



BOOK REVIEW

Péter Hartl and Adam Tamas Tuboly (eds). *Science, Freedom, Democracy*. Routledge Studies in the Philosophy of Science. Routledge, 2021. 230p. Hardcover: USD152. ISBN 978-0-367-41817-5. E book: USD42. ISBN 978-0-367-82343-6.

This interesting and wide-ranging book contains nine essays (plus an introduction by the editors), seven of which were presented at the *Science, Freedom, Democracy* conference in Budapest in July 2019. The book deals with the complex interplay of values implied by the trinitarian title: where do the values of the sciences, including the human sciences, and the (multiplicity of) values of a liberal democracy intersect, conflict, reinforce one another? And what are the essential foundations for a public reason that is not epistemically compromised?

I recommend the book for those interested in cross-disciplinary explorations that connect academic silos such as epistemology, philosophy of science, sociology, and political philosophy, along with contemporary populist and authoritarian politics.

In this brief review, I will offer a sketch of the book's contents especially remarking on the Polanyian aspects of the book, which appear in chapters 2 and 3 in the first of the work's three parts.

Following the Introduction, four authors (Phil Mullins, Péter Hartl, Heather Douglas, and Janet A. Kourany) focus on freedom and control of science in Part I. They deal with historical and theoretical discussion of the appropriate limits to academic freedom and the degree to which science/scientists are publicly accountable.

Mullins's essay (ch. 2) is an excellent overview of Michael Polanyi's political and social ideas as they relate to science. For Polanyi, the practice and assumptions of science (and the problem of scientism) are integrally connected to the political and social organization and thinking of a society. A misunderstanding about the nature of the scientific enterprise leads directly to what Polanyi calls "moral inversion": the problem of the modern mind in which an unanchored skepticism becomes nihilism, driven by moral passions that are no longer constrained by traditional commitments to truth and charity. Mullins's chapter highlights the genealogy of Polanyi's ideas, which are woven into an integrated whole wherein science and a free society are interdependent and completely reciprocal. The chapter includes elucidations of various aspects of Polanyi's thinking: his advocacy of a middle political position between extreme liberalism and totalitarianism; his insistence on the importance of "moral confidence" (as against skepticism); the importance of a widespread trust between social actors (and, of course, within "the republic of science"); his warnings against populism; the dangers of central planning—instead advocating a minimal supervisory role for government to encourage dispersed centers of intellectual and practical social activity and knowledge production; and finally his understanding of the importance of public liberty, which serves the purpose of the common good rather than merely an individual's personal ends. Mullins's chapter also includes inexplicit but not entirely opaque links between Polanyi's thought and global politics of the last decade or so; he refers to contemporary politicians who "do not recognize the importance of ideas about truth and its independent pursuit...

manipulate democratic principles...massively tweet and thrive on chaos" (25).

This chapter is an excellent overview of so much of the thinking of a polymath who never quite found a place in one of academia's silos but nevertheless has much to offer them all.

Hartl (ch. 3) probes the respective understandings of science of Robert Merton and Michael Polanyi and their defenses of scientific autonomy as being essential to a free society. In similar ways, both thinkers resist totalitarian control of science, and both argue that science and a free society are mutually dependent. While Merton's approach is sociological and Polanyi's is more philosophical, their approaches reinforce one another, centering on "the idea that the values and the ethos of science should be respected as fundamental values in any liberal and democratic society" (39). The collapse of a free society into one of centralized control is the alternative—a warning that, in not-so-obvious ways, is still relevant today in a context of populism and authoritarian politics, says Hartl. The essay also examines Polanyi's negativity about what he saw as Merton's value-free sociology of knowledge, which Hartl claims was a misunderstanding of Merton. Also challenged here are Polanyi's idealism about scientific freedom (actually, given unconstrained freedom scientists may go in unethical directions) and his rigid distinction between pure and applied science, which, according to Hartl, do not withstand historical scrutiny (actually, science can respond to social factors without science being judged on purely utilitarian principles).

