

## Book Reviews

Zeynep Pamuk: *Politics and Expertise: How to Use Science in a Democratic Society*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021. Pp. xiii, 239.)

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At a time when citizens are enjoined to “believe the science” or “follow the science” and a popular yard sign lists “Science is Real” among other progressive catechisms, challenging the authority or judgment of scientists might be perceived as anything from a minor heresy to an apology for irrationalism. But in Zeynep Pamuk’s provocative *Politics and Expertise: How to Use Science in a Democratic Society*, it is a necessary move—not because Pamuk construes scientists as distant, scheming technocrats (she does not) or the public as a repository of wisdom or virtue (she does not press this case either), but because it’s what an honest commitment to democracy requires. Rather than imploring the public to follow the science, Pamuk’s agenda is to make science follow the public. Her lucid, rigorous, and tightly written book moves quickly to problematize the role of science in democracy and from there to imagine alternative institutional configurations which would expand the scope of public engagement at all stages of the scientific process, from the design of research agendas to the application of new technologies.

What Pamuk wants readers to understand about science is its “uncertainty, incompleteness and fallibility” (11) and the critical junctures at which value judgments shape scientific research. Early in the book, Pamuk lays the groundwork for her argument by demonstrating that scientists make both implicit assumptions and explicit judgments about which knowledge to pursue, which hypotheses to test, what type of evidence to consider, which models to construct, and more. She argues that these judgments should not be left to experts to make alone and should instead be opened up to public scrutiny and, in some instances, to public determination. Otherwise, the judgments of scientists preempt public deliberation and circumscribe the bodies of knowledge to which citizens may make appeal when considering policy options. She then prescribes institutions which are both participatory and adversarial: designed to expose assumptions, air dissent, and scaffold informed public debate. The goal, Pamuk emphasizes, is not to educate the public so that they understand science better—which is often tautologically defined as agreeing with scientists more—but to empower the public by supporting robust public engagement and debate, including debate with scientists.

The book is especially compelling as Pamuk considers the types of institutions that could facilitate the democratization of science. The most novel of these is the proposal for a “science court” which forms the centerpiece of the book. Though it is difficult to do the idea justice in brief, Pamuk offers a convincing preliminary draft for an institution that would have experts argue competing positions on issues of public concern (such as whether to implement lockdowns during a pandemic) before a citizen jury, whose decision would be taken under advice by policymakers. Pamuk also defends a positive role for the public in determining the distribution of funds for scientific research, and a negative one in preemptively restricting dangerous scientific research. In both areas, Pamuk acknowledges that citizens will not always agree with scientists about which scientific research is valuable, on the one hand, or dangerous, on the other, but again, this is not her criterion of success. Truly democratizing science, as she argues in the conclusion, means giving citizens “meaningful control” (187) even when scientists might prefer otherwise.

One of the book’s major strengths is Pamuk’s extensive repertoire of illustrative examples. Her forays into specific science policy controversies—especially the discussions of GMOs (genetically modified organisms) and autonomous weapon systems—are often as intriguing as the abstract principles they serve to clarify. The book concludes with a detailed case study on the policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which allows Pamuk to show how her analysis of the scientific process and her proposals for democratic governance thereof apply to some recent and high-profile controversies.

While Pamuk moves convincingly both at the level of normative principles and at the level of concrete examples, her book rarely considers the space between: that is, the systems and institutions—economic, cultural, ideological, etc.—which structure the interactions between science and politics. There are some promising exceptions: early in the book, for example, Pamuk briefly elucidates the “structural form of power” (49) at work when scientists—not as individual decision-makers, but as participants in a collective enterprise—shape the knowledge and choices available to citizens. But is there any pattern to how this power operates, which interests it tends to favor or which it tends to discount? *Politics and Expertise* often gives the impression that science sometimes serves the public interest and sometimes doesn’t, or that the public sometimes trusts scientists and sometimes doesn’t, with the questions of why or why not and what that means for the prospect of democratizing science left in the background.

Perhaps another way of articulating my question is to ask: If science is not democratic now, then what is it? Maybe because Pamuk endeavors to construct a theory good for all democracies and all forms of science these considerations would strike her as overly specific, but it is odd to read a case for public funding of science that does not elaborate the role of capital or industry in current funding regimes, or a case for banning certain kinds of weapons system that does not mention the outsized influence of the military in shaping scientific research agendas. I do not believe Pamuk is ignorant of

or indifferent to these issues. They sometimes manifest in her examples, as when she discusses the conflict between agroecology movements and biotech companies over GMOs. But Pamuk often seems hesitant to *theorize* such issues, and while she argues for her prescriptions rigorously, the level of abstraction occasionally blunts their critical purchase.

