



Dialogue, Knowledge, Press and Citizens Dialogue, Connaissances, Media et Citoyens

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Abstract: The public domain is the fundamental institution in a society. A society can only exercise its political activity when allowing the free dialogue in this arena. Legitimacy rests on rational public agreement. To realize its nature, this dialogue needs to be carried out with the participation of equal and autonomous beings whose contributions to the debate are based on information and reflection. Manipulation and the promotion of particular interest erode the legitimacy to be achieved in this dialogic exercise. Education helps society for a responsible dialogue in which human capacities flourish. On the other hand, the free press warrants a political *ethos* where ideas and reflections are shared without undue restrictions. The promotion of a free, informed and rational dialogue directs society towards rational decisions not based on the narrow conceptions of instrumental rationality.

Keywords: public domain, dialogue, education, free press

Résumé : Le domaine public est l'institution fondamentale d'une société. Celle-ci ne peut exercer son activité politique que si elle permet le libre dialogue dans ce domaine. La légitimité repose sur un accord public rationnel. Pour réaliser sa nature, ce dialogue doit être mené avec la participation d'êtres égaux et autonomes dont les contributions au débat sont basées sur l'information et la réflexion. La manipulation et la promotion d'un intérêt particulier érodent la légitimité à atteindre dans cet exercice dialogique. L'éducation aide la société à un dialogue responsable dans lequel les capacités humaines s'épanouissent. D'autre part, la liberté de la presse justifie un *éthos politique* où les idées et les réflexions sont partagées sans restrictions indues. La promotion d'un dialogue libre, éclairé et rationnel oriente la société vers des décisions rationnelles qui ne sont pas fondées sur les conceptions étroites de la rationalité instrumentale.

Mots clés : domaine public, dialogue, éducation, presse libre

Resumen: La esfera pública es la institución básica de la sociedad. Una sociedad solo puede ejercer su actividad política si permite el diálogo libre en esta esfera porque la legitimidad solo se sostiene sobre el acuerdo público racional. Para que este dialogo alcance su razón de ser debe ser llevado a cabo con la participación de seres autónomos e iguales cuyas contribuciones se basan en el genuino conocimiento y la reflexión. La manipulación y la promoción de intereses particulares socava la legitimidad que puede ser alcanzada por el ejercicio dialógico. Para este objetivo debe asegurarse la educación y la prensa libre. La educación prepara a la sociedad para un diálogo responsable en el cual florecen las capacidades humanas. Por su parte, la libertad prensa garantiza un *ethos* político en el que se hace circular sin restricciones indebidas la información y las reflexiones. La promoción del diálogo

libre, informado y racionalidad dirige la sociedad hacia decisiones racionales que no se basan en la noción estrecha de la racionalidad instrumental.

Palabras clave: esfera pública, diálogo, educación, prensa libre

Resumo: O domínio público é a instituição fundamental em uma sociedade. Uma sociedade só pode exercer sua atividade política quando permite o livre diálogo nessa arena. A legitimidade repousa no acordo público racional. Para perceber sua natureza, esse diálogo precisa ser realizado com a participação de seres iguais e autônomos, cujas contribuições para o debate sejam baseadas em informação e reflexão. A manipulação e a promoção de interesses particulares corroem a legitimidade a ser alcançada nesse exercício dialógico. A educação ajuda a sociedade para um diálogo responsável, no qual florescem as capacidades humanas. Por outro lado, a imprensa livre garante um *ethos político* onde ideias e reflexões são compartilhadas sem restrições indevidas. A promoção de um diálogo livre, informado e racional direciona a sociedade para decisões racionais não baseadas nas concepções estreitas da racionalidade instrumental.

Palavras chave: domínio Público, diálogo, educação, imprensa livre

Given that the public domain is the basic institution, others flowing from such an arena may well vary: presidential, prime ministerial, judiciary, and parliamentary versions may be established. All of these are a question of convenience, size of population, and efficiency. Nonetheless, even political society must maintain public dialogue. Dialogue is not a necessary consequence of the freedom of expression of each member of the political community. This freedom can be exercised without political dialogue; individuals may say whatever they please. Furthermore, political dialogue is not designed to function as free self-expression, but as a basic political institution. Some of the following considerations ought to clarify this conception.

One form of a political society deals with its public affairs by establishing an institution of representative government. To be democratic, this government must meet certain conditions. First, any person appointed by the public is allowed to perform only what the public requests, within the parameters of universal rights. All other activities purported to be for the sake of the public good are illegitimate. This stems from the view that the sole source of legitimation is the public agreement. Public officials do not lead but serve.