Douglas (ch. 4) argues that scientists are increasingly aware of the public responsibility that goes with the freedom to pursue research, as opposed to previous views that feared scientific freedom would be limited by imposed constraints. (Douglas mentions those opposing J. D. Bernal and the 1940 Society for Freedom in Science, formed by Polanyi et al.) This essay has a useful historical background and divides the two attitudes as pre and post the

year 2000. Given this turn, Douglas looks at how institutional structures might be reformed to align with newer understandings of freedom and responsibility. While "we should shift the attention of scientists from compliance to full responsibility in their decision-making" (82), Douglas advocates for the integration of ethical thinking in science; rather than acting as isolated individuals, scientists should have access to advisors, akin to ethical bodies and consultants in healthcare settings.

Kourany (ch. 5) questions the Baconian promise that the results of science, unhindered by societal control, will inevitably contribute to the common good. Following case studies that make a lie of such optimism, she argues that we must infuse in science "the right social values" to hold scientific research accountable: "the ones that promote human flourishing" (106). This, she believes, is the task of the scientific community, which (on the analogy of a workers' union) could conceivably refuse to participate in certain forms of research.

In Part II, Hans Radder, Hugh Lacey, and Dustin Olson tackle "Democracy and Citizen Participation in Science." What democratic values should govern science policy and to what extent should science be democratized (as opposed to, perhaps, deferring to expert opinion)?

Radder's chapter (ch. 6), "Which Science, Which Democracy, and Which Freedom?" has accounts of each mentioned theme, starting with the nature and aims of science or, more properly, the sciences: a family where "the members...are both similar and distinct" (114). Then follows a discussion of the implications of Radder's account of democracy and freedom for science. He focuses on academic freedom and its justifiable limitations in a democracy: it should be practiced in the public interest.

Lacey's (ch. 7) begins with a list of eight acronyms used regularly in the text (e.g., VTM: values of technological progress) and includes lengthy sentences of 100 words. I believe the reading might have been made easier in this interesting discussion

of the relationship between, on the one hand, two conceptions of democracy (representative and participative) and, on the other hand, two conceptions of scientific research (decontextualizing and multi-strategic). Lacey criticizes commercially oriented technoscience, arguing that participatory democracy at the state level (as contrasted with representative democracy) bolsters multi-strategic research and vice versa; one result is the strengthening of the ideals of the scientific tradition (e.g., inclusivity, evenhandedness, and comprehensiveness).

Olsen (ch. 8), is concerned to mitigate the willfully propagated distorting influences on public opinion and their epistemically compromising effect on popular views. Such distortions amount to “social epistemic exploitation” (SEE) (161), where an actor asserts a view, P, but is indifferent to the truth-value of P while also maintaining that the assertion is made in good faith. Olsen cites as an example the propagandistic and influential denial of the scientific consensus about anthropogenic global warming seen around the US 2010 midterm elections. We are epistemically vulnerable to such exploitation for two reasons: first, we are epistemically interdependent in being forced to trust the testimony of others to arrive at our beliefs, and, second, we are egotistically inclined to prefer certain views over others. Olsen’s argument against SEE is a normative one: traditional liberal institutions (e.g., journalism) have obligations (epistemic, moral, political) to facilitate public reason and resist epistemically corrupting influences; otherwise, they undermine democratic legitimacy.

Part III closes the book with chapters by Jeroen Van Bouwel and Lidia Godek focusing on freedom and pluralism in the methodology and values of science.

Van Bouwel’s chapter title (ch. 9) asks whether transparency and representativeness of values are hampering scientific pluralism (and, in so asking, assumes that scientific pluralism is a good thing). Applauding Kevin Elliot’s 2017 *A Tapestry of Values*,

this chapter critiques two of Elliot’s three conditions for bringing appropriate values into science: transparency (about methods, models, data, assumptions etc.) and representativeness (science should conform to representative social value expectations/norms). Some understandings of transparency and representativeness of values, argues Van Bouwel, can hamper the epistemic productivity of science. His conclusion is that scientific pluralism and agonistic democratic pluralism (against Rawls’s or Habermas’s seeking rational consensus) are mutually enriching and necessary for science to flourish and serve society.

