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Introduction: Issues in Political Epistemology

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This special issue comprises of papers first presented at two ECPR (European Consortium for Political Research) events in 2018 and 2019: the ECPR 'Summer School on Political Epistemology' at Siegen University and, respectively, the 'Kant on Political Change: Theoretical Grounds and Global Implications' workshop held at the ECPR's Joint Sessions at the Université Catholique de Louvain in Mons, both events organised by the Kantian Standing Group of the ECPR. The summer school was partly funded by the British Academy Newton Advanced Fellowship "Dealing Ethically with Conflicts between Deep Commitments"[1] which has served as the guiding inspiration for the theme of this volume and our emphasis on navigating real-world examples of political and ethical differences.

This volume demonstrates a wide array of approaches from our eight contributors, who come from a diverse range of academic and cultural backgrounds. Our contributors come from various stages in their careers and work all over the world pursuing political and philosophical studies in Australia, the USA, Pakistan and Europe including Denmark, Finland, the Czech Republic and the UK. Although the papers in this issue cover a wide range of topics and pursue different approaches, they all embrace the fundamental goal of understanding various aspects of political epistemology. Political epistemology is a relatively new field of inquiry, currently attracting more and more scholars. In the simplest term, it might be defined as the theory of knowledge as it is applied or relevant to political life. Each paper in this special issue can be seen as answering a central question about the acquisition and utilisation of knowledge within the political sphere. They can also be loosely grouped depending upon the type of question they seek to answer: higher-order, normative or applied. Higher-order questions examine what we mean by justice, tolerance, freedom and the concept of right in the first place (Wyrębska-Đermanović, Klix). Normative questions concern the viability of specific methodological approaches used in the acquisition of knowledge and the epistemological standards by which we are guided in making sound decisions in the political realm (Russell, Uhrenfeldt, Krepelova). Finally, applied questions attend to understanding how these concepts (justice, equality, etc.) can be employed in real-world scenarios (Muhammad, Vereb, Kings). Some of the papers focus on just one of these questions, while others touch upon all three.

1] Co-holders: Ruhi Demiray and Sorin Baiasu.

The intricate links between each set of questions become clear through our contributors' careful analysis of some of the most important contemporary problems dominating political philosophy. For instance, Muhammad's examination of Pakistan's Lawyers Movement highlights the need for theory-driven methodologies to evolve alongside real-world applications, and Klix's discussion of the potentially negative connotations of tolerance illustrates how a refusal to interrogate assumptions surrounding higher-order concepts can help feed the negative public perception of minority groups. Likewise, Russell's illustration of the need to consider why the public contestation of credibility may peacefully co-exist with a deliberative democratic system and Kings's examination of the inadequacy of basing environmental judgments on beauty both demonstrate the need to challenge our methodological assumptions in order to make epistemologically sound decisions. This special issue highlights that high-order, normative and applied questions cannot be addressed without reference to each other: our aim has been to draw together scholars working on seemingly different topics to help demonstrate the need to work together going forward.

Matheson Russell's paper "The contestation of credibility and the deliberative model of democracy" considers the undermining of credibility in the public sphere and questions whether attacks on a public speaker's credibility can be accommodated within the framework of deliberative democracy. Whether it is the buffoonery on display in the House of Parliament or politically irrelevant attacks on a politician's character, open *ad hominem* attacks on public figures are a part of everyday political discourse. However, they are easy to dismiss as illegitimate forms of argumentation, especially when operating within a deliberative model of democracy. Russell argues that while contesting a person's credibility can intensify political divisions and contribute to nastiness in political discussion, there is also a good reason to think that the public contestation of credibility can have valuable epistemological and social outcomes.