There is a parallel tendency in Pamuk's positive political vision. Pamuk succeeds at opening the "black box" (11) of scientific expertise, but sometimes seems to put politics within a black box of its own, with the democratic public serving as an undifferentiated agent whose inputs need merely to be channeled into the scientific process. But Pamuk rarely acknowledges that the public is itself beset by deep inequalities and conflicts of interest, a point which complicates institutional design considerations. For example, in her discussion of the COVID-19 response, Pamuk argues incisively that public health modeling was insufficiently attentive to racial, ethnic, and class disparities, both with respect to the first-order harms of the virus and with respect to the second-order harms of lockdowns and school closures. Would a democratized science have made the needs of vulnerable communities more salient? Perhaps, perhaps not; democratic processes also frequently fail these communities, particularly when they are constructed as difference blind, and Pamuk never discusses what principles might shape the solicitation of public inputs so that they do not skew toward the interests of the most affluent, educated, and privileged.

It is possible these concerns simply go beyond the scope of Pamuk's inquiry, and in any event, they speak to the wider terrain of questions at the intersection of science and politics that political theorists have only begun to explore. It would be tedious to belabor the complaint that Pamuk's book does not pose the exact questions I might wish it to, especially when it is so insightful regarding the agenda Pamuk has set out for it, and when it succeeds so often in expanding the contours of both scholarly and public debate.

As it is, Pamuk offers more than enough distinctive insights to make the book worth reading, and in the process tips her fair share of sacred cows. For those who abhor the idea of science being politicized, Pamuk's conclusions may be startling, but even such readers will have to acknowledge the central dilemma: if science cannot be politicized, then it cannot be democratized. Pamuk is clear about which horn of the dilemma she finds more dangerous, and her book therefore pivots the conversation away from familiar concerns about the interference of politics in science and toward a fresher terrain of debate about how to make science and politics interact more productively. Some will want to contest Pamuk's central claim that the public should have more control over the agenda and activities of science, others will want to build on it, either refining Pamuk's proposed institutional configurations or using them as foils for their own proposals. Either way, Pamuk has accomplished a great deal of analytical and

imaginative work, and as debates about the proper relationship between politics and science continue to develop, *Politics and Expertise* is guaranteed to remain a touchstone in and beyond the field of political theory.

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Brian Kogelmann: *Secret Government: The Pathologies of Publicity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. x, 215.)

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From the middle of the previous century through the beginning of the present one, the concept of “transparency” became a leading governing principle for public and private institutions. Its status ascended in academic fields such as law and public administration, advocacy groups formed to promote it, and international governmental organizations such as the World Bank incorporated it as a component of the reforms they pressed upon those seeking assistance and funding. (For accounts of this rise, see Mark Fenster, *The Transparency Fix* [Stanford University Press, 2017] and Michael Schudson, *The Rise of the Right to Know* [Harvard University Press, 2015]). But in the wake of disappointing results, academic reappraisal, and the rise of right-wing populist movements that embraced the concept’s antibureaucratic spirit but ignored its rules upon assuming power, transparency has faced significant critique and lowered expectations over the past decade (for critique see, e.g., Emmanuel Alloa and Dieter Thomä, *Transparency, Society and Subjectivity: Critical Perspectives* [Palgrave Macmillan, 2018]; for reappraisal see Gregory Porumbescu, Albert Meijer, and Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen, *Government Transparency: State of the Art and New Perspectives* [Cambridge University Press, 2022]). Transparency’s stock has fallen in the conceptual marketplace almost as quickly as it had risen.

Jeremy Bentham’s fascination with the state’s visibility notwithstanding, Anglophone liberal political philosophy did not play a key role in transparency’s rise and fall. Brian Kogelmann’s *Secret Government: The Pathologies of Publicity* addresses that absence directly, offering a historical and contemporary gloss on the usefulness for democratic institutions of visibility as a metaphor for governance. Beginning with a summary of leading pre-twentieth-century philosophers who considered the role that “publicity” (a concept close enough for purposes of this short review to use interchangeably with transparency) and secrecy play in a liberal state, *Secret Government* considers, among other issues, publicity’s role in democracy, deliberation, and the ideals