Godek (ch. 10) has a technical discussion of Max Weber’s conception of value judgments in science (which go beyond the methodological value judgements of practitioners) as well as his understanding of vocation. Following the analysis of Weber’s accounts of values, she closes by offering three accounts or models of policy making in science (regulative, protective, and integrating models) that arise from her discussion of the institutionalization of values.

This excellent and stimulating book ends with a paragraph bio of each contributor and an index. I heartily recommend it for those interested in pondering the connections between science, freedom, and democracy.

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J. Bradford DeLong. *Slouching Towards Utopia*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2022. ISBN 9780465019595. Hardcover \$35.

J. Bradford DeLong is an economist at UC Berkeley who has exercised significant influence over the course of his career. In the early 1990s he co-wrote, with Lawrence Summers, two papers that provided the theoretical game plan for the Clinton Administration’s approach to neoclassical financial deregulation during Summers’s tenure as Secretary of

the Treasury. DeLong himself worked as a Treasury official during this same period. His own theoretical legacy from the Clinton era can be fairly described as left neoliberal. He was, in his own terms, a “[Rubin Democrat](#)” (a reference to the market- and finance-friendly Robert Rubin), espousing “largely neoliberal, market-oriented...tuning aimed at social democratic ends” while in political terms advocating “taking a step in the direction of appeasing conservative priorities” (quoted in Beauchamp 2019). He has since modified his position with regard to the company that market-oriented thinkers with social democratic aims ought to keep, claiming that Democrat party elites should embrace and partner with the resurgent social democratic left that emerged alongside the candidacy of Bernie Sanders.

DeLong himself has summed up the [central arguments](#) delivered in his long book:

1. Since 1870, we humans have done amazingly, astonishingly, uniquely, and unprecedentedly well at baking a sufficiently large economic pie.
2. But the problems of slicing and tasting the pie—of equitably distributing it, and then using our technological powers to live lives wisely and well—continue to flummox us.
3. The big reason we have been unable to build social institutions for equitably slicing and then properly tasting our now more-than-sufficiently-large economic pie is the sheer pace of economic transformation.
4. Since 1870 humanity’s technological competence has doubled every generation. Hence Schumpeterian creative destruction has taken hold.
5. Our immensely increasing wealth has come at the price of the repeated destruction of industries, occupations, livelihoods, and communities.
6. And we have been frantically trying to rewrite the sociological code running on top of our

rapidly changing forces-of-production hardware.

7. The attempts to cobble together a sorta-running sociological software code have been a scorched-earth war between two factions.
8. Faction 1: followers of Friedrich von Hayek, who say “the market giveth, the market taketh away: blessed be the name of the market.”
9. Faction 2: followers of Karl Polanyi, who say “the market was made for man; not man for the market.”
10. Let the market start destroying “society,” and society will react by trying to destroy the market order.
11. Thus the task of governance and politics is to try to manage and perhaps one day supersede this dilemma.

These arguments are communicated in the context of a grand narrative that traces the contours of what DeLong calls the “long twentieth century” (1870–2010), a coinage he presents in opposition to British-Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm’s “short twentieth century” (1914–1991). The long twentieth century, in DeLong’s analysis, is marked by the “triple emergence of globalization, the industrial research lab, and the modern corporation” (1), a trio that allowed humanity at large to escape (to a significant extent) the sort of subsistence existence that had dominated our lot since the advent of agriculture. For DeLong, 2010, in the wake of the Great Recession, marks the end of the era in which economic growth allowed for a continuation of this trend whereby more and more of the world’s population escaped lives of mere subsistence.

He recognizes European-style social democracy and, to a lesser extent, the New Deal social democracy of the United States as the highest achievement of this long, high-growth century. He creatively describes this social democratic achievement as the “shotgun

marriage of Hayek and [Karl] Polanyi blessed by Keynes” (DeLong 2022, 6), by which he means to emphasize the incorporation of the decentralized power of market mechanisms into a societal structure that honors what he calls “Polanyian rights”—rights that would guarantee that “those who do not own valuable property should have the social power to be listened to, and that societies should take their needs and desires into account” (ibid., 5). Such a rapprochement between Hayek and Polanyi would be impossible, in DeLong’s view, without the judicious application of Keynesian insight. This sort of arrangement, if on a gradual track toward wider and wider inclusion, is the incremental, non-revolutionary utopia that, on DeLong’s account, we slouched towards through most of the long twentieth century.