Second, an election is a dialogical process. Persons, offering to serve the public, present their solutions to what they believe are important questions. If a person is appointed to office, such proposals become a covenant. This means that since the public agreed with the proposals and placed a candidate in office, this person is duty-bound to carry out the proposals. Any failure to do so is equivalent to breaking a binding agreement. These derelict officials have no legitimate claim to remain in the office, and thus must be dismissed from or leave office immediately. Depending on the public agreement, they might be prosecuted for criminal activities, i.e. for breaking the agreement with the public.

Third, persons who appear to serve the public should not only submit their proposals, but in light of public debates and input should modify them. Dogmas of all types, whether ideological or moralistic, should not be treated as universal truths, but rather as one person's proposals that should be open to possible modifications once they are exposed to public debate. In a political society a candidate's duty is not to expound on future hope and grand visions, such as "my dream of better life" or "don't worry, be happy," but should articulate and communicate his or her concerns in public to reach an acceptable platform. This means that political dialogue is responsible for all the statements that are made. Yet in this sense, private interests, motivated by causes and irrational drives, conceal, if not abolish rational, logical, and free discussion of issues. The candidate must be truthful since otherwise he would not respect the public and in turn would fail to respect himself.

Discussions need not be simplistic or without controversies. Yet a public discussion requires that political dialogue be understood. This dialogue is triadic: someone speaks to someone about something. The something is the subject matter of concern, which is addressed by a speaker and the public not as a passive listener but as an active partner. Avoided by the dialogical process is the surface view, often paraded as fair and objective, that if two opposing opinions are presented, then the public has an understanding of an issue.

A competent dialogue requires a thorough exposition of the subject matter prior to its obfuscation by the so-called "different viewpoints." A simple exposition of positions does not constitute objective information; the subject matter of each position is the essential component. In turn, direct participation in the public sphere requires that the public be cognizant of the subject matter to be discussed. Full rationality requires nothing less. It would be nonsensical to debate a public policy

on nuclear energy without a thorough articulation of the effects, benefits, and risks of this form of energy. Clearly the duty of everyone, and above all a candidate for office who claims to possess an ability to serve the public, is not only to be well versed in the issues that are important, but also to be able to introduce these topics for public consideration.

We must understand that political dialogue as public is not simply about “politics.” As was argued above, the political is the public region of autonomous and equal persons. Accordingly, political dialogue pertains to concerns that are significant to the public. Such an understanding excludes all informal arguments and the psychologization of issues. Informal arguments include a focus on another person, use of power images and threats, appealing to wrong authority, and not on the issue. “Psychologization” covers emotional appeals as well as rhetorical exhortations related to the use of images, rituals, and slogans.

This *modus operandi* is not designed to treat the individual as autonomous and rational, but as subject to manipulations and irrational outbursts. In effect, public issues are obfuscated. Soliciting such reactions is a mode of modern, but not classical, rhetoric. In the latter one finds a detached reasonableness and a clear discursive practice founded on rules, while in the former disconnected and psychologically over laden speech that is designed to make a direct impact is dominant, and thus the autonomous political process is subverted. Such rhetorical means treat the public not as a rational partner but as an ignorant mass to be manipulated.

If publicly appointed figures, or those running for public office, engage in this level of rhetorical obfuscations, they disqualify themselves from public service. This claim carries no moralistic undertones; it simply follows from the principle that the political is primarily public, and relates to proposals for open discussions about public matters. No such justification as state secrets, known only to the leaders, can be used to either prevent public debate or to avoid addressing important public concerns.

Presumed by this practice is that only the officials are in a position to decide what is good for everyone. This is known as paternalism and is modeled on the mistaken view of the political state as a family. Sure there are temptations not to become embroiled in politics and to leave these activities to government. In this case the citizen has duties, but ceases to have rights. This tendency may appear even in a representative democracy, if the representatives begin to assume that all public problems can be resolved by the wisdom of the leaders. This ideology is obvious in the case of a charismatic representative’s appeal to the public. Such an appeal allows an official to pursue undebated his or her personal dogma, thus leading to disastrous results - so obvious from the popular “leadership” of recent decades.