We don't all have the time or resources to educate ourselves on every nuance of a political discussion. Often the best we 'ordinary folk' can do is to watch the news, do a bit of googling and then hop on down to the voting booth and hope for the best! In order to make more informed decisions, many of us (at some point) have relied on better-informed individuals or organisations, to help guide our decision-making strategy. For instance, the scientist who specialises in Green-energy technology helps us to decide whether to buy solar panels for our home, our doctor is trusted with knowing which supplements are best for our health, and we even (sometimes) trust when the weatherperson tells us to take an umbrella to work. This has a multitude of epistemological implications, in terms of warranted belief and the role of second-hand knowledge acquisition. However, in this paper, Russell focuses on the degree to which the contestation of a public figure's credibility (or trustworthiness) should be advocated in a deliberative democratic model of society – where the ramifications of trusting an untrustworthy public figure may have farther-reaching consequences than simply getting caught in the rain on your way home!

Russell takes for granted that people put their trust in public figures and that people will also continue to contest other's credibility: his pragmatic approach emphasises the role of this contestation and interrogates whether it can be helpful in advancing the aims of deliberative democracy by promoting greater transparency in political discourse.

Rasmus Uhrenfeldt's paper also considers whether an element of our everyday political system ought to be incorporated into a deliberative democratic framework. In his paper, "Deliberative Democracy and the Secret Ballot: Can we keep both? Three Areas of Tension," Uhrenfeldt examines whether the omnipresent secret ballot, a fixture of most modern democratic systems, is at odds with principles at the heart of deliberative democratic theory. In the same way as the public contestation of credibility is often regarded as antithetical to the aims of deliberative democracy, the secret ballot is often seen as exhibiting strictly non-deliberative properties.

If we take the central aim of deliberative democracy to be consensus-driven decision-making brought around by open discussion, then the presence of a secret ballot introduces issues of accountability and lack of voter engagement or justification in their voting choices. Uhrenfeldt argues that the practice of secretive voting may in some instances be in tension with some of the ideals of deliberative democracy, but that, if we take an epistemic view towards deliberative ideals, the tensions lose substantial power.

The epistemic rationale of this argument lies in the probability that the alternative to ballot secrecy – the public ballot – would not have significant epistemic benefits and may, in fact, undermine some of the work done by the deliberative system. The pressure on individual voters to justify their vote may lead to electors leaning on shallow or superficial reasoning, which, in Uhrenfeldt's words, "[...] threatens to flatten the discursive landscape." Even aside from the advantages of ballot secrecy, there may be serious epistemic downsides to abandoning secrecy within an epistemic approach to deliberative democratic theory. This paper brings into focus some key concerns and points of potential conflict between ballot secrecy and deliberative democracy and points the way towards areas which need further research.

The discussion surrounding deliberative democracy often focuses on the nuances of theoretical and normative parts of the concept, but understanding real-world examples of deliberation in political settings is equally important for the navigation and improvement of the system. Irfan Muhammad's paper "Pakistan Lawyers' Movement and Democratization: A Deliberative Perspective," examines the role of deliberation in the democratisation of Pakistan by focusing on Pakistan's Lawyers' Movement during the years 2007-2009 of the military dictatorship.

Muhammad's paper provides a compelling counterpoint to Western-centred accounts of deliberative democracy, which usually presume against a politically significant existence of deliberation in non-western authoritarian context and simply ignore any potential role it can play in those contexts. Focusing on the role of the Pakistan Lawyers' Movement, his paper draws attention to studies which have thus far failed to account for the deliberative aspect of this movement in Pakistan's transition to democracy. He suggests

that understanding how social movements help instantiate deliberative democratic ideals is an important aspect of democratisation studies which tend to be dominated by a focus on structural issues such as elections, constitutional preconditions, and the role of elites.

The Lawyers' Movement was highly instrumental in the development of the overall deliberative capacity of the Pakistani political system and helped Pakistan in its transition to democratic rule. Muhammad's paper highlights the importance of deliberation within the public sphere as well as the necessity of having robust systems of communications for successful mobilisation of the populace. Although the Lawyers' Movement began as an internal legal issue for Pakistan's lawyers to restore the Chief Justice, it soon became a national, social rallying cry for social justice and the restoration of democracy. Contrary to the prevalent tendency of the literature on democratisation in focusing upon the influence of the public sphere in increasing the amount of deliberation in 'empowered spaces' such as the courts and legislature, Muhammad contends that the reverse can also be true, i.e. that the transmission of deliberative capacity can also filter down from 'empowered spaces' to the informal public sphere with transformative social and deliberative consequences.