The bulk of his narrative is concerned with the ways the triple emergence referenced above was harnessed and developed (or not) around the world in the context of ongoing ideological debates, political shifts, and revolutions hinging on the role of markets in society—that is to say, to the extent that Hayek’s views or Polanyi’s held sway. DeLong keeps this debate alive throughout by employing his two framing figures as a tragic chorus that provides commentary on the evolution of political economy. Together we visit Europe, the US, Meiji Japan, China, Africa, India, etc. The villains of the tale are totalitarians, whether fascist, Nazi (if we accept the distinction), or Bolshevik. Given the defeat in WWII of the reactionary totalitarians, the “really-existing-socialism” of the Leninist-Stalinist USSR serves as the longest-running foil to the social freedom achieved by embedding markets within social democracy.

The breadth of DeLong’s historical knowledge is impressive, and his prose is readable and lively. While Karl Polanyi’s thought is a central focus throughout the book, DeLong also mentions Michael Polanyi in a passage in which he glosses a number of figures he would have included in his history had time and space allowed. He singles out the younger Polanyi

as important due to his theorization of society’s need to transcend both the mercenary nature of the free market and attempts at comprehensive central planning by means of “decentralized fiduciary institutions focused on advancing knowledge about theory and practice...in which people follow rules that have been half-constructed and that half emerged to advance not just the private interests and liberties of the participants but the broader public interest and public liberties as well” (ibid., 168).

He intersperses his text where appropriate with self-reflective commentary on his own participation (as a relatively influential economist and high-level apparatchik under Clinton) in the neoliberal turn. This is very much to his credit, since it is most apparent when he regards his own involvement in the neoliberal turn, the “hubris” of which “truly brought forth nemesis” (ibid., 463). He is also open and clear that presenting a grand narrative, as he does, will necessitate overlooking certain details and nuances in the wide-ranging subject matter he treats. Fair enough. Nonetheless I will mention three themes that I would have liked to see figure more prominently:

- 1) DeLong might have considered our retrospective recognition that environmental destruction is endemic to industrialization. This is a pretty fair candidate to derail any possibility of long-term progress, slouching or otherwise. The impending consequences of industrial environmental degradation are addressed in the final chapter or so, but almost as an afterthought. In contrast to this, DeLong works commentary and analysis throughout the body of his text that recognize *other* problems that were festering throughout the long twentieth century but perhaps went unrecognized by those in control of societies until later. The exclusion of women and marginalized racial groups from full social participation, for instance, is addressed in parenthetical commentary interspersed throughout the book, whereas the future environmental costs

of industrialized globalization are not handled with such consistency.

2) DeLong might have considered the ways in which the really-existing-socialism of the Soviet sphere—as a live, counter-hegemonic alternative to Western liberalism—may have given progressive reformers like FDR, civil rights activists, or those who engineered European social democracy the leverage necessary to overcome forces of reaction that opposed such [Karl] Polanyian shifts. Would the social democratic achievements of the New Deal have happened, for example, if big business, etc. didn't feel that an American rerun of the Bolshevik Revolution were a real threat in the aftermath of the Great Depression? These questions, open to debate, seem relevant to his narrative but don't make much of an appearance.

3) I concur with DeLong's approval of social democracy as the highest political economic achievement of the long twentieth century. I would like to have heard more from him in the book about the specifics of how the successful social democracies function(ed) and the distinctions, if such there be in his view, between social democracy and democratic socialism.

Overall, *Slouching Towards Utopia* is a fascinating, readable, and worthwhile book that comes highly recommended, regardless of one's ideological commitments.

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Matteo Bortolini, *A Joyfully Serious Man: The Life of Robert Bellah*. Princeton University Press, 2021. 528 pp. \$35.00 (cloth). ISBN 9780691204406; 9780691204390 (ebook).