Education

There cannot be any doubt that autonomy, responsibility and rights are coextensive with knowledge. Ignorant persons cannot make judgments in public dialogue without running the risk of being misled by all sorts of rhetorical images, myths and interest manipulations. Education is a process from authority to autonomy - rational and free adjudication of issues based on knowledge.

One must move through authority by those who know a subject matter and are capable of articulate its intricacies, whether in sciences, literatures, social affairs, and even public institutions. But one must also grow out of being subjected to authority by mastering issues and complexities in principle of different fields of

knowledge in order to make rational and thus autonomous decisions. Without such a process the person cannot be responsible for his decisions, since the latter are blind and irrational.

In this sense education is another institution that is coextensive with the public region of dialogue and finally autonomy and responsibility. This extends into the very domain of universal human rights to education as a continuation of all other rights to be autonomous, equal, and responsible member of human public community. This is specifically important in an age where such public domain and universal rights to autonomy and equality are being assaulted by technocracy, materialistic reductionism of all functions of human life to cause and effect, and blatant lies by ideological rhetoric.

The presumed “empirical person” cannot be posted as a standard by which to decide the human question. Humans are more than a current empirical entity. Various terms have been used to express this “more” ranging from potential to possibility, impossibility and even infinity. This suggests a common recognition that this “more” has to be disclosed, revealed, actualized or realized. It can be claimed that even philosophical anthropologies belong in this framework when they proclaim the human to be an “unfinished” being, or when the globalizers on various continents demand for all sorts of technologies, assistances, and expertise to help “develop” the indigenous populations. All such notions suggest that there is a human dimension that has to be brought out, educed, educated and thus fully actualized. Even all the furious revolutions to abolish alienation rest on this phenomenon of “more.”

To begin with, the unfolding of the more is also related to the phenomenon of radical diversity of human occupations, interests and above all abilities. In this sense it would be impossible to prescribe an education policy that would treat everyone as the same. Yet as was noted, political equality is a condition, but it will have to be treated in its unfolding through differences. What is significant that among interests and capacities of each individual, there can emerge the “highest capacity,” and do so through the process of education. The bringing out of such capacities and their exercise in society leads to the fulfillment of a person’s life and even to happiness. This means that to be able to exercise one’s highest capacities is to be satisfied with one’s life, while to be placed below such capacities could be deemed unsatisfactory. In turn to reach beyond one’s capacities is also dissatisfying both to a person and to society. To insist on becoming a doctor when one cannot endure the sight of blood or pain will not lead to being a good doctor and thus will be disservice to society. Yet to be able to become a doctor and be allowed to reach the capacity of an inadequate mathematician is again disservice to the person and to society. It could even be said it would be unjust to both.

The richness has a basic outline: to actualize her potential, she needs others to the extent that the actualized capacities are inadequate to fulfill all of her needs – for the latter she needs others with different actualized capacities. Thus the fulfillment of her life is coextensive with the unfolding of the capacities of others and resultantly the correlate fulfillment of their lives. Actualization of one, is an actualization of others but in such a way that each is aware of the importance of the capacities of others for mutual fulfillment of the variety of needs, from daily necessities to cultural creations. The latter are just as much needed as other necessities – as shall be seen later. Such awareness is required in order not to fall into the sense of false security of being “self made man” completely independent of others and perhaps even most significant in relationship to them. It is to be noted that there was no mention or decision as to which capacities are more important over others. At this level of unfolding the “more” all capacities are equivalent to the

extent that they comprise mutual contributions to one and all. It must also be stated that there is not yet the question of the priority of individual over society or society over the individual: both are mutually founded-founding – well argued and defined by Husserl in his *Communal Spirit*.

While human potential can unfold in a great variety of abilities, the latter provide a ground, but not a complete fulfillment of human openness. It is in the ways the openness is shaped that a greater variety and orientation of the fulfillment reside. In this sense, the responsibility of the educator is not only in bringing out of a set of fixed abilities, but also in the concrete formation of them leading to direct, perceptual fulfillment. Lacking a formative orientation the best of abilities may remain diffused or assume a detrimental function for the individual and society. The implication for such channeling is valuative. One may have the greatest talent in nuclear physics and could build weapons of mass destruction for any government; yet the question of valuating such a capacity demands that it be employed for the benefit and not the destruction of others.

We cannot allow a development of barbaric expert geniuses under the guise of pure science. The question is obvious: could one perform an action which violates the others without violating oneself, and could one violate oneself without violating the others? By “violation” is meant a diminishment, thwarting, or destruction of human self actualization in the social world. By violating another in this way one is diminishing her possibility of actualization of her potential and at the same time one closes ones own actualization insofar as one closes the capacity of the other to reveal a way of being human which has never, and perhaps will never occur to one.

