

# ***DIALOGUES CONCERNING NATURAL POLITICS***

## ***A Modern Philosophical Dialogue about Policymaker Ignorance***

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## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

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### **Guide for Instructors**

One of the goals of *Dialogues concerning Natural Politics* is to promote in-class discussion. The topics addressed by the characters in the *Dialogues* are relevant to several different fields of political inquiry, such as political philosophy, political theory, political science, economics, and political economy. The purpose of this guide is to offer some suggestions to instructors in these fields for maximizing the pedagogical value of the *Dialogues*.

The book argues against the assumption, typically employed in the fields of political analysis, that policymakers are epistemically privileged, and defends the alternative assumption that, with respect to the knowledge required to discharge their political tasks effectively, policymakers are no more knowledgeable than their constituents. More than this, however, the *Dialogues* are designed to leave readers thinking about and, hopefully, inclined to debate these (and other) profound issues. Many of the topics raised in the *Dialogues* are purposely left unresolved, as typically happens in a conversation among friends, leaving room for further discussion and debate in a classroom setting.

Although the book defends a particular conclusion about the method appropriate to political analysis, it leaves room for disagreement with this conclusion, and carefully avoids taking particular stances on substantive political matters. Indeed, the book is critical, in about equal measure, of both the left and right endpoints of the political spectrum. The method of analysis defended in the *Dialogues* favors no political philosophy or party.

The *Dialogues* offer a model of civil discourse concerning various fraught political controversies. In an era of political polarization, the book offers a reminder of what genuine civic (and civil) discourse looks like. Despite the contentious nature of several issues discussed in the dialogue, the characters never forget that their friendship is more important than their political differences.

Each chapter (or “book”) of the *Dialogues* addresses a more or less distinct topic or problem of political analysis. Please refer to the brief synopses at the head of each book for a summary of the problems and topics discussed therein. The chapters can thus be read either individually, in combination with other individual chapters, or as parts of the integrated whole. Each chapter concludes with suggestions for further reading. These additional materials are not necessary to understand the *Dialogues*, but might be incorporated in a lesson plan to provide students with a more comprehensive perspective on a particular topic. Indeed, a syllabus for a class in any of the disciplines of political analysis might be constructed by combining *Dialogues* with careful selections from the suggestions for further reading. Each chapter also includes a set of discussion questions that might be either assigned as homework, employed as exam questions, or used to promote further dialogue and debate in the classroom.

### *Teaching Strategies*

The following teaching strategies may be deployed either separately or in various combinations.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

Perhaps the easiest – not to mention, the most fun and engaging – way to teach the *Dialogues* is simply to re-create the conversation in class, while pausing at appropriate moments to encourage reflection upon and discussion of the relevant points. There are several different ways this might be done. There are also several different assignments that might be given to students to improve and build upon their understanding of the material.

Instructors might assign each of the characters to particular students and ask the students to play their assigned character's parts in class. To ensure that every student has an opportunity to participate, instructors can rotate and re-assign characters to different students either from one class session to the next or from one chapter to the next. Alternatively, students might be split into four teams, each team being assigned to present a particular character's role. The character's lines might be split among the team members or each team might designate a particular member to speak the character's lines. The assignment of a team to a particular character might be either maintained or re-assigned from one class or chapter to the next.

To encourage students to learn to identify arguments and their parts, instructors might assign students to re-state one or more of the arguments expressed conversationally in the *Dialogues* as a formal argument. Students could be asked to explicate the premises and conclusion of the argument, and to provide any unstated implicit premises necessary to make the argument valid or cogent. Students assigned to a particular argument might be grouped together and assigned to share, discuss, and critique each other's work, with the aim of settling on a consensus analysis of the argument. Each group could then present their analysis to the class and open the floor to further discussion from classmates.

As in a formal debate setting, students might be asked to develop additional arguments in defense of – or, for that matter, against – a position presented by a particular character. The supplemental material outlined in the “For Further Reading” section of each chapter will help students improve their understanding of the relevant material. Such an assignment might be made either in advance of a particular class discussion, so that students enter class prepared to offer additional arguments, or as a post-discussion homework assignment.

The discussion questions at the end of each chapter might be used to stimulate further debate in the classroom. Some questions are of the “What does the book say about X?” variety. These questions might be appropriate for homework assignments or exam questions in lower-level courses. However, many of the questions are designed to encourage students to think beyond, to form their own opinions about, and even to challenge the content of the *Dialogues*. These questions might be more appropriate for discussion in either introductory or more advanced courses, or may be suitable as either homework assignments or exam questions, or as potential term paper topics. Instructors should also encourage students to develop their own questions about the arguments of the *Dialogues* and to pose these questions to each other, as another method of promoting in-class discussion.

Of course, the *Dialogues* are intended to encourage more than mere contemplation and discussion. The book presents a model of civil civic dialogue that might inform student's interactions regarding political matters, both in and out of the classroom, especially in online contexts. The characters in the *Dialogues* needle, make fun of, and criticize each other with little

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

mercy. They generally pull few punches in their arguments, but each takes their lumps, and the conversation never descends into hatred or personal animosity. Instructors might ask students to think about and discuss the relative value of the characters' conversational model, compared to the more vitriolic approach to political discussion that has become increasingly common in recent years, as a method of learning, especially from one's peers, and of moderating destructive political polarization.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

### *Dramatis Personae*

Emma – 30 years old; Fifth-year philosophy PhD student, specializing in political philosophy and epistemology; ABD (“all-but-dissertation”); dating Andre

Andre – 35 years old; Fourth-year philosophy PhD student, specializing in philosophy of science; Academic Advisor to undergraduate students in the Philosophy Department; dating Emma

Connor – 24 years old; Second-year philosophy PhD student, specializing in normative ethics; a devout political progressive

Jack – 25 years old; Second-year philosophy PhD student, specializing in logic and epistemology; a devout political libertarian

### **Book One**

**Book One Synopsis:** The main subject of Book One is *progressivism* as a political philosophy. The characters discuss the relationship between progressivism and forms of *liberalism*, e.g., modern (American) liberalism and classical liberalism. Unlike liberal political philosophies, which emphasize to varying degrees the significance of individual human beings and the need for *rights* as a safeguard against state oppression, progressivism is a form of *collectivism*. The characters consider the relationship between progressivism and other forms of collectivism, e.g., fascism. Progressives often advocate for the expansion of democracy. The characters consider different conceptions of what it might mean to expand democracy and the practical possibilities for such an expansion. The characters also consider the relationship between democratic procedures and the principle of *popular sovereignty*.

[September 2009. Several graduate students studying philosophy at the local university are gathered at a party to celebrate the start of the fall semester. They have just learned that, in response to pressures exerted by the financial crisis and ongoing recession, the University Administration is planning to shift resources away from the humanities toward business education and the physical sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Significant cuts to the Philosophy Department’s budget are planned. The Department Chair has been “voluntarily reassigned” (read: fired). Fewer and less generous funding opportunities will be available to the graduate students moving forward. Several members of the Department’s support staff will be laid off. Open faculty positions in the Philosophy Department will not be filled. A number of prominent faculty members are openly seeking to leave the University. To make matters more ominous for the graduate students, the Administration has indicated that it will soon deliver news of further changes to the Department’s organizational structure.]

**Jack** [laughing and shouting]: ...Hitler was the greatest progressive who ever lived!

**Emma** [walking up to the group]: Who was Hitler?

**Jack:** Hitler.

**Emma:** Hitler was Hitler?

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Jack:** Right.

**Emma:** That's exactly what I've always thought. No, seriously, what are you babbling on about? What about Hitler?

**Jack:** He and Connor share a political philosophy.

**Connor:** Oh, come on! Just because I call myself a progressive and – according to you – Hitler was characteristic of a kind of political progressivism doesn't make me a Nazi.

**Jack:** No, it just makes you stupid and historically ill-informed – or, maybe I should say, ill-informed about history...

**Emma:** How about “Historically ill-informed about history”?

**Jack:** Right, thanks. The point is that you might want to re-consider identifying your views with a political philosophy so closely associated with eugenics and, yes, Nazism. I know you're not a Nazi. What I don't know is why you've chosen to describe your views using a term that eugenicists and Nazis used to describe *their* views.

**Emma:** As much as I hate to agree with Jackie boy here, I have to say, he's got a point. It's not a very good look, Connor.

**Andre:** Plus, why do you need a new term for good old-fashioned American liberalism? It was confusing enough when non-liberals insisted on describing themselves as liberals. Why compound confusions? Why pour the same musty statist wine into yet another bottle?

**Jack:** Especially a bottle with a desiccated Swastika label on it?

**Andre:** Or is progressivism supposed to be something different from American liberalism? What do you mean by “progressive”? What makes your politics uniquely progressive rather than, say, liberal in the traditional American sense?

**Connor:** That's a good question. I can't say, exactly. I mean, I do normative ethics, not the history of political philosophy.

**Jack:** Aren't you ethically obligated to understand the basis of your political beliefs better than you apparently do – not to mention their implications – given your evident desire to foist them on the rest of us?

**Connor:** Yeah, I suppose...

**Jack:** Well, then...

**Connor** [fidgeting]: Well...[hemming and hawing]

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** Give him a minute...he's thinking.

**Jack:** I know. I can see the gears turning in his head.

**Connor:** I guess I would say that, for me, democracy is the most important consideration in politics. I want the people to be sovereign. I favor the liberation of democratic decision-making from its various legal and constitutional constraints.