Not only the scope of concepts and words but also their very nature or essential meaning can be controversial in politics. Moreover, in certain cases, at least, the words we use have the power to either include those around us or induce a sense of segregation. Increasingly extreme and polarising political debates have led to progressively stronger and more radical language on both sides of the political spectrum and the normalising of such language in many areas of social life. For instance, the use of discriminatory language by the far-right provides an obvious counterpoint to the idea of tolerance, which at surface level is an innocuous and perhaps even beneficial linguistic and conceptual device to promote greater equality.

The aspirational use of the term 'tolerance' to describe an ideal state of society, whereby its members are accepting of those from other backgrounds, is ubiquitous in both the public and civil spheres. Dog-whistle politics and virtue-signalling allow politicians and public figures to pay lip service to the idea of tolerance while taking no long-term action against the root causes of discrimination. Nikolai Klix deconstructs this rush to tolerance in his paper, "On the Conceptual Insufficiency of Toleration and the Quest for a Superseding Concept" by opening up the negative foundation of the term toleration and proposing the term 'respectance' to be used in its stead.

The idea that we merely tolerate a person or group of people implies first that their existence is a nuisance and secondly that the best we can possibly hope to do is 'put up with them'. Given that the subject of tolerance is ordinarily an individual or group that already experiences marginalisation, Klix proposes that we choose a less loaded word in order to cease the perpetuation of negative attitudes through linguistic microaggressions. His paper explores the need to find a replacement for tolerance in a changing political landscape which does not inspire the same subject/object distinction as 'toleration' or does not promote further discrimination against minorities.

The sensitivity to the epistemological aspects in political theory triggers also reconsiderations of the general methodological problems of the discipline in more serious and extensive ways. It is well known that positivism as an attitude of abstention from strong metaphysical contentions has been prevalent in the western thought (including both philosophy and science) in 20th and 21st century. In contemporary political philosophy, we witness its influences in the form of new methodological approaches attempting to avoid what is considered as the subjectivist pitfalls of the discipline. Tereza Krepelova's paper "A Methodological Turn in Political Philosophy: Making Political Philosophy More Scientific?" provides a critical examination of such scientific approaches in the case of the particular method called reflective equilibrium. Her paper explores the development and use of reflective equilibrium in contemporary political philosophy and reflects upon the epistemic impacts of this methodological approach on the discipline as a whole. In particular, Krepelova focuses on the overestimation of its justificatory power and the over-reliance on its ability to provide non-subjective results which are in some cases even comparable with those of political science. Krepelova argues that preconceptions and normative distortions make the use of reflective equilibrium capable of undermining the discipline of political philosophy and its reflective, critical and analytical roles in political theory. Krepelova ultimately concludes that the epistemological soundness of this coherentist approach is unsatisfactory as it undermines much of political philosophy as a normative discipline.

Arguably, Goodman and Rawls never intended reflective equilibrium to be used in such a way or for the ultimate outcome of its use to be epistemic correctness. However, as Krepelova points out, the ability for reflective equilibrium to be action-guiding and provide justificatory power for political and moral judgments can be called into question on multiple accounts. In the realm of political philosophy, using an approach such as reflective equilibrium to help make sense of tangled belief systems and solve issues emerging from conflicting beliefs and values, may instead of providing clarity merely recapitulate the problems. Krepelova's paper draws together some of the key literature in this area and explores why the uncritical use of, and overreliance on, any methodological device or tool can have detrimental effects which are diametrically opposed to the desires of its creators or users.

