

Objectivity, participation, democracy: bringing together Helen Longino's ideas about objectivity and analyses of democratic participatory practices

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I have previously argued that there may be seen some parallels between philosophical proposals about the social organisation of science and developments towards a greater democratisation of science policy. In the presentation, I summarise my argument that there are important similarities between one approach to objectivity in philosophy of science—Helen Longino's account of objectivity as freedom from individual biases achieved through interaction of a variety of perspectives—and some ideas about the epistemic benefits of wider representation of various groups' perspectives in science policy, as analysed by Mark Brown. Given these similarities, I suggest that they allow one to approach developments in science policy as if one of their aims were epistemic improvement that can be recommended on the basis of the philosophical account. Analyses of political developments inspired by these ideas about the benefits of inclusive dialogue can then be used for understanding possibilities for implementing a philosophical proposal to improve the objectivity of science in practice. Accordingly, analysing such specific developments can be one of the tasks for philosophy of science.

In the second part of the presentation, I discuss some analyses of participatory practices that since then have made me rethink some aspects of the relation between the epistemic and the democratic in the vision of public participation inspired by Longino's ideas. Several analyses of participatory practices have identified different types of the public that such initiatives seek to engage. One of the most important contrasts here is between representatives of the public invited for their knowledge, experience and relevant perspectives—„lay experts” —and representatives of the „pure public” meant to represent ordinary citizens. I suggest that it is useful to recognise Longino's account as supporting the first type of public participation. Analyses of participatory practices demonstrate some difficulties that may arise when trying to organise participation of different types of the public. In particular, the qualities required for a successful “lay expert” may be incompatible

with the qualities of a „pure citizen” and acquiring these qualities may undermine one’s credibility as a representative of the general citizenry. I still believe that some participatory practices involving „lay experts” combine epistemic and democratic rationales in a way that makes them relevant for understanding the practical promise of philosophical proposals and that can be characterised as democratisation of science and science policy. At the same time, being aware of different types of participation and different types of the public is important for understanding the kind of democratisation that proposals based on Longino’s ideas can support.