Robert N. Bellah (1927–2013) was among the most well-known and influential figures in the sociology of religion. Like many who began study in this area in the late 1970s, I first became familiar with his concept of “civil religion” (an institutionalized,

nonsectarian set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that gives the political sphere in America a religious dimension) and then was drawn into the broader sweep of his work. By the time *Habits of the Heart* became a best-seller in the middle to late 1980s, it seemed clear (despite his close association with Talcott Parsons, whose functionalist theorizing had lost the dominance it enjoyed in American sociology mid-century) that Bellah was angling for the status of an enduring luminary. His late magnum opus, *Religion in Human Evolution* (2011), is still making some significant waves among scholars of religion.

I was thankful for the chance to review Matteo Bortolini's recent biography, as I had heard many rumblings about Bellah's career being extremely rocky despite his star status. This turned out to be a great read, of much greater value than even I had anticipated. Bortolini takes us back to the heady days of the 1950s and '60s, when the study of religion (among other areas of inquiry) was enjoying a post-war period of ferment, and then traces Bellah's amazing journey from Harvard to Berkeley (with several international stops on the way). But the more significant thing he has done is to bring both Robert Bellah and those he worked with fully to life. Bortolini has done his homework well (with the requisite access to documentation, and with cooperation from family and friends) and provides a much more complete picture than I had yet encountered of Bellah's genius, of his struggles and weaknesses, and of his complexity. In addition to a sensitive and poignant treatment of the loss of two of his four daughters (one to suicide and the other in a car accident), we get a deft treatment of Bellah's political trials, his bisexuality, and his open marriage (regarding the latter two, I personally had no more than vague hints before reading the book). Bortolini presents a compelling picture of how these aspects of Bellah's life are intertwined with his intellectual development, which he pursued with a passionate openness that was wider and warmer than is readily discernable in his publications.

I am struck by how the broad and deep perspective of this book on the life and times of Bellah is comparable to that of Ray Monk's award-winning biography, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (1990). As with Monk's longer book, a reader with interest in the time period covered will be drawn in and carried along by the wonder of the story. We see how Bellah's early flirtation with communism (creating some delicate situations in relation to employment) gives way to a trajectory of public flirtations with radical figures and causes. He was strongly attracted, for example, to the work of Norman O. Brown, a popular Marxist and Freudian writer who was good at unsettling those of a less radical bent. But underlying this fondness for transgression was a solid liberalism and progressive spirit that was apparently more restrained in private than it sometimes appeared in public. In this book, we find the progressive Bellah deeply appreciative and respectful of traditional belief and ritual, with this appreciation being fueled by a rootedness in Durkheim that I think is deeper than his formation by Parsons's functionalism, as well as by careful and sympathetic readings of such thinkers as Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre. Bortolini's account, though it reveals depths of Bellah's progressive inclinations of which I had not been aware, has also confirmed for me that he was not an enemy of tradition and genuine community.

What I find most inspiring in this intellectual biography is (as Bortolini's title suggests) the profound joy that was evident in Bellah's passion for understanding humanity through religion, for making sense of the startling diversity of religious expression (drawing deeply and fluently, for example, from both Japanese and American religion). Furthermore, his joy in serious inquiry was consistently placed in the service of articulating hope for humanity's future. Bortolini shows how these aspects of Bellah's persona were often misunderstood as simplistically countercultural or "Californian," just as the breadth of his theoretical reflection was

often misunderstood as never transcending a narrow Parsonian functionalism. Even some of Bellah's most enduring contributions to sociology of religion are often detached from the quest for hope and for renewal of community that was their original soil. Discussion of civil religion, for example, as Bertolini shows, took on a life of its own in various sociological discussions, often freed from its moorings in Bellah's search for a way to revive a sense of unity and common purpose in the politically turbulent sixties and seventies.

It may be that a mark of a great biography of a great person is that it brings one to a deep longing to know and converse with the person portrayed. I had read and been formed in my own thinking by some of Bellah's work, but reading this telling of his life, I find myself deeply sorry that I had not taken what opportunities I might have had to meet and interact with him. And I would like to be able to tell him that his troubles and his weaknesses have resonated with me as much as his brilliance and his many accomplishments. I think that he would have relished such a conversation.

I think that you will relish the encounter that is available here with Bob Bellah. We owe a debt of gratitude to Matteo Bortolini for his wonderful portrait of this joyfully serious man.

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