As far as the high order theorizing examining the key concepts of politics is concerned, Kant's practical philosophy is still considered as one of the most essential sources of inspiration in western political philosophy. In her paper "The Moral Source of Kant's Concept of Right," Ewa Wyrębska-Đermanović revisits the big debate in Kant's political-legal philosophy, namely the relation between ethical normativity and political-legal normativity. She argues that Kant's concept of right is dependent upon the general principles of his practical philosophy and cannot (as some contend) be justified independently from this. Her argument stands in contrast with the idea that the claims contained in Kant's legal theory can be derived from within his legal theory alone without recourse to other parts of his practical philosophy, particularly to his ethical

philosophy. She focuses on showing the dependency of Kant's concept of right upon our moral obligation towards humanity both in oneself and in others, and counters one of the most prevalent objections to the dependency thesis, namely, that the use of coercion in the theory of right is grounded within the doctrine of right without help from his ethical philosophy. Wyrębska-Đermanović explores the relationship between the Categorical Imperative, and the conception of right and responds to criticism that the CI is not able to ground the concept of right due to the essential connection between coercion and the conception of right.

As it proposes a reading of Kant that emphasizes the integral unity of his practical philosophy, Wyrębska-Đermanović's paper suggests that there is a fundamental insight Kant provided in relation to political theory and political epistemology. It is the insight that there is a moral basis for political power and its limits, and thus a moral metaphysics of politics and law is the inevitable primary part of any sound political-legal philosophy.

In terms of the questions concerning the applied level, the one concerning the global climate change has turned out to be the most crucial one that contemporary political philosophy should tackle. The threat of global climate catastrophe looms large over many of the political and ethical decisions made by organisations, governments and individuals alike. Navigating the complexities of environmental decision-making is often a difficult and time-consuming process, especially when the decisions must be made to appease the varying views of a population. Alongside direct interest in human survival, appeals to beauty are a common feature in justification of environmental protections. In her paper "The danger of beauty alone: The limitations of beauty in environmental decision-making," Kings demonstrates the need to interrogate our assumptions concerning the role of beauty further when making judgments about the natural world. In particular, Kings focuses on instances of harmful beauty and helpful ugliness, in order to illustrate the inadequacy of beauty-only accounts of aesthetics and the subsequent flawed justifications for environmental protection (or lack thereof).

Zachary Vereb's paper "Moral Views of Nature: Normative Implications of Kant's Critique of Judgment," also grapples with motivating environmental protectionism, but through the lens of Kant. Vereb highlights the role of the *Critique of Judgment* in the rehabilitation of Kant's image, into a potential defender of action taken to mitigate the climate crisis. A Kantian moral view of nature seen through the Analytic of the Beautiful can provide good reasons for humans to appreciate the beauty in nature and can even lead to environmental protections resulting from the setting aside of human self-interest. Kings and Vereb touch on the historical significance of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in environmental aesthetics and the importance of aesthetic disinterest as the basic starting point of environmentalism. However, both papers illustrate the inadequacies and limitations of using this approach alone and point towards different resources to overcome these challenges.

Vereb explores Kant's Critique of Teleological Judgment and its potential relationship with understanding and appreciating ecosystems as a whole, rather than

having to focus on the beauty of singular objects. His paper examines the capability of a moral view of the nature of ecosystems to be motivated through a Kantian framework. In theory, the role of teleological reflection allows for the appreciation of flora and fauna of an ecosystem in its totality – accounting for the beautiful, ugly and everything in between. This would help make environmental protections more robust and a Kantian defence (or even promotion) of such protections more feasible. While making Kant more amenable to environmentalism, Vereb's argument may also hold value for non-Kantians and even Gaians who wish to connect traditional enlightenment philosophy with modern-day holistic environmentalism.

We hope that this special volume of *Public Reason* offers some insight into the exciting and creative early-career research taking place in political philosophy and that this collection of papers will help inspire others to tackle the assumptions at the heart of their own political decision-making. We would like to thank the European Consortium of Political Science (ECPR), the ECPR Kantian Political Theory Standing Group, the Keele-Oxford-St Andrews Kantian Research Centre (KOSAK), Siegen University and the British Academy (BA) Newton Advanced Fellowship "Dealing Ethically with Conflicts between Deep Commitments". We would also like to thank our contributors – without whom the volume would not have been possible.

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