**Jack:** So, direct democracy, basically?

**Connor:** More democracy and more direct democracy, yes.

**Jack:** That's less a political philosophy than a slogan...

**Andre:** Does democracy vary in terms of *more* and *less*? I mean, you can have *some* democracy or *none*, but it's not clear to me that, if you have some democracy, there is any meaningful sense in which one political system can be said to be more or less democratic than another.

**Connor:** An election in which all citizens can vote is obviously more democratic than one in which only a subset of citizens is eligible to vote.

**Andre:** Only eligibility-to-vote matters? Doesn't actual participation matter? What if every citizen eligible to vote participates in a limited-suffrage context, but none of the citizens participates in an unlimited-suffrage context? It's not obvious to me which is "more democratic" [makes quotation marks in the air]. What if several of the institutional features historically associated with democracy – freedom of speech and expression, a free media, for example – are present in some limited democracy, but not in some unlimited democracy? If there is any meaningful sense in which a political system can be said to be more or less democratic than some other, it does not seem to be a simple function of the number or ratio of citizens eligible to vote.

**Connor:** Good point. Well taken. What about this? When I say that I want more democracy, what I mean is that I want more of the decisions made throughout society – especially, I should say, more of the decisions concerning the economy – to be made democratically. Workers and consumers should control economic institutions, not greedy, money-grubbing, capitalists. Production and distribution decisions should be made democratically, to meet the needs of the people rather than the desires of businessmen. A political system in which more decisions are made democratically is obviously more democratic than one in which fewer decisions are made through democratic means.

**Jack:** So, central planning, basically? Socialism...albeit, maybe, without the collectivization of property? You can own things, but you're limited in your capacity to do as you please with the things you own. These decisions, or many of them, at least, are to be made democratically and the property owner must follow along. Is that the idea?

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Connor:** Yeah, something like that. Corporations might be worker-owned, but the principle would be the same.

**Andre:** It's still not obvious to me that you've offered a workable definition of "more democracy." You stated a definition, while hinting at a second, neither of which strikes me as defensible. You asserted that the *number* of decisions taken democratically defines the extent to which a political system is democratic, while hinting that it is actually the *importance* of the decisions taken democratically that determines the extent of democracy in a political system. Which is it? Which system is more democratic, a political system where, say, more decisions – but not those economic decisions concerning production and distribution that you deem so important – are made democratically, or a system in which these – but only these decisions – are made democratically, and all other decisions are made in some other way, say, individually, by those persons most immediately concerned, autocratically, by some totalitarian dictator, or randomly, by – I don't know – pulling balls from an urn?

**Connor:** I see what you're doing. Any criterion that may seem intuitively plausible as a measure of the extent to which a political system is democratic, you will argue, is potentially in tension with some other criterion that might also seem plausible as a measure of a system's democraticness...if you will.

**Andre** [smiles]: Yes, that's what I'm doing. So far, you've offered three independent criteria, the proportion of citizens eligible to vote, the proportion of decisions made democratically, and the importance of decisions made democratically. I offered two more: the extent of actual participation, rather than mere eligibility to participate, in democratic procedures, and the presence or absence of various liberalities historically associated with democracies.

**Connor:** But, surely, you will agree that a system in which more citizens are both eligible to vote and in fact participate in elections, and in which more decisions, and more important decisions, are taken democratically, is more democratic than a system in which none of these things occur...

**Andre:** I already conceded that we can distinguish systems that exhibit some democratic features from those that display no such features. So, yes, I agree that easy cases are easy. They are also uninteresting. The hard cases are interesting precisely because they're hard. Indeed, it's not obvious to me that a society that displays all the features you mention but which lacks all of those liberalities I mentioned previously is *per se* more democratic than one in which those liberalities are present, but where no decisions are made democratically. You're fetishizing voting, but voting is only one and, as it happens, perhaps not a very important feature of democracy. What *is* important is that the people are sovereign. However, given this objective, it must be remembered that every democracy that has ever existed has limited the suffrage in some way, if only to persons over a particular age, but typically, in other respects, as well. Indeed, unless you are willing to countenance the absurdity of infant suffrage, every democratic system *must* limit its conception of the people whose sovereignty matters in at least this and perhaps in other ways. Similarly, every democratic system that has ever existed has limited the decisions with regard to which the people are sovereign to a small subset of the decisions taken in society. Again, this *must* be the case, unless you are willing to countenance the absurdity of using



## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

democratic means to decide, say, what I have for breakfast tomorrow and, I don't know, how many times Emma presses the snooze button in the morning. Democracy must be limited because, as a practical matter, not every decision can be taken democratically, much less that anyone wants every decision, like how many times Emma presses the snooze button in the morning, to be made democratically.

**Jack:** Like I said before, appealing for more democracy and for more direct democracy is just empty sloganeering. There are four things, at least, that you must specify, Connor, if your appeal is to be more than an empty slogan. First, who will be included in the *demos*? That is, who will be eligible to participate in democratic decision-making? Second, what decisions or what kinds of decisions will be made democratically, and what decisions will be left to other persons, or to other mechanisms? Third, what constitutes victory in various electoral contexts, a simple majority, a supermajority of some degree, unanimity? Fourth, how will democratic decisions be made? Will they be made through the mediation of representatives or immediately, directly? Is voting, as such, even necessary? Are we really so deficient in imagination that we cannot conceive of any other mechanisms through which people might express their political preferences? Are the choices really that citizens must either show up early in the morning at their local, dirty, sweat-and-mopwater-stinking, elementary school gymnasium to yank their levers behind a shower curtain or, what, a rapid and inescapable descent into tyranny?

**Andre:** We can speak meaningfully about *more* and *less* with regard to some of those dimensions, but not all of them. It is not clear that there is any connection between the extent to which a political system is democratic and the criterion of a winning majority, for example. A simple, fifty-percent-plus-one, majority has been most frequently favored, historically, but not universally and not necessarily because it is more democratic than other possible criteria. Similarly, I see no necessary connection between the extent of a system's democratic-ness – if you will – and the direct or indirect nature of its democratic mechanisms. Representative democracy can display a high degree of popular sovereignty and direct democracy might fail to make decisions or, especially, might fail to generate outcomes that respect popular sovereignty.

**Connor:** How is that? How could direct democracy not respect popular sovereignty?

**Andre:** It shouldn't be hard to conceive of a decision made through direct democracy that leads to an outcome that does not respect popular sovereignty. Just imagine a policy decided through democratic means that – for whatever reason, government inefficiency or corruption, say – leads to results exactly opposite of those originally promised for it, results counter to the expectations that inclined voters to support the policy in the first place. So, this can happen, obviously, but I think it can also happen that, whatever its ultimate results, a decision can fail to respect popular sovereignty, despite being made through direct-democratic means. Just imagine a policy passed through direct democracy, but with very few voters, such that the policy passed fails to reflect the interests or preferences of the majority of eligible voters, much less of everyone in society. In order to ensure that direct democracy respects popular sovereignty, it would seem to be necessary to either make voting mandatory or somehow otherwise ensure that a proportion of eligible voters participates sufficient to reflect the interests of the majority or supermajority, or what have you. If this condition isn't met, then the connection between democracy, direct or

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

otherwise, and popular sovereignty, which we might think is a necessary connection, can be easily broken.

**Connor:** I may be amenable to making voting compulsory...

**Andre:** In political systems like ours and like most other Western democracies, where suffrage is already universal for all adults, regardless of race, color, creed, or whatever, there aren't many obvious ways to expand democracy, except to mandate or otherwise coerce increased participation. But, this is where my worry about the aforementioned liberalities is relevant. Whatever else might be said for a political system in which participation, in the form of voting, is mandatory, it's not particularly liberal. To the extent that various freedoms are historical accompaniments, if not conceptual requirements, of democratic systems, it is not clear that compulsory voting would mean more, rather than less, democracy. But, more to my current point, even compulsory voting would not suffice to ensure the connection between democracy and popular sovereignty. Just imagine a scenario in which everyone votes in a direct-democratic setting, but voters are convinced to support a policy against their actual interests, either because they don't know their own interests very well or, what might be the same thing, because they are taken in by political charlatans who convince them to make policy decisions against their own interests. We might say about such a case that popular sovereignty is respected in appearance only. Is popular sovereignty about voting, even if the results don't accord with popular preferences, or is it about policies that – at least in the reasons that motivate their passing, if not in their eventual results – are consistent with the people's preferences or interests?

**Connor:** Ideally, I think we want results consistent with the popular will, not merely policies motivated by popular concerns.

**Andre:** I think so, too. I also think that it is because this is the ultimate goal that democracy, direct or otherwise, is ever instituted. What I am less confident about is the connection between democracy and popular sovereignty. I think it is less secure than it might seem.

**Emma:** In any case, one thing is sure, I think: a representative system, such as ours, cannot be made both more direct, less representative, and, at the same time, more democratic. Starting from a system of representative democracy, you might move to a world of more democracy, either in the sense that more people are represented – that is, the suffrage is expanded – or in the sense that the subset of decisions made via representative democracy is expanded, or you could move to a world of direct democracy, meaning that the decisions made in the former representative system come to be made directly by voters, without the mediation of political representatives. However, I don't see how you could expand either the suffrage or the scope of decisions made democratically, and also remove the mediation of political representatives. Moving in the direction of more democracy necessarily means moving away from – or, at least, no closer to – direct democracy, and conversely, more direct democracy means no more democracy, if not less, in fact.

**Connor:** Why should that be true?

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** A newly-formed direct democracy must be more limited than the representative democracy out of which it is formed, because a smaller part of the populace has the resources, in terms of time, money, and interest in political matters, to engage in direct democracy than can be represented in a representative system. A representative system permits the representation of more people than can directly participate in direct democracy. Moreover, a smaller subset of decisions can be made via direct-democratic means than can be made through representative democracy. Much of the value of a representative system lies in the fact that citizens do not have to engage in the day-to-day stomach-churning drivel of politics in order to participate. If you make participation more onerous, which direct democracy definitely does, you will get less of it.

