EDITORIAL 2

SCHOLARS AND POLITICIANS

How are historical studies connected to the contemporary theorising about politics in democratic regimes? This is the topic of focus in several of the contributions published in this volume. The relationship between liberty and law is a key issue in contemporary political philosophy. Using an historical perspective, Lena Halldenius offers some illustrations of the complexity of the issue. Continuing the work of Quentin Skinner on the opposition between freedom and dependence, she discusses Hobbes, Locke and Kant as representatives of three ideal typical positions regarding liberty and law, all of which are also present in the present-day debates.

Wim Weymans discusses the normative implications of Skinner's and Pierre Rosanvallon's views. He opposes Rosanvallon's juxtaposition of the contemporary *malaise* in democratic politics with its historical origins to Skinner's more detached call to examine some of the lost treasures of the past. Weymans emphasises how Rosanvallon connects historical analysis to definite normative positions in the present with a *histoire totale*, to which Skinner has his objections.

The *malaise* is also a very central topic in Frank Ankersmit's article. He discerns and outlines a complete turn of the private vs. public dichotomy as having taken place since the French Revolution. As a committed "Liberal," Ankersmit finds himself opposed to the contemporary "Liberals'" agenda of privatisation. In more formal terms, however, he detects an intrusion of the private-public dichotomy within individuals. Whereas his conclusions remain rather pessimistic, I would suggest that this challenges us to extend the professional

politician's mode of dealing with issues *pro et contra* to one's personal life.

Also departing from the sense of disgust with the contemporary situation of debates on democracy, Hubertus Buchstein and Dirk Jörke call attention to the academisation of debates. This paradoxical feature has inspired me to further reflect upon the relationships between scholars and politicians.

Certainly, academisation can be seen as a consequence of the changing background of present-day politicians. Academic studies seem to render politicians as better equipped to confront the problems of democracy than the old self-made politicians. A more disturbing consequence, however, lies in the rather strange reverence amongst contemporary politicians toward the academic authorities. Such reverence is incompatible with the individuality and equality of the political judgment of democratic rule and may revive the negative aspects of expert rule, which democratising reforms promised to eliminate.

We can speak of the existence of a certain "democratising" tendency in political theorising itself. Quentin Skinner's declaration in the *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (1978, vol. I, xi) that "political life itself" creates problems for the political theorist has gradually altered the entire genre of the study of political thought. It encourages it to take the words of political agents seriously and concentrate on those problematics, such as elections, parliaments and party struggles, which acting politicians themselves face. The formulation of the problems of democratic politics by some academic authorities can lead to the loss of this theoretical reorientation. The expert authority of some political theorists is no less dangerous than that of others.

Of course, we cannot return to the days dominated by self-made men. Even autodidact politicians, such as Joschka Fischer, write books that are marked by academic debates on political concepts. But precisely for this reason, it is crucial to break with the reverential attitude. Of course, I do not mean to imply that politicians should be in direct competition with academics in when it comes to theorising on democracy. The point, rather, is that politicians should be encouraged in their daily practice to use their own judgment against the expertise, including the authority of political theorists.

Electoral candidates today frequently claim to be "experts" in one field or another, which they allege is urgently needed in parliament. However, hardly any political science professors in the past few de-

cades have declared themselves to be the kind of "expert in politics" needed in the parliament. Such a claim would, indeed, be self-defeating: Why should a parliament be elected by universal suffrage with the candidature open to any and all citizens if there were such a thing as a profession of "experts in politics"?

University professors in general tend to deliberate over things so thoroughly that they frequently fail actually to arrive at any decision, and, consequently, tend to remain at the mercy of those who more spontaneously use their *Fingerspitzengefühl*. The academic debates surrounding concepts such as democracy also require procedural reformulation in order to play any role at all on the parliamentary, electoral and public agenda. The proceduralism of democratic political practice tends to remain a rather foreign concept within the professorial experience, although also help us to better understand the constant rhetorical disputes within the academic world.

In order to discuss Buchstein's and Jörke's thesis in more precise terms, I distinguish between three different conceptual pairs: the dilettante and the competent, the amateur and the professional as well as the layperson and the expert. The relationship between citizens and politicians in a democratic regime can be reformulated by applying these simple conceptual distinctions.

Critics of democracy used to denounce the "cult of incompetence" (Emile Faguet). Indeed, there are some views that explicitly celebrate dilettantism. In this type of argumentation the good citizens are categorically opposed to the bad politicians. The point here is, as Pierre Rosanvallon puts it, the notion of the simplicity of politics; the nineteenth-century Jacksonian democracy in the United States, based on *the spoils system* of elective offices, holds that every citizen was competent enough to hold office. Many of its critics were led to reject elections and parliamentary deliberations as such. In the strictly populist type of argumentation, "the people already knows" (as Veikko Vennamo used to declare in Finland) what is good and what is to be done. This brand of thought is essentially a conspiracy theory according to which politicians systematically tend to either distort or to fail to recognise "the right thing" that "the people" intuitively knows.

Against this ideal of simplicity, there are a number of grounds for defending competent politicians. Indeed, any and all claims that there exists an ideal and self-evident criteria of good politics or a right course of action are *a priori* to be rejected. Contrarily, competent politi-

cians are not afraid of facing open issues, recognise the inherent ambiguity of political questions, dispute the conventional wisdom and question the authority of established policies. Above all, they regard the presence of a number of alternative courses of action as a decisive mark of democratic regimes.

In other words, competent politicians do not differ from dilettantes in terms of their level of knowledge but in their judgment. They recognise the complexity of political situations and the corresponding inherent contingency of political action.

The opposition between amateurs and professionals, too, concerns political judgment as opposed to the level of knowledge. Democratic regimes characteristically leave a *Spielraum* to both the amateur judgment of citizens and the professional judgment of politicians, a point which is expressed by Max Weber's distinction between occasional and professional politicians. Voting is the paradigmatic act of occasional politicians; the opportunity to vote in parliamentary elections challenges each and every citizen to form one's own personal opinion. As such, we can concur with Frank Ankersmit's view that it is representation that creates the represented and not vice versa. The degree of political action and commitment beyond the decision of how to act on election day shall, however, remain a matter of choice. Citizens also play a key role as occasional politicians in the control over professional politicians, particularly in cases of their *déformation professionnelle* and the corresponding tendencies to form a "closed shop" in order to separate themselves from the outsiders.

Nonetheless, professional politicians are indispensable for parliamentary democracies. With their full-time concentration on the issues on the current political agenda, professional politicians are both extremely effective in controlling one another and adept at playing with the contingent, contested and controversial situations that characterise the parliamentary-cum-democratic style of political action. It is professional politicians who add new items to the political agenda, although they might originate in the debates among the citizens at large. As strongly as Max Weber in his own time, we can insist that professional politicians form a counterweight to the everyday rule of the bureaucracy in the modern state.

The opposition between experts and laypersons also refers directly to the contrast between knowledge and judgment. Similarly to the dilettantes, those advocating the authority of experts also claim to dis-

regard the normative, strategic and existential questions of judgment and tend to reduce politics to the mastery of a specific bloc of knowledge. This is possible only when viewing the controversial questions of judgment and choice as already resolved and delimiting oneself to the realisation or implementation of the given commitments.

The superiority of lay over expert judgment is a cornerstone of democratic and parliamentary regimes, as otherwise neither general elections nor parliamentary deliberations would make any sense at all. There can be no set criteria of knowledge with which to judge candidates in parliamentary arenae. According to newspaper reports, one of the city councilmen elected in the Finnish city of Kokkola in 2004 is "illiterate" but is able to comprehend the council's political agenda with the help of his advisors. The general assumption is that all parliamentarians learn about the formalities and the playing possibilities involved in parliamentary procedure through practical experience, thus making this a question of political judgment as opposed to knowledge.

Modern parliaments are obliged to deliberate and decide upon a growing number of technical issues. Outside experts are invited to present their views with parliamentary committees. In his parliament pamphlet, Max Weber offers a number of illustrations as to how to apply the lay rhetoric of parliamentary procedure to the expert hearings in committees. He argues in favour of pitting different experts against each other in order to illustrate to the parliamentarians that it is their own rhetoric and judgment that is needed in deliberations and decisions. He also favours the application of the juridical model of cross-examination to the expert hearings in parliamentary committees: the political judgment of the parliamentarians serves as the criterion of the acceptability and the range of applicability of the expert knowledge at hand.

As related to the three aforementioned conceptual oppositions, the distinction between knowledge and political judgement can now be seen as highlighting the nuances of the dichotomy proposed by Buchstein and Jörke.

Above all, academic theorists cannot claim to possess any kind of expert authority regarding democracy, but should be seen instead as laypersons. Political scientists do not follow, unlike journalists, the day-to-day activities of professional politicians. They are, however, occasionally able to warn us of the dangers of the closure of the pro-

fession. As amateurs, as persons who genuinely love politics, political theorists can encourage politicians to dare to be politicians who are neither experts per se nor members of a closed profession.

In relation to dilettantism, the distinction between political scholars and politicians tends to be relative. However, even here we can detect a distinction between ”theory politicians” and ”politicians proper”. Scholars recognise the problems, explicate the alternatives, take up new items on the agenda and may thus be able to recast the horizon within which the professional politicians themselves operate. Simultaneously, they recognise that it would be patronising to use their political competences to make actual decisions between various alternatives. Political theorists have the opportunity to encourage politicians to dare to be politicians, despite all the unpopularity they tend to encounter even in democratic regimes.

Kari Palonen