The institution: free press

In a political society the press is not merely free to print or show anything at random. Instead, various events are supposed to be reported as they occur. It is important to note that there are various epistemological arguments concerning the possibility of reporting events without interpretive mediation, and no doubt these claims should make the public wary and remain critical. Yet the principle remains, specifically in the domain of public affairs: in order to participate in the public domain, every person ought to be informed publicly about relevant issues.

Information, and its transmission by mass-media, is a fundamental public “institution” of democracy. One could plausibly contend that the transmission of information is coextensive with the continuous establishment and maintenance of the autonomous source of all laws and legitimation. An uninformed citizen is hardly in a position to comprehend public issues and to form a rational judgment. Moreover, knowledge is a condition for public dialogue, debate, and adjudication. The public region and its participants as a process of constant self maintenance of the *polis* includes at its core the necessity for information that is available to everyone, not simply for the sake of extraneous purposes, but as part of the *ethos* of democratic activity. This may be a difficult point to convey in an age that assumes the legitimacy of interest laden, technical, and purposive rationality; yet, to speak in terms of mass-media, the argument could be made that irrespective of the type of information, knowledge is offered for its own sake as an exercise of universal freedom to bring into the public domain the voices that create and maintain the polity.

As was noted with respect to the dialogical domain, the freedom of the press does not originate with the right to free expression, but from the necessity to establish and maintain the public domain as a place for free and mutual understanding and

the adjudication of issues. Thus, what is called the free press should be the facilitator of dialogue and, as an institution, play a leading role in keeping this discourse open and public.

The activity of a free press, in this sense, is coextensive with political *ethos*. If the press has the freedom to report and to inform, then members of the press have an obligation and duty to defend the public arena wherein open and uncompelled debates are carried out. In a political society the institution of a free press is one of the basic modes of communication. In this sense, there is no such thing as apolitical reporting. This is to say, at this level the free press is basically political communication prior to any question of ideology or any other agenda.

As a major avenue of political communication, a free press is not restricted to reporting what occurs at public gatherings or what office holders say. In a political society, any activity or proposal that enters the public domain must become a public concern to be adjudicated openly. Even so-called private enterprise is an aspect of political agreement, where the latter delimits what areas shall be deemed private or public. No doubt, the common wisdom that claims free enterprise leads to universal freedom must be questioned; the very designation of private is a political activity. Moreover, the idea that the interest laden social domain will lead to an autonomous political society, is a contradiction. The continuous origination of the political society defies all the social functions based on instrumental rationality.

Postscript

Within a political society, various technical processes are a matter for public discussion. As indicated earlier, any interest that in any way enters the public arena becomes subject to the citizenry and, by extension, to the free press. Here education reappears in a broader context. Uneducated person cannot be free and responsible. But having gone through education and gained an understanding of various fields, including that of justice, search for truth, recognizing one's possible failures and mistakes, one must continue education through other means.

This is to say in democracy, the public must be informed and the *ethos* of free press requires the reporting of events that affect the public. Crucial to the coextension between democracy as its own purpose and the free press as an "educational" institution, is the principle that whenever members of the press publish information, they are part of developing and maintaining the autonomous public region. The public's right to information is not natural, but political.

Personally, it might be more convenient and beneficial to a member of the press to serve the interests of the public officials and their friends by publishing the "right" stories. Yet such a subjection becomes instrumental, purposive, and interest laden, and thus social and not political. A press that is subjected to these conditions is no longer a part of the political region, but merely markets specific commodities owned by a seller. This type of newspaper is in advertisement business and sells "designer news," or, bluntly, provides technical knowledge to public officials that is counter to public interests. Thus free press is not to say whatever one wills, but to serve the public region and its dialogical autonomy.

While one must report the news, one need not stop at this level. A free press, if it is free, is also responsible for informing the public what the officials are hiding behind the obfuscations, theatrics, and equivocations. At the same time what is relevant to the public must be exposed to insure that public figures explain their rhetoric or the introduction of myths, moralities, or ideologies into the public arena. Clearly, the

institution of free press is one of the key institutions of political society, and is linked inextricably to the continuous maintenance of such a polity.

CF Prologue.

Note from the editor of the journal: this article is a follow-up to the philosopher's reflection in his prologue.