**Connor:** I consider political participation to be an honor and a privilege, and I suspect that most people inclined to progressivism do so, as well. I think there are a lot of people who would look at a more direct-democratic system as an opportunity.

**Emma:** Of course, some would, but most wouldn't. There are people who respond to a price increase by either failing to adjust their consumption or by buying more of the relevant good, but most people respond by cutting their consumption. If you increase the cost of political participation, most people will buy less of it.

**Connor:** Well, if that's true, then it's just another reason to make voting compulsory. Easy-peasy.

**Andre:** Farewell, liberal democracy. We hardly knew ye.

**Emma:** OK, but then you will just run up against the other problem. If you are going to force everyone to vote in a direct-democratic context, while also leaving them time, energy, and income enough to lead semi-normal lives, if you are not going to turn them into single-minded machines for the making of political decisions, one moment choosing what Andre eats for breakfast and the next second deciding how many times I hit the snooze button in the morning, all while subsisting on state-produced gruel – God knows no one has time to produce anything else in your Utopia – then the range of decisions that can be decided via direct democracy surely cannot be expanded and probably must be severely restricted from what it was prior to the transition to direct democracy.

**Jack** [smiling]: The fact that fewer political decisions can be made via direct democracy, that fewer stupid laws and tedious regulations can be passed, is probably the best argument for it. Still, it strikes me as obviously a pipe dream, for all the reasons you mention, to think that both democracy and direct democracy can be expanded together.

**Emma:** Anyway, Connor, you can't start from a representative system and make it both more direct and more democratic. Moving from a representative system to a direct system means either that fewer – or, more exactly, no more – decisions can be made democratically or that fewer – or, more exactly, no more – persons can participate in the system. If you don't like the current system, you're not going to like the results of the "more direct and more democratic" system you are suggesting.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Connor:** You're not making its practical application sound very appealing, admittedly.

**Andre:** So, is that all there is to progressivism? More democracy, in some not-so-easily-defined sense, and more direct democracy, to the extent this can be made consistent with the demand for more democracy?

**Connor:** No, there's more to it. Public policy should be more rational and more moral. Rather than leaving society to the chaos and cruelty of markets, and the selfish pursuit of profits, we have made sufficient scientific and moral progress to rationalize policymaking. I think we should use all of the scientific knowledge and moral understanding at our disposal to advance the general will, the public interest, the common good, the collective interests of society, what have you.

**Emma** [shaking head]: Oh, Connie...

**Jack:** Oh God! Rousseau! Or is it Robespierre?!

**Emma:** Well, Rousseau would not have liked the science bit, but—

**Jack:** True. But the “general will” nonsense is pure Rousseau.

**Emma:** Right.

**Andre:** OK, I see. So, there's at least one crucial difference between you and a liberal. Your political philosophy is ultimately about the collective, not about the individuals who constitute the collective. In that sense, you're not a liberal...not even in the sense of the traditional American left. Even if the means they propose are not especially liberal, the ends of American liberals are at least truly liberal. They have always understood the primary political problem in terms of individual human beings and their rights, and, especially, in the fact that either too few individuals have rights or the rights that some individuals ostensibly possess are routinely ignored by the state, the police, and various other powerful interests. A progressive apparently has no use for such old-fashioned notions like individual rights, at least, not as far as they might hinder the progress, as the progressive conceives it, of the collective.

**Connor:** Individual rights strike me as rather overrated, especially given the aforementioned scientific and moral progress, not to mention the fact that such rights are too often employed by the privileged as bulwarks against incursions on their interests by the less privileged. What we need are not rights *per se*, but moral and scientific expertise, such as I think we have already achieved, in order to realize the chosen ends of an expanded democratic electorate. Individuals need the right to vote, but expertise will take care of realizing the ends decided by the enlarged constituency.

**Jack:** But, Connor, on your philosophy, there can be nothing in the law to prevent the state from sacrificing you, me, or any other individual, for the sake of the ostensive general will. If the electorate chooses an end that the experts decide requires your sacrifice—

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Connor:** I am pretty sure that the police can do whatever they want to us now. Do you really think the law is any assurance against state injustice?

**Jack:** I feel better with the constitutional protection than I would without it. The rule of law, for all the difficulties inherent in sustaining it, contributes something positive. Just look at states without it. I mean, would you rather live in Obama's, or even G.W.'s, America, or Pol Pot's Cambodia?

**Connor:** Fair enough. But, surely, there are other and more profound differences between the U.S. and Kampuchea than the existence of individual rights in the first country and their absence in the second. The maturity of the American electorate, its long experience with democratic forms, peaceful transitions of power, the resilience of other American political traditions and institutions...are these really insufficient? I want to create a morally righteous political and social system that reflects the will of the whole people. Do we really need rights in order to avoid descending into Khmer Rouge-like chaos?

**Andre:** The American electorate matured under a system of rights. Its long history with democracy, peaceful transitions of power, the traditions and institutions of American democracy all presuppose the existence of rights. Take these away at the founding of the republic and who knows how American history would have unfolded counterfactually? Take these away now and who knows what the future holds?

**Jack:** In what sense could a state without – or with only very limited – individual rights ever be morally righteous? In the ideal progressive state, justice is anything that promotes the interests of the collective. What would be unjust in your preferred state would not necessarily be the state's excessive use of force against an individual, but the *failure* to use excessive force against individuals when the perceived requirements of the common good called for it. Progressive justice does not strike me as a terribly morally righteous conception of justice.

**Andre:** How do you propose to create a morally righteous society that accords with the [makes quotation marks in the air] “will of the whole people” by taking away their rights? What is this thing, the “will of the whole people” [makes quotation marks in the air] anyway? How do you know what it is at any given time? And how do you transform this knowledge, assuming its adequacy, into a more righteous society?

**Connor:** It's not that hard. It just requires politicians that are properly oriented with regard to the general will.

**Andre:** But, what *is* the general will? Is it just whatever is implicit in the latest democratic election, is it just whatever a majority of the electorate *wants* at any given moment, as expressed electorally? If this is what you mean by “general will,” then how can it ever be truly *general*, given that it might reflect nothing more than a bare – fifty-percent-plus-one – majority of the electorate? The interests and desires of the losers of the most recent election are just to be ignored? Or is the general will something that transcends the results of the most recent election? Is it some sort of abstraction of the citizens' mutual interests, regardless of whether the citizens know these interests or not, regardless of what interests they express electorally?

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Connor:** To be truly general, it must be more like the latter than the former.

**Andre:** But, then, how does one learn about the general will? If the general will were just whatever the majority of the electorate wanted, we might imagine the results of the most recent election providing some knowledge of the general will. But, you've just said that electoral results are irrelevant to the general will, so how do policymakers learn what the general will wants them to do at any given moment?

**Connor:** Like I said, it just takes appropriately enlightened politicians. I would offer Obama as a perfect example of someone who has his finger on the moral pulse of the citizens and, if he doesn't personally know how to realize what the general will requires, he knows enough to rely on the best scientific experts to ensure that the general will is respected. All that is required is to elect more people like Obama: honest, caring, in touch with the prevailing moral *zeitgeist*, educated, and knowledgeable.

**Emma:** That's not an answer, Connor. That just pushes the problem back a level. Assuming you're right about Obama's moral and intellectual genius, how do we identify the Obama-like politicians, who know the general will, and either know how to realize or know how to identify experts who know how to realize goals associated with it?

**Andre:** In any case, one thing is certain: it's your preference for the interests of the collective over those of the individual, together with this business about putting science to work in the interests of the collective, that makes you a progressive rather than a liberal. The shoe fits, but I have to agree with Jackie here: I have no idea why you'd want to wear it. It's not Nazism, but it's like Nazism... "with a human face"?

**Jack:** Was it Orwell who said something like, "If you want to see the future, imagine a boot forever stamping on a human face"?

**Connor:** What nonsense! Didn't I just say that Obama, not Hitler, is my political archetype? Explain to me how I have anything in common with the Nazis? I want to take advantage of our moral progress, use science to realize goals associated with the general will, and improve society. The Nazis rounded up Jews and other people that they deemed sub-human – without any justification, I might add – put them in concentration camps, and brutally tortured, exploited, and ultimately discarded them, in an effort to purify the Aryan race—

**Jack:** They thought they were using science to improve society, too.

**Andre:** Right. You say they had no justification for their actions, and, surely, you are right in an objective sense. But, they *thought* they had a justification. Indeed, they offered the same justification that you would likely offer to support your own policy preferences...SCIENCE!

**Jack:** It just so happens that the particular science or research program, or whatever you want to call it, that the Nazis relied upon – eugenics – went out of fashion with swing dancing...I mean, the first time that swing dancing went out of fashion.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Connor:** Eugenics is not making a comeback. I really don't see why your worries should worry me.

**Andre:** Actually, it's worse than I said. Their justification was that the general will required a particular application of scientific, eugenic, wisdom. Of course, when they said "general," they didn't mean it in your expansive sense, as they excluded from the general will the interests of non-Aryans and others. So, yeah, congratulations, you're not a Nazi, if only because you have a more expansive conception of "general."

### **Book One: For Further Reading**

#### ***On Progressivism***

Woodrow Wilson – *Congressional Government, A Study in American Politics* ([1885] 2002), Routledge

Herbert Croly – *Progressive Democracy* ([1914] 1997), Routledge

Walter Lippmann – *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest* ([1914] 2015), University of Wisconsin Press

James T. Kloppenberg – *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (1988), Oxford University Press

John Dewey – *The Political Writings* (1993), Debra Morris and Ian Shapiro (eds.), Hackett

Bob Pepperman Taylor – *Citizenship and Democratic Doubt: The Legacy of Progressive Thought* (2004), University of Kansas Press

Michael McGerr – *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870–1920* (2003), Oxford University Press

United States Congress Progressive Caucus – “What We Stand For” (Retrieved January 24, 2022), <https://progressives.house.gov/what-we-stand-for>

#### ***On Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the “General Will”***

Jean Jacques Rousseau – *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses* ([1762] 2002), Yale University Press

Christopher Bertram – “Rousseau’s Legacy in Two Conceptions of the General Will: Democratic and Transcendent,” *Review of Politics* (2012), 74: 403–420

#### ***On Democracy and Popular Sovereignty***

Nathan Tarcov – “Popular Sovereignty (in Democratic Political Theory),” *Encyclopedia of the American Constitution* (1986), Leonard Levy (ed.), 3: 1426

Edmund S. Morgan – *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (1989), Norton

## ***Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics***

Scott Scheall

Paulina Ochoa Espejo – *The Time of Popular Sovereignty: Process and the Democratic State* (2011), Penn State University Press

### ***On Progressivism, Individual Rights, and Eugenics***

Thomas C. Leonard – *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era* (2017), Princeton University Press

Adam Cohen – *Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck* (2016), Penguin

### **Book One: Discussion Questions**

1. Discuss the similarities and differences between classical liberalism, modern American liberalism, and progressivism.
2. Describe and explain the implications for individual *rights* of collectivist political philosophies.
3. In what respects must real-world democracies be limited?
4. How might democracy be expanded in *theory*? Why might it be difficult to expand democracy in *practice*?
5. In what ways have individual rights sometimes been used to protect the interests of the privileged against those of the unprivileged? Do rights also protect the unprivileged against the privileged, if so, how? Consider historical examples.
6. What are the two possible meanings of Jean Jacques Rousseau’s concept of the *general will*? Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each conception.
7. Discuss the relationship between democratic procedures and the principle of *popular sovereignty*. Under what conditions do such procedures conform to rather than conflict with the principle of popular sovereignty?

### **Book Two**

**Book Two Synopsis:** The main topic discussed in Book Two is the significance of *science* and *expertise* for policymaking. The purpose of policy experts is to compensate for the relevant ignorance of policymakers, who would otherwise lack some of the knowledge required to effectively perform many of their policymaking duties. The characters consider whether experts can satisfy this purpose generally or only under special conditions. The characters discuss the various methods by which scientific *consensuses* form and the significance of a particular consensus’s method of formation for its value as a policymaking tool. The characters also address the meaning for policymaking of science’s *tentative* nature.

**Jack:** Of course, the eugenic consensus was overturned in favor of the anti-eugenic consensus, as tends to happen in science, but that is exactly why our objections should worry you.

**Andre:** Exactly. Unless you believe that science has achieved something approaching infallibility, it is entirely possible that the seemingly benign, if not apparently beneficial,



## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

implications of some scientific consensus will lead you, just as the Nazis and other eugenicist progressives were led, to support policies and programs that will be considered repugnant when the relevant consensus is overturned.

**Jack and Andre** [together]: ...as tends to happen in science.

**Emma:** Connie, let me ask, why science? Why should science guide policy?

**Connor:** What else you got? Divine revelation?

**Emma:** That's a strange answer for a normative ethicist! The only possible bases of rational political decision-making are either revealed religion or empirical science? What about ethical norms? What about our commonly- if not unanimously-held conceptions of ethical interpersonal behavior? Our broadly shared notions of what we owe to and how to treat each other? Our moral beliefs have nothing to do with the legitimacy of different policies? This is entirely a function of their scientific adequacy?

**Connor:** It's not that science should decide policy. The general will – or, at least, a majority of the electorate, preferably, of an expanded electorate – should decide policy. Science just helps design policies that conform to the requirements of the general will.

**Emma:** But, what if the experts and the voters disagree about the significance of some end?

**Connor:** Like I said, the voters should choose ends; they should be entirely sovereign in this regard.

**Emma:** That majoritarian democracy ensures popular sovereignty would seem dubious, given everything that Andre and Jack just argued. But, even granting that a simple majority guarantees the sovereignty of the people, ensuring that policy experts conform to all and only the decisions of the majority would seem easier said than done.

**Connor:** How so?

**Emma:** Consider two scenarios. In the first, voters choose an end that the scientific experts deem not just inessential, but counterproductive. Should the experts earnestly pursue this end? Should they try to realize an end that they believe to be against society's interests? Are they, in any case, very likely to work hard to realize such a goal simply because of its democratic provenance, given their studied opposition to it? In the second scenario, voters fail to choose an end that the experts believe necessary to preserve society. Should the experts ignore this seemingly society-sustaining goal in favor of whatever – from the experts' perspectives – potentially damaging rubbish voters happened to support in the moment? Again, are the experts likely to follow the democratic decision with any conviction?

**Connor:** I don't know, frankly. Those are hard questions. I don't have ready answers.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** I envision a world of government-by-expert that is democratic only to the extent voters choose ends that happen to coincide with the preferences of experts, but where voters' preferences are otherwise routinely ignored.

**Connor:** I see the point.

**Andre:** How often, or how generally, can we rely on science and what can we say about the quality of policy decisions made using science as a tool? Given what you just said, I presume that the relevant criterion is something like the *effectiveness* of policies – the extent to which they realize the democratically-determined goal, probably, I would imagine, without greatly exceeding the proposed costs – rather than their moral goodness, prudence, or what have you.

**Connor:** Yeah, right. It's the electorate's responsibility to ensure that the goals they choose are moral, prudent, pragmatic, and economical. Scientists just provide technical advice about realizing the goals decided upon by the electorate.

**Andre:** OK, so let me ask, which sciences are relevant for policymaking?

**Connor:** All of them, I would think, for one policy purpose or another.

**Andre:** Physics?

**Connor:** Surely, if you want to shoot a rocket into space...

**Andre:** Biology?

**Connor:** Of course, if you want to grow abundant crops and raise healthy pasture animals...

**Jack:** What about if you want to create a genetically pure populace, is biology relevant there, too?

**Andre:** Shush, you're not helping.

**Jack:** I'm not trying to help.

**Andre:** What about ecology or environmental science, Connie?

**Connor:** Sure, if you want to avoid destroying the environment.

**Jack:** Economics?

**Connor** [laughing]: Economics is not a science.

**Emma:** Why do you say that?

**Connor:** Economists don't falsify.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Jack:** Of course they do! If economists didn't falsify, we'd still be mercantilists and Soviet communism would never have died.

**Emma:** Those can't both be true...

**Jack:** You know what I mean. Economists falsify, Connor. You just don't like what they've falsified...because you're a commie.

**Connor:** Wait, I thought I was supposed to be a Nazi. Now I'm a commie too?

**Andre:** Ignore him.

**Jack:** Yeah, ignore me...you commie.

**Andre:** I don't see why falsifying – or not – is all that important.

**Connor:** Economists don't agree on anything! They never achieve consensus. Look at how they reacted to the financial crisis: "The bankers did it!" "No, the government did it!" "Stimulate the economy this much!" "No, stimulate the economy that much!" "Don't stimulate the economy at all!" Who knows the truth about economics?

**Andre:** I think there's probably more agreement among economists than you realize. All economists agree that, whatever else might affect it, incentives are important determinants of human behavior. All economists agree, for example, that demand curves slope downward from left to right or, in concrete terms, that more of a good will be demanded as its price falls, other things equal. There might be some disagreement among economists about the specific goods or markets to which supply-and-demand analysis applies, and it is rarely a simple thing to know the slopes of the curves, which is to say, the elasticities of supply and demand, in particular contexts, but all economists agree about the basic dynamics of supply and demand. There's a lot more agreement on theoretical matters than you're admitting. Indeed, this theoretical agreement leads to considerable, if not complete, agreement among economists about more substantive policy matters. Most economists since Adam Smith have supported free trade. You will not find many economists supporting minimum-wage laws, rent control, or other types of price controls.

**Connor:** Economists don't care about normal people. They don't care about the working class. The economy can be run democratically to meet the needs of regular people. There's no need for economists. They're just apologists for capitalism anyway.

**Jack:** Oh, so they do agree about the most important thing!

**Andre:** It can't be both, Connor. You can't say economics is not a science both because economists don't agree on anything and because they all agree about the benefits of capitalism.

**Connor:** OK, then I take back the former assertion and rest my case on the latter claim.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Andre:** That's not going to help you. First, it is simply untrue that all economists are apologists for capitalism. There are many heterodox schools in economics, several of which are resolutely anti-capitalist. Second, to the extent that there is agreement among economists about the benefits of capitalism, you have given no reason to think this agreement is not well-founded. You have given no reason to think that the economic policies of the progressive state should *not* be based on the widespread, if not unanimous, agreement among mainstream economists on the benefits of markets. But, more to the point, I think you have to consider a problem converse to the one you attribute to economics.

**Connor:** What do you mean?

**Andre:** I suspect that disagreement is more widespread, consensus less pervasive, in some of the sciences you named as crucial policy instruments than you seem to realize. I have had the distinct displeasure of hanging out with a number of professional physicists over the years and they don't seem to agree about much, except, perhaps, that, on earth, objects tend to fall downward. Similarly, there is a consensus in biology in favor of Darwin, of course, but, as far as I understand the situation, the details of competing evolutionary accounts vary. You're apparently fetishizing consensus as the criterion of both legitimate science and its proper use for policy purposes, but scientific consensus are not always easy to come by and, as we have already said, tend to be non-permanent, at best, and ephemeral, at worst. What would you have politicians do when there is no consensus or when there are competing consensus between rival schools of thought in some science that they need to rely upon as a policy instrument?

**Connor:** I understand what you're getting at, the tentativeness of science and all that, but I don't think a complete absence of consensus or cases of competing consensus are very likely or, in the event, all that problematic.

**Andre:** But, you've just claimed that economics – the acknowledged “queen of the social sciences” – is insufficiently scientific for its analyses to figure in policymaking, because of its alleged failure to reach consensus. So, on your own account, some disciplines regularly fail to achieve consensus, problematizing their use for policy purposes. If not economics, what about sociology, a squishy science if there ever was one? You're not really going to reject economics for policymaking purposes, but accept sociology?

**Connor:** I wasn't planning on it...

**Andre:** What about political science? Granting everything else that you want, surely you need political science or something quite like it.

**Connor:** I don't see why that should be the case. Politicians typically don't make laws about political procedures. They don't write – or re-write – political constitutions. What do they need political science for?

**Andre:** They might write constitutions. Everything we have said so far is applicable to the authors of constitutions as well as to legislators operating under an existing constitutional

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

framework. But, that's not my point. Would you like your favorite policies to be implemented and administered properly and to ultimately realize the goals they are meant to realize?

**Connor:** Of course.

**Andre:** Do you think knowledge concerning effective means of policy implementation and administration is innate or otherwise self-evident, or *a priori*, to policymakers?

**Connor:** Of course not.

**Andre:** Then your policymakers will need political science or something like it, a science of policy implementation and administration. Even the best *designed* policy, which I take to be the business of scientific experts in your system, can fail to achieve its goals because of improper implementation or maladministration. I mean, [in mock English accent] "there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," you know?

**Connor:** I suppose.

**Andre:** So, good policymaking, on your account, requires that a univocal consensus obtains in all relevant physical and social disciplines that are, according to criteria you've yet to provide, legitimately scientific. What, I wonder, are you planning to replace economics with in policymakers' schemes, since you deny it the status of a science? Economic phenomena are surely relevant to designing effective policies, yet you've just denied that we possess an adequate theoretical understanding of these phenomena. How then are policymakers going to control these phenomena well enough to ensure the success of their policies? What is going to fill the gap left by your denial of scientific status to economics?

**Connor:** Ideally, a better, more scientifically respectable, economics.

**Andre:** One that produces consensus about policy-relevant economic phenomena...

**Connor:** Right, ideally.

**Jack:** But not about the benefits of capitalism over other political-economic systems?

**Connor:** Well...

**Andre:** What about any other gaps in their knowledge, how will policymakers plug these gaps? I mean, there's no reason to think that a theory, much less a full-fledged science, exists to explain every phenomenon conceivably relevant to every policy goal we might like to pursue. It is trivially true that your program could not have been implemented in a pre-scientific age, correct? The scientific material required simply did not exist.

**Connor:** Correct.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Andre:** You have the same problem today to the extent that science is incomplete and / or indeterminate. If there are phenomena that policymakers must understand adequately in order to make an effective policy, but no theory exists that adequately explains these phenomena, your progressive program is not feasible and your policymakers are screwed. Moreover, some fields in modern science are basically brand-new. They consist of nothing but untested models or of models that are constantly in flux, constantly being revised, because, so far, they have *only* been falsified and no improved model has been developed. Should policymakers rely on such models, either untested or tested-and-falsified-and-not-yet-replaced?

**Connor:** I take the point. To the extent that a scientific consensus does not exist with respect to some phenomenon relevant to effective policymaking, the notion that science can be put to work for policy purposes is dubious. Still, you've yet to convince me that this is much of a problem in practice; that, when policymakers need adequate scientific input in order to make an effective policy, they will not always be able to find that input.

**Andre:** Oh, I'm sure there will always be people willing to offer advice, especially if there is money to be made by acting the expert, but that seems more like an invitation to charlatanism than a way to uncover scientific truth or a theoretical explanation adequate for policy purposes. The expert's goal then becomes attracting the attention and favor of policymakers rather than the approval of one's scientific peers. It becomes a matter of the expert convincing policymakers, ill-equipped to judge scientific truth, rather than the expert's better equipped colleagues. Scientific controversies come to be settled by political-power considerations, rather than by experimentation, publication, and citation. That seems less like a method of making good policy than a way to screw up both politics and science.

**Connor:** Eh, I don't know. Maybe.

**Andre:** Let me ask something else. Is the fact of a scientific consensus in some field sufficient to establish its adequacy for policy purposes? Are all scientific consensuses equal or are there some consensuses that might be inappropriate for policy purposes?

**Connor:** What do you mean?

**Andre:** A scientific consensus is just an expression of the more or less shared opinions of members of some scientific community concerning competing theoretical explanations as evaluated in the "daylight," if you will, of the available evidence. Science is a matter of exposing various theories to this daylight to see which melt and which, if any, harden. There would seem to be at least two ways to arrive at a scientific consensus. In the first, a consensus is achieved through normal, one might say, "healthy," scientific processes: through the development and publication of theories, open deliberation, and honest debate among scientific peers about the value of different theories, the subsequent citation – positive or negative – of relevant publications, and the eventual emergence of some considerable, if probably imperfect, degree of agreement among scientists in the relevant community. In this scenario, all of the forces pushing the scientific community toward consensus emanate from scientists and their respective appraisals of competing explanations in light of the relevant evidence; the opinions of practicing scientists regarding explanations and evidence are all that matter. However, the second route to

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

consensus involves input from outside such a normal scientific process: in choosing between theories, scientists have to consider the attitudes, opinions, and interests of non-scientists, e.g., corporate executives, government officials, or the representatives of NGOs. Indeed, we might imagine a particularly extreme case – Trofim Lysenko comes to mind – in which a consensus is simply imposed from outside anything like the healthy scientific process I just described.

**Connor:** Who is Trofim Lysenko?

**Jack:** Another progressive who killed a lot of people.

**Andre:** Dammit, Jack!

**Jack:** Sorry, Pa.

**Andre:** He was a Soviet biologist who convinced Stalin of several manifestly false things, that happened to sound good to Stalin's ears, who in turn imposed them on other biologists and—

**Jack:** Meaning that he imprisoned or killed them, if they refused to accept Lysenko's line.

**Andre:** Yes, one assumes. But, to make matters much worse, Stalin required that Soviet agricultural plans be developed according to Lysenko's theories. He used Lysenko's theories as tools of Soviet agricultural policy, an experiment that ended—

**Jack:** Mao, too.

**Andre:** Right. Mao enforced a similar program based on Lysenko's ideas in China. Anyway, these experiments ended poorly...

**Jack:** What you mean to say is that tens of millions of people died of famine.

**Andre:** Yes, that's what I mean. I am just a bit more judicious than you.

**Emma** [laughs]: Ha! When you want to be.

**Andre** [smiles]: Yes, when I want to be, not always. Anyway, Connie, my point is that not all scientific consensuses are equal. Some emerge from within science via normal scientific processes; some are imposed on practicing scientists—

**Connor:** But, do we really need to worry about the ascendance of a new Stalin? That doesn't strike me as a particularly contemporary concern. I mean, we've had Presidents that were immoral idiots, but none that were comparable to Stalin. I'm really not worried about the emergence of a totalitarian dictator who might wantonly impose illegitimate consensuses on various disciplines and fields of science.

**Andre:** Nothing I've said implies that a totalitarian dictator is necessary for the problem to appear. Indeed, you would agree, I assume, that a similar problem potentially appears whenever

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

corporations or private interest groups fund scientific research, would you not? Surely, you would be skeptical of any consensus about, say, environmental pollution, that emerged from research projects funded by Dow Chemical or ExxonMobil, or of a consensus concerning the effects of smoking on lung cancer that grew out of research funded by Philip Morris or R.J. Reynolds.

**Connor:** Of course.

**Andre:** But, governments are generous funders of scientific research, too. Indeed, in some countries and in some fields of inquiry, government funding is practically the only game in town. Private actors have interests, of course, and ideologies, but so do government officials. There's no reason – at least, you have offered no reason – to think that these officials are above acting upon their selfish interests or immune to various problematic incentives attendant upon their powerful positions.

**Connor:** Politicians and other government officials are generally public-spirited—at least, those of the humane and sagacious sort that I take Obama to be. They aim to maximize the public good in response to what they believe to be the general will.

**Andre:** That's not an argument, Connor. That's just to assert that politicians of the relevant sort are both above their personal interests and immune to perverse incentives. It's an assertion of faith. Given your devout atheism, I would think you should find faith as epistemologically dubious in political as in religious contexts. But, even granting your premise that politicians are generally public-spirited, factionalized conceptions of the common good, of the requirements of public-spiritedness, can obviously emerge—aren't these just political parties? And to the extent some faction gains adequate control of the process of funding scientific research, surely, they can distort that process in favor of their factional interests, whatever these might be.

**Emma:** It is remarkable how often politicians discover scientific results that support policies they would likely have promoted in any case, or, worse, policies they have already made or, worse yet, interpret their policy decisions as implications of the best science, come what may. I suppose this is just a variation on politicians' tendency to claim success – or, at least, non-failure – for everything they do.

**Andre:** That's right. It is no less in the nature of politicians to rationalize, justify, legitimize, vindicate, exalt, and glorify themselves than it is in the nature of fleas to bite. But, more to my point, even if all policymakers share a conception of the common good and aim to realize it, a false pseudo-consensus can come to be imposed from outside on an area of scientific research. It is not necessary for policymakers to be ill-intentioned or to aim at anything other than the common good for such a result to emerge. Perfectly well-intentioned policymakers can impose a false consensus on a field of inquiry, with disastrous results, no less than can venal lickspittles like Trofim Lysenko.

**Connor:** How so?



## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Andre:** Imagine a case in which policymakers want – I mean, *earnestly* want – to bring about a result that promotes the common good, say, something concerning public health. Imagine that they want to decrease the incidence of, or the number of deaths from, I don't know, say, heart disease or diabetes. Now, let's stipulate that there is no scientific consensus in the fields of medical research relevant to the public-health problem that policymakers wish to mitigate. There are multiple competing explanations, each garnering roughly equal support among researchers in the field. Yet, policymakers still *really* want to do something to contribute to the public good. Indeed, we might complicate the example, make it more realistic, by assuming that these policymakers are under some pressure from constituents to do *something* about the problem at hand. Under such conditions, given the incentives they confront and their ignorance of the adequacy of available theories, what do you think policymakers will do?

**Connor:** I don't know.

**Andre:** Given the pressure from their constituents to do something about the problem, I doubt they will just say, "We're stumped; we don't know what to do." Instead, I think they'll *guess* at the competing theories, pick one that they think they can justify to their constituents on seemingly reasonable grounds, and build a policy upon it. They're surely not going to allow themselves to be interpreted as doing *nothing* in the face of constituent demand to do *something*.

**Connor:** That seems right.

**Andre:** Now, imagine that they choose poorly, that the theory they settle upon fails to explain the relevant phenomena, and that the problem is either exacerbated or simply not mitigated as a result of their ill-conceived policy.

**Connor:** Consider it imagined.

**Andre:** Now, are policymakers a humble bunch? Do they typically admit their errors?

**Connor:** No, I wouldn't say that.

**Andre:** So, the policymakers in this example probably will not confess their mistake? Maybe constituents have no other way to discern the original error. Are policymakers likely to disabuse them and admit that the theory they guessed at turned out to be inadequate to the goal of minimizing suffering from the disease?

**Connor:** Probably not.

**Andre:** Now, what if these policymakers control much of the funding available for research in the relevant field? Are they more likely to support defenders of the competing theories that they guessed to be incorrect or adherents to the theory that they guessed to be correct, and which they subsequently built policy upon?

**Connor:** The latter, I suspect.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Andre:** As do I. After all, funding research concerning competing theories would appear tantamount to admitting to or, at least, acknowledging the possibility of their original error.

**Connor:** I see that.

**Andre:** Now, put yourself in the shoes of an investigator in this field. You face considerable incentives to pursue research concerning the government-approved theory and to eschew work on its competitors. These incentives take the form of comparatively easy access to research funds and, as a consequence of both this and the fact that others in your field confront the same incentives, relatively better publication prospects and, ultimately, improved opportunities for tenure, career advancement, *et cetera*. If this is right, then the recipient of government funding is as ethically compromised as the recipient of corporate monies. If you are skeptical of self-serving research funded by oil and gas and tobacco companies, you should be no less skeptical of self-serving research that emerges from the activities of politicians, however wonderful their apparent intentions.

**Connor:** Eh, I'm not so sure about that. I mean—

**Andre:** Indeed, given that the interests of petroleum and tobacco executives tend to be *obvious* while those of politicians are far more *obscure*, you might be wise to be more skeptical of the latter. Corporate executives essentially walk around in t-shirts with their interests emblazoned across them. Politicians all claim to be well-intentioned, but who knows whether they really are, your Obama-worship notwithstanding? But, more to the point, well-intentioned policymakers can impose and, via control of research funds, enforce a false consensus on a field of scientific inquiry. There's no need for a Stalin or a Lysenko.

**Connor:** I see the argument you are making, but it still seems beside the point. You've provided no evidence that such a scenario has ever actually occurred, much less that it is at all likely. You've given me no reason to worry about such a scenario.

**Jack:** The situation Andre just described is basically identical to the one that some have argued occurred in nutrition science in the late 1970s and which led directly to the brilliant dietary advice that the Feds have been offering for the last 30 years or so. If you've noticed, obesity, heart disease, and diabetes have all reached epidemic proportions over that time. And Andre did give you reasons to think that such scenarios happen with some regularity. The mere fact that policymakers possess such extensive and often exclusive control over scientific research funding, despite their comparative ignorance of science, is sufficient reason. However well intentioned, they will occasionally guess wrong, back the wrong theoretical horse, and, through their control of research funds, impose a false consensus on a field of inquiry that would have otherwise evolved in a different direction.

**Connor:** I suppose. I need to think about it some more.

### **Book Two: For Further Reading**

*On Policymaking and Expertise*

## ***Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics***

Scott Scheall

Walter Lippmann – *Public Opinion* ([1922] 2010), Wilder Publications

Walter Lippmann – *The Phantom Public* (1925] 1993), Routledge

James C. Scott – *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* ([1999] 2020), Yale University Press

William Easterly – *The Tyranny of Experts: Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor* (2013), Basic Books

Nate Silver – *The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail—but Some Don't* (2015), Penguin

David M. Levy and Sandra J. Peart – *Escape from Democracy: The Role of Experts and the Public in Economic Policy* (2017), Cambridge University Press

Philip E. Tetlock – *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know? New Edition* (2017), Princeton University Press

Roger Koppl – *Expert Failure* (2018), Cambridge University Press

Jeffrey Friedman – *Power Without Knowledge: A Critique of Technocracy* (2020), Oxford University Press

### ***On Science and Consensus***

Karl Popper – *Logic of Scientific Discovery* ([1934] 2002), Routledge

Thomas S. Kuhn – *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Third Edition* ([1962] 1994), University of Chicago Press

Larry Laudan – *Progress and Its Problems: Towards a Theory of Scientific Growth* (1978), University of California Press

Larry Laudan – “A Confutation of Convergent Realism,” *Philosophy of Science* (1981), 48 (1): 19–49

William N. Butos and Thomas J. McQuade – “Nonneutralities in Science Funding: Direction, Destabilization, and Distortion,” *Journal des Economistes et des Etudes Humaines* (2012), 18 (1): 1–26

Simon Ings – *Stalin and the Scientists: A History of Triumph and Tragedy, 1905-1953* (2017), Atlantic Monthly Press

Scott Scheall, William N. Butos, and Thomas J. McQuade – “Social and Scientific Disorder as Epistemic Phenomena, or the Consequences of Government Dietary Guidelines” (2018), *Journal of Institutional Economics* (2018), 15 (3): 431–447

### ***On the History of Economics and Social Science***

Robert L. Heilbroner – *The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times And Ideas Of The Great Economic Thinkers, Seventh Edition* (1999), Touchstone

Henry William Siegel – *The Growth of Economic Thought* (1991), Duke University Press

## ***Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics***

Scott Scheall

Roger E. Backhouse and Philippe Fontaine - *The History of the Social Sciences since 1945* (2010), Cambridge University Press

Lawrence H. White – *The Clash of Economic Ideas: The Great Policy Debates and Experiments of the Last Hundred Years* (2012), Cambridge University Press

### ***On the History of Nutrition Policies***

John Yudkin – *Pure, White, and Deadly: How Sugar Is Killing Us and What We Can Do to Stop It* ([1972] 2013), Penguin

Ancel Keys – *Seven Countries: A Multivariate Analysis of Death and Coronary Heart Disease* (1980), Harvard University Press

Gary Taubes – *Good Calories, Bad Calories: Fats, Carbs, and the Controversial Science of Diet and Health* (2008), Anchor

### **Book Two: Discussion Questions**

1. Discuss the significance for policy experts of the *tentative* nature of scientific knowledge.
2. What are the consequences for the application of expertise to policymaking of the fact that science explains only some, but not all, potentially policy-relevant phenomena?
3. What are the two basic ways in which a scientific consensus can form and what is the significance of each method of formation for the value of the relevant theory as a potential policy tool?
4. Discuss the significance for policymaking of an *absence* of consensus – i.e., of disagreement among scientists – in some policy-relevant scientific field or discipline.

### **Book Three**

**Book Three Synopsis:** The *problem of evil* is a problem for believers in the standard conception of God as *all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good*. The problem can be simply stated: Why would an all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good God permit evil to exist in the world? If God is all-knowing and all-powerful, then God can prevent the occurrence of evil; that God allows the occurrence of evil thus seems to undermine God's purported all-goodness. Alternatively, it could be that God *is* all-good, but either not all-knowing or not all-powerful, and, thus, not able to prevent the occurrence of evil. In any case, the existence of evil presents a problem that the believer in the traditional conception of God must explain. In Book Three, the characters consider an analogous problem for anyone who accepts a conception of policymakers as aiming to promote the interests of the people: in fact, policy results sometimes fail to promote the interests of the people. How can this be, if policymakers are conceived as altruistic and, implicitly, as knowledgeable and powerful enough (perhaps with the assistance of policy experts) to effectively discharge their policymaking tasks? The conception of policymakers as altruistic seems to face difficulties in adequately explaining relevant cases of policy failure. Anyone who accepts such a conception thus seems to confront a problem analogous to the traditional problem of evil.

**Jack:** Alright, it's my turn to attack Connor. You two have been hogging all the fun.

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Andre:** Have at him. I'm spent. Do you have anything to add, Em?

**Emma:** Oh, I have a lot to say, but I want to see what Zippy the Wonderdork has come up with...

**Connor:** I don't want to continue this persecution. There's a party going on. Don't I have any say here?

**Jack** [laughing]: No, you don't. Wait, Zippy the Wonderdork?

**Emma:** Yeah, I just came up with it. I like it for you.

**Jack** [shakes head]: My god, OK, whatever.

**Emma** [laughing]: What? You don't like it? It's so fitting.

**Jack** [shakes head]: No, I don't like it and it's not "fitting." Stop it.

**Andre:** If the name fits...

**Emma:** Right?

**Jack** [turning away]: OK. So, here's the complaint that I was working up against Connor before you two so rudely interrupted...

**Emma** [laughing]: Oh, Zippy's panties are bunching!

**Andre:** Yep, they're riding up on him.

**Jack** [louder, over their voices]: Connor's progressivism is inconsistent with his rabid hatred of the University Administration and, especially, their recent decision to shift resources away from the humanities.

**Connor:** Oh, God. Alright, how so?

**Jack:** Here's what I mean: what are university administrators?

**Emma:** Oh, this is gonna be fun! Lemme guess! Lemme guess! Fun sponges? Uhhh, addlepates? What's the plural form of "ignoramus"? Ignoramuses? Ignorami?

**Andre:** Addlepatated ignorami?

**Emma** [laughing]: Yeah!

**Connor:** Soulsuckers? Scumsuckers? They definitely suck...er, uh, something.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Jack:** All of the above!! But, they're also politicians; they're policymakers.

**Emma:** Ah, yes! Very good, Zippy.

**Jack:** I mean, think about it: the administrators of a large American university make policies that affect 50,000 to 60,000 people, more than the mayors of many cities. If the mayor and city council of I don't know, Missoula, Montana are policymakers – and I would think they definitely are policymakers – then so too are university Presidents and their various boot-licking administrative subordinates. Now, if university administrators are policymakers and if policymakers pursue the collective good, as Connor contends, then, in cutting the Philosophy Department's budget in favor of the Business College and the STEM disciplines, the University's administrators are acting on what they take to be the general good of the University.

**Andre** [to Emma]: Isn't it ironic that they're called "STEM" disciplines, but that all inquiry in fact stems from philosophy?

**Emma** [to Andre]: What actually stem from the STEM disciplines are donations to the University from alumni!

**Andre** [laughs]: Exactly!

**Jack** [over their laughter]: My point is that Connor has to deal with something akin to the problem of evil. His requirements for "good" policymaking are seemingly present in the University's budget decision. I think we can safely assume, given the technocracy-loving administrators we're talking about here, that their decisions were based on the most advanced and innovative theories of educational best practices, whatever the value of these theories might be, plus the available statistical data. So, on Connor's own criteria – the application of science, or, in this case, educational theory, to the realization of goals in the interests of the collective, the University itself – he should applaud, not bemoan, the changes coming to the Philosophy Department.

**Connor:** Oh, God. OK. I deny out of hand your attempt to equate educational or pedagogical theory with anything like science.

**Jack:** On what grounds? You still haven't told us what science is or, more generally, how we are to distinguish policy-relevant theories from irrelevant theories, except that consensus is important. What if consensus existed – in the extreme case, what if unanimity existed – about pedagogical theories among scholars of educational practice? Nothing you've said so far could license ignoring this consensus and *not* using the accepted theories in educational policy.

**Connor:** Oh, come on. You don't really think such a condition holds in education, do you?

**Jack:** I honestly don't know, Connor, but my point is, neither do you! You've rejected the Administration's new policies apparently without considering the possibility that they actually satisfy your own criteria of good policymaking. But the reason I raise this issue is really to suggest another problem. You have never—

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma** [to Andre]: Oh, he's building to something...I'm excited.

**Jack:** You don't apply these criteria consistently. Like most people, you pretty much automatically approve of the policies of your preferred party, without engaging in any analysis of either their supposed scientific basis or the extent to which they are likely to promote the common good; and you reflexively reject the proposals of the rival party, again, without seriously considering their scientific basis or their potential collective benefits. Your attempt to defend your criteria of good policymaking is just a red herring, a smokescreen for the fact that your reasoning about politics is no more sophisticated than that of the average middle-American Gomer: "My side good; other side bad." You engage in whatever mental gymnastics and intellectual backfilling is necessary to maintain this basic view of the world.

**Connor:** The other side denies science! They're just a bunch of religious kooks.

**Jack:** As I was saying. You treat politicians who happen to agree with your pre-analytical preferences on substantive policy matters as public-spirited intuiters of the general will. All other politicians, you treat as either single-minded and mean-spirited defenders of their own selfish interests or as idiots, basically. If you were serious about your purported criteria of good policymaking, you would have to admit that the University Administration's decisions constitute good policies. In truth, however, because the criteria that really operate in your mind have nothing to do with the general will or the application of the best theories to the problem at hand, and everything to do with your intuitive preferences and gut instincts, you reject the Administration's decisions...

**Emma:** How is it that the other side denies science, Connor? Refusing to make science the end-all of policymaking is not *per se* denying science or advocating for Christian theocracy. Do members of the rival party deny gravity? No members of the rival party have ever been involved in the design of weapons or in the space program? I'm quite sure that's wrong. Do they deny the germ theory of disease? No members of the other party have ever contributed to public-health endeavors? I'm quite sure that's all wrong. Or do you think they were relying on divine revelation or something equally unscientific, and not on prevailing scientific ideas, in their contributions to these activities? What you call "denying science" seems to me to be nothing more than a healthy skepticism – which, as I think Andre has shown, is the proper attitude to adopt toward science – especially about new and untested theories, and about, as Andre called them, "tested-and-falsified-and-not-yet-replaced" theories. The distinction between you and your political opponents on matters scientific is at best one of degree, not of substantive difference. You seem to have a perhaps too-reverential attitude toward science, or at least, toward what you *call* science. Your opponents do not. I suspect it is your attitude, not theirs, that is the improper one.

**Jack:** She's totally right, of course, but, dammit, Emma! I was on a roll. Don't interrupt my flow.

**Andre:** Your "flow"? Jesus. You really are a Wonderdork.

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** Sorry, Zippy. My apologies. The floor is all yours. “Flow” all over it.

**Andre:** Gross...

**Jack:** Where was I?

**Emma:** Intellectual backfilling, mental gymnastics...

**Jack:** Right! This is problematic for many reasons. Of course, it’s arbitrary, it’s *ad hoc* and obviously grounded more in emotion than reason. But, the biggest problem with your approach to politics – “My side good; other side bad” – is that it is empirically unsupported and, ultimately, *unsupportable*. Only to the extent that a conception of the political good is agreed upon by everyone, shared by members of all relevant parties, is it possible to make a definitive judgment that the members of one party are better than the members of another political party. Mercifully, we have achieved a considerable degree of agreement that, among other things, slavery and genocide are bad, and we can thus make relatively clear judgments about nations, political parties, and individuals who fail to act accordingly. But, easy cases are rare and, as Andre said before, uninteresting. More often, the common standard required of such comparisons is lacking and, outside of the rare easy cases, it seems to me that conceptions of the political good are precisely the things about which rival political parties tend to disagree. Conceptions of the political good are what are at stake, but you pretend that the matter is settled, always and everywhere, till the end of time. All politicians need to do is to govern in line with your moral compass and, hence, in line with what you consider scientific truth, and they will forever find themselves in the realm of the political good.

**Emma:** So, he’s begging the question against everyone, but people like him?

**Jack:** Yeah, I think that’s right. He’s assuming an answer to what is under dispute. But, maybe more than that, I think all of this general will and scientific expertise stuff is just post-hoc rationalization. You’re fooling yourself, Connor, if you think that you have discovered or identified the good and bad policymakers. The idea that members of your preferred party pursue goals in the interests of the common good and build their policies on science seems to me more like an *ex post* rationalization of policies you would have supported anyway, whatever their actual source and justification. I mean, for every person like you, there is presumably a member of the rival party who makes the opposite evaluation that members of his party are “good” and members of your party “bad,” and who has some similar *ex post* justification that makes him feel as morally superior for supporting his party as your rationalization makes you feel in supporting yours. A pox on both of you, I says!

**Emma:** You would say that.

**Jack:** Wait. So, let me get to my point.

**Emma:** Oh, this is all still prologue to the big “point”?! Zippy, I’m impressed.



*Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Jack:** If you had to guess, would you say it is more likely that the University's administrators are members of Connor's preferred party or of the rival party?

**Emma:** Oh, well done, Zippy.

**Connor:** Ah, dammit. Alright. Let me have it.

**Andre:** I think we all see where this is going...

**Jack:** No, let me get to it. Come on, this is my big moment. The requirements for "good" policymaking, as Connor would have them – whether we mean his official or his unofficial criteria, those he claims to follow or those he actually follows – are apparently present in the University's budget decision: the Administration relied on data, they relied on well-regarded theories of educational best practices, and were well-intentioned with respect to the University's general good. Indeed, this result is virtually guaranteed by the fact that these administrators are, if not all of them, the vast majority, members of Connor's preferred party, all or mostly all of whom accept his conception of the political good. Thus, Connor has the problem of explaining how such good policymakers could make such an evil decision as to re-orient the University's budget away from the humanities.

**Andre and Emma** [together]: Well done!

**Jack** [deep breath]: I therefore conclude that Connor's declared allegiance to his particular conception of good policymaking is inconsistent with his attitudes toward both policymakers of the rival party and, in the present instance, toward the University's administrators, by and large members of his own party.

**Emma:** Good job, Zip.

**Jack:** What's more—

**Emma:** Oh no, there's more. Zippy, quit while you're sort of ahead.

**Jack:** Sort of? What do you mean "sort of" ahead?

**Emma:** Yeah, sort of. We're not doing arithmetic here. There's always a way around or over – or through – an argument.

**Jack:** What's more!

**Emma** [smiles]: I think I hurt his feelings...

**Andre** [laughs]: I think you did, hon.

**Jack:** What's more! I have no such problem bewitching my political beliefs, no such inconsistency. I am free to hate the University's decisions without guilt, because I do not make

## ***Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics***

Scott Scheall

the error that Connor makes of conceiving of policymakers as single-mindedly benevolent public-interested servants of the general will. Indeed, I think that politicians are – to use Hume’s famous phrase – “knaves,” who, far from caring much for the common good, always pursue their own personal interests. Thus, I can explain the Administration’s new policies, while Connor cannot: shifting resources from the humanities to business, engineering, and the physical sciences promotes the interests of the President, the Dean, and their unprincipled underlings.

### **Book Three: For Further Reading**

#### ***On the Conception of Policymakers as Public-Interested***

Plato – *Republic*, Second Edition, Allan Bloom (trans.) ([1991] 2016), Basic Books

Plato – *Statesman*, Christopher J. Rowe (trans.) (1999), Hackett

Plato – *Laws*, C. D. C. Reeve (trans.) (2022), Hackett

A. C. Pigou – *The Economics of Welfare* (1932), Macmillan

Michael Hantke-Domas – “The Public Interest Theory of Regulation: Non-Existence or Misinterpretation?” *European Journal of Law and Economics* (2003), 15 (2): 165–194

#### ***On the Traditional Problem of Evil***

David Hume – *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* ([1779] 1998), Hackett

Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert M. Adams (eds.) – *The Problem of Evil* (1990), Oxford University Press

### **Book Three: Discussion Questions**

1. What is the traditional problem of evil?
2. What is the significance of the problem of evil for a conception of policymakers as altruistically aiming to promote the interests of the public?

## **Book Four**

**Book Four Synopsis:** The different ways that a goal, any goal, might be realized lie on a continuum. On one end of the continuum are goals with respect to which the relevant actor’s (or actors’) knowledge is adequate. With regard to these goals, the actor(s) can design, implement, and administer an adequate *plan of action* for realizing the goal. Such goals can be realized entirely *deliberately*, in other words. At the other end of the continuum are goals with respect to which the relevant actor is utterly ignorant, completely incapable of realizing on the basis of their absolutely deficient knowledge reserves and learning capacity. Such goals can only be realized *spontaneously*, i.e., only if circumstances, considerations, forces, etc., outside the actor’s ken and control intervene to compensate for the actor’s relevant epistemic deficiencies. In between these two extremes are goals the realization of which require a combination of deliberate planning and spontaneity.

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** And that's why you're Zippy the Wonderdork! You couldn't just quit while you were sort of ahead. You had to push it and leave yourself exposed.

**Jack:** Nothing is exposed. I'm well-covered, fully-dressed. You only wish I were naked.

**Andre:** Jesus...

**Emma:** OK, but remember, you asked for it.

**Jack:** I'm all ears.

**Andre** [*sotto voce*]: You're all something...

**Emma:** Connie's view, which we'll call the "Rousseauian" position for short – we will set aside the question how far this is fair to Rousseau – supports advocacy of policies ostensibly in the public interest, the common good, consistent with the so-called general will.

**Jack:** OK.

**Emma:** It seems to me that advocating for a policy or a suite of policies, for a party platform or some of its various planks, implies various things about the advocate's beliefs. Every person who holds political beliefs, beliefs about what goals policymakers should try to realize, regardless of their political predilections, implicitly assumes that the policymakers whose task it is to bring about states of affairs associated with these goals are sufficiently knowledgeable to bring about these states of affairs. Policy advocacy implies belief in policymakers' ability to bring about relevant states of the world associated with either the goals of the policy or, at least, with marginal improvement on the condition of the world. No one advocates for a policy unless they believe it likely to improve the world, all things considered, i.e., without making some other equally important problem worse, on the margin. Would either of you support a policy, whatever it might be, if you believed its pursuit likely to, on the whole, exacerbate social problems, or if you believed the overall costs to outweigh the benefits of its pursuit, if you believed it likely to make the world a *worse* place, in other words?

**Connor:** Of course not.

**Jack:** Your question is underspecified. On whose conception of "better" and "worse"?

**Emma:** On your own personal conception.

**Jack:** No, probably not. At least, it's hard to imagine a case where I would advocate for a policy that I had reason to believe likely to make the world a worse place, on the whole, as I conceive better and worse.

**Emma:** So, advocating for a policy implies that the advocate believes the policy will benefit society on net, either by realizing its ostensible goals or otherwise by improving the world on

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

balance. As you just agreed, it is hard to imagine anyone advocating for policies that they think likely to aggravate social problems, all things considered, as they themselves conceive these problems.

**Connor:** Yes, I see the point. Even Jack – or Zippy – here wants the world to be a better place. He just has a bad conception of good.

**Jack** [laughing]: Don't be mad, just because I destroyed your most treasured beliefs.

**Connor:** Pfff. Whatever, Zip.

**Emma:** Quiet, children. Now, what determines whether a policy ultimately achieves this minimal ambition?

**Connor:** Uhh, I don't know.....circumstances?

**Emma** [laughs]: OK. Which circumstances? What conditions determine whether a policy succeeds or not?

**Jack** [thinking]: They're different from case to case.

**Emma:** Are they?

**Connor:** Of course. The circumstances that determine whether a war is won are vastly different from the circumstances that determine whether a welfare policy or – to pick up Andre's earlier example – a public-health policy, achieves its goal.

**Emma:** I'm not so sure. Here's what I mean: surely, you're right that what matters to the success – or the non-failure, as we've defined it – of a policy, is whether it is adapted to the unique circumstances it encounters, during the time period relevant to its effects. Indeed, it is this fact that makes possible a general explanation of the success or failure of policies, whatever the goals at which they are aimed.

**Jack:** OK, interesting. Please proceed.

**Emma** [laughs]: Thanks, I will. Let me ask the question in a slightly different way: who is *responsible*, I mean *causally* responsible, for realizing the purported ends of a policy? Who is charged with bringing about states of the world that citizens, voters, constituents, what have you – the "people" – either approve of or do not? [Laughing] Come on, boys, I've already given you the answer!

**Andre:** Oh, I know! I know! Can I guess?

**Emma** [smiling]: Of course, my love.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Andre:** Policymakers! Politicians. They're the people ultimately charged with acting in citizens' interests, with bringing about goals preferred by constituents. Actually, now that I think about it, this seems true regardless of the prevailing *form* of government, whether democratic, autocratic, or something in between. Policymakers are – everywhere, at least, in contemporary political contexts – expected to bring about results that promote citizens' interests or which, at a minimum, the citizens approve of.

**Emma:** Very good. You get a gold star!

**Andre** [laughs]: I'm so proud!

**Emma** [smiles]: It seems to me that a policy objective, whatever it might be – landing people on the moon, winning World War II, mitigating suffering from some disease, reforming health insurance, literally, whatever goal we might aim at through political action – can be realized either *deliberately* or *accidentally*. We can either develop a plan adequate to realize a goal, then successfully implement the plan, or the goal can come about of its own accord *sans* such intentional planning. More carefully, a goal can be realized entirely in one of these two ways, or through some combination of deliberate decision-making and accidental – or, perhaps better, *spontaneous* – forces that are not consciously directed at realizing the relevant goal, but which produce the desired result as an unintended consequence or by-product.

**Jack:** So, basically, imagine a continuum with *completely deliberate goal realization* at one end and *entirely accidental goal realization* at the other end.

**Emma** [laughs]: If you need a visual, yes.

**Jack** [smiles]: It helps.

**Emma:** It seems to me that realizing a goal entirely through deliberate decision-making, without resort to spontaneous forces – that is, by making a plan in advance for the realization of the goal and then putting the plan into action such that the goal is ultimately realized entirely on the basis of the plan, requires that the designers of the plan, policymakers in our case, possess knowledge adequate to its deliberate realization. In effect, policymakers need to possess knowledge concerning relevant causal mechanisms sufficient to control circumstances adequately to realize the desired policy goal. Generally speaking, a policy objective is realized because either policymakers know enough to deliberately realize it or circumstances not reflected in their plans are adequate for its realization, despite their ignorance. If policymakers lack some of the knowledge required to deliberately realize an objective, it can be realized only to the extent that something they do not intend, something that has escaped their plan – an accident, spontaneous forces, luck, or outrageous fortune – intervenes to compensate for their ignorance.

**Connor:** Either policymakers know enough to realize some policy end or, if they do not possess this knowledge, they get lucky, and the end is realized even though they are ignorant to some degree—you're saying that these are the two fundamental ways, with an infinity of intermediate ways involving a combination of knowledge and luck, that a policy goal can be realized?

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** Yeah, basically, but I don't want to identify spontaneity with luck. Luck is a kind of spontaneity, but, more generally, spontaneous forces are just those not encompassed in the plan of the relevant actor or actors, forces that can either conduce – or not – to the realization of the goals of the plan. So, luck is a kind of spontaneous force, but so too, for example, are the forces of Adam Smith's *invisible hand*.

**Connor:** Ugh. So, like, miracles, basically?

**Emma:** No, not like miracles. Spontaneity is not identical with, neither does it require the occurrence of, miracles. Of course, if miracles occur – a dubious proposition – then they are spontaneous in that they are necessarily unplanned, by any human mind at least, but spontaneous outcomes extend far beyond the miraculous and, as I just said, far beyond the merely fortuitous.

**Connor:** How so?

**Emma:** Consider what you