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Editorial

Debate as Politics: Parliament and Academia

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In an interview he gave in 2008, Quentin Skinner said: "I now say to my students on Hobbes's Leviathan …, think of it as a speech in parliament; all of these great works of political philosophy are recognisably contributions to a debate; interpreting is to uncover what that contribution was" (Skinner, 2008). The idea, in short, is that students of intellectual history and political thought will improve their interpretative skills as scholars by following parliamentary debates and applying them to their own research.

For the traditional view that wants to separate science from politics as strictly as possible, Skinner's advice is indeed provocative. Yet in this time of questioning the integrity of science and knowledge, the political aspects of academia have come to the fore. It is now commonplace to challenge the results of scientific research and ask what kinds of agendas are behind them and in whose interests they are produced. Such suspicion of the underlying politics may give rise to concern. However, in our view, the increased awareness of political aspects of academia is something to be welcomed. To bring politics back into the public debate on science and research can help to remove the antiquated cloak of mystery from academia that has only served to reinforce the public resentment of expertise in recent years.

In this Special Issue we provide some new perspectives on the connections between political and academic debates. Our aim is to generate scholarly interest in this somewhat neglected topic and to increase awareness of the need to understand politics and politicians. As we have argued elsewhere (see Wiesner, Haapala and Palonen, 2017), it is time to re-appreciate politics and political actors, as studying them can yield important information about the practices and patterns of political life as well as the current debates on the integrity of scholarly activity.

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Parliamentary and Academic Rhetoric as Debate

Skinner identifies debate as common in both politics and academic research and refers to the parliamentary form of debate as an explicit model to which scholarly debates should be compared. Furthermore, he recognises that debate is an inherent part of scholarly life, nothing exceptional or irregular. The aim of academic research is not to terminate or step away from debate but, on the contrary, to keep it alive by adding new items to the agenda.

Understanding academic research in terms of debate shifts the scholarly controversies from the epideictic to the deliberative genre of rhetoric and makes academic debates comparable to debates in parliaments. However, in the classical and even the present-day rhetorical literature the deliberative genre concerns rather the oratory of individual speakers rather than debate as such. For Chaïm Perelman, for instance, the third classical genre, forensic rhetoric, is the model for "reasonable" debates (see e.g. Perelman, 1977), whereas for most of the US scholars of rhetoric the presidential system of the country prioritises the epideictic genre. In this volume Alan Finlayson's article deals with the variations of the deliberative as the rhetorical practice of parliamentary politics.

Here we want to take up some questions surrounding the relationship between parliamentary and academic rhetoric. There are fundamental differences between the two rhetorical genres: the secondary role of votes in academic debates, as well as their less direct impact on the lives of other people. In this Special Issue, we are, however, more interested in their interconnections. While we take it that changes in academic theories and concepts are also contingent upon changing circumstances and potentially controversial, we can also accept that parliamentary debates on theories and concepts are worth looking at.

Since the 1980s "rhetoric of the human sciences" has been a common topic especially in US rhetorical studies. However, rhetorical inquiry has focused largely on the tropes and figures of argumentation, whereas the classical division between rhetorical genres has hardly been applied to the practices of research and teaching. The academic power exercised by teachers *ex cathedra* is clearly a variant of the epideictic rhetoric of praise or blame. It is comparable to the rhetoric of festivities or artistic performances as well as with the "rhetoric of the pulpit" of sermons.

An important form of epideictic rhetoric is that exercised by officials and experts. Similarly to rhetoric *ex cathedra*, it is commonly justified by allegedly "superior knowledge" and it is as difficult to shun or dismiss by citizens as academic authorities. The everyday rule of bureaucracy, as Max Weber put it, is indispensable, but he emphasises that parliamentary debate contains rhetorical tools for controlling the knowledge of the officials and experts, such as the

cross-examination of officials or the access of parliamentary committees to the sources of expert knowledge (see esp. Weber, 1918). It is possible to submit their proposals and knowledge claims to parliamentary-style debate that makes alternatives visible and enables an open debate on their strengths and weaknesses.

Skinner's view stems from his extensive studies on the Renaissance rhetorical culture in which scholarly and political aspects are closely intertwined. This rhetorical tradition is still apparent in the works of such scholars as John Stuart Mill or Friedrich Nietzsche. For Weber, in particular, the openly conducted parliamentary controversies *pro et contra* are to be followed *mutatis mutandis* also in the academic debates (see Weber, 1904). The parliamentary-style debate transforms both political and academic debates' fair and civilised forms, without reducing the range of opposite views.

New Perspectives on the Relationship between Parliaments and Academia

Skinner's example above refers to parliamentary practices as a tool for interpreting academic debates, for which the rules and conventions are more implicit and must be reconstructed by scholarly investigation. In this case, parliament provides the ideal type: scholars can direct attention to aspects that would be regularly present in parliamentary debates and discuss their implicit role in academic debates. Or, scholars can discuss, among others, which ideal-typical alternatives are missing from their debates.

There are, of course, personal links between parliamentary and academic *fora*: scholars as parliamentarians and parliamentarians as scholars. The former cases are numerous, as discussed in Onni Pekonen's article on professors in the phase of establishing Finnish parliamentary culture. Today, as both the parliamentary agenda and professorial duties are ever increasing, even standing for parliament is hardly compatible with a professorship. Rosario López deals interestingly with the opposite type of politician, the self-made man, Richard Cobden.

There are also parliamentarians who became scholars after their parliamentary careers. A nineteenth-century British example is the former banker and radical MP George Grote, who, after his parliamentary career, became a famous historian of ancient Greece and Rome. Walter Bagehot writes in his obituary that Grote's reinterpretation of history was inspired by his parliamentary experiences: "He was essentially a practical man of business, a banker trained in the City, a politician trained in Parliament, and every page in his writings bears witness that he was so" (Bagehot, 1871).

It is rare to write a scholarly work about one's own parliamentary experience. An exception is Carl-Christoph Schweizer, who was Professor of International Politics at the University of Bonn, was a Social Democratic member of the Bundestag from 1972 to 1976, and published a book outside his academic specialty (Schweitzer, 1979). He reflected on his experiences as a parliamentary backbencher from an insider's perspective in more general terms. In a sense, his book can be compared to the perspective of an anthropologist, which Emma Crewe discusses in her article and elaborates further in her books.

A less studied topic is the mediation of academic scholarship to parliamentary debates. In the parliamentary committees legal experts and other specialists of all kinds are consulted as experts. Emma Crewe's article discusses a case in which Parliament had to take a stand on a debate between experts who had approached the topic from opposite perspectives. Of course, who is consulted and who is not indicates links between parliamentary majorities and academic trends. The point worth exploring is how such "expertise" is dealt with: is it taken at face value, or submitted to parliamentary control along Weberian lines?

With the online records on parliamentary debates we can, especially for the plenary debates, conduct simple searches on famous scholars in parliament. Such searches would illustrate how frequently, when and how their names have been mentioned in parliamentary debates. Here we focus on a single case, the mention of the name of Max Weber (with first name) in the British Parliament. In the Hansard documentation of the debates (until 2005, see http://hansard.millbanksystems.com) Weber's name has been mentioned on eight occasions, two of them in the House of Commons, all others in the House of Lords. The first mention is from 1974, the rest in 1998 or later.

The former minister Shirley Williams quotes twice the same passage from the end of Weber's *Politik als Beruf* (1919) on "boring hard planks": "Perhaps there is no more appropriate quotation than that from the famous social scientist, Max Weber, that politics is like the boring of hard boards. No harder boards exist than the position of the government of the former republic of Yugoslavia." (Kosovo, HL Deb 24 February 1999) A few months later, in a debate on the social security of asylum-seekers she said: "There is a quotation from Max Weber that politics is the boring of hard boards. That seems to be an excellent description of the Committee stage of this Bill." (Eligibility for the social security benefits whilst awaiting asylum decision, HL Deb 21 July 1999) Thus, while quoting Weber, Williams takes up an important aspect of the patience of the activity of politics.

Weber's views on bureaucracy are referred to on three occasions. Stanley Thorne refers to how the impartiality of bureaucracy could be harmful to the weak: "Max Weber and others wrote about it in the early days. They described the ways in which those who were weak and humble could be subjected to violence by the bureaucracy in our huge organisations." (Public safety and the

respect for the law, HC Deb 25 July 1974) This is rather a periphrasis than an exact quote from Weber.

A passage is presented twice as a quotation from Weber, although it is a rather arbitrary periphrasis. Lord John Patten says on the ideal of the official: "One of the few sensible remarks ever written by a sociologist was by Max Weber and it was so sensible, I wrote it down. On civil servants, he said: 'The ideal official conducts his office in a spirit of formalistic impersonality, without hatred or passion, and hence without affection or enthusiasm'." (The Civil Service, HL Deb 24 May 2000). The same quote is repeated, also in the Lords, by Maurice Saatchi (Civil Service Act, HL Deb 01 May 2002).

However, in Peter Lassman's and Roland Speirs' edition of *Political Writings* (1994) Weber's Latin phrase *sine ira et studio* is translated as "without anger and prejudice" (p. 330), in the Gerth and Mills translation *From Max Weber* (1947) the formula is "without *Zorn* and bias". We thank our Frankfurt colleague Jens Borchert for establishing that the immediate source for the quote is Peter M. Blau's *Bureaucracy in Modern Society* (first edition 1956, p. 30), tracing back Arthur Henderson's and Talcott Parsons' 1927 translation of the first part of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, under the title *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (p. 340), in which, the two parts of the quotation are rather arbitrarily combined.

It seems that Weber is recognised as someone who can be quoted in the British Parliament without further introduction. Quoting Weber shows that MPs with social-science backgrounds in both houses assume that academic references strengthen their cause. This may indicate a Weber renaissance from the 1980s onwards, including greater familiarity with his work outside the specialists, with new translations and so on. But it also shows the close connections between parliament and academia. In parliamentary debates the rhetoric of knowledge is often understood as providing credibility for political arguments or giving an authoritative voice to one's critique of political opponents. This is in direct contrast to the current populist attacks on experts eagerly denouncing their worth and blaming the political "elites" for fostering them for their own interests.

The contrasts between parliamentary and non-parliamentary forms of debate are discussed in Taru Haapala's and Hubertus Buchstein's articles. Both of them deal with a proto- or quasi-parliamentary debate compared to a secondary debate that follows without the original context. Haapala's case study is a debate at one of the most consistent strongholds of parliamentary procedure and debate, namely the Oxford Union Society. Buchstein's contribution analyses a debate inside a professional association of scholars, the German Political Science Association. Common to both articles is that the secondary debate in the press not only rejects the terms of the original debate but many statements in it directly condemn the association to the original debate itself.

The debates on post-truth politics (see Paul-Erik Korvela's Editorial in *Redescriptions* 19:2) compel us to remember that a true "religion of facts" is still very prominent among both scholars and politicians. In the pronouncements of the recent March of Science global event we can discern a longing for "fact-based" politics, which is a rather antiquated *topos*, and many politicians still appear to expect "hard facts" from scholars. Eventually, "facts" may exclude some pertinent political alternatives, while still leaving room for opposite choices and for debates on their strengths and weaknesses. Remembering Skinner's and Weber's arguments, that debate is the common core of both politics and research, such a religion of facts is illusory and offers an excuse for not regarding their own activities as contributions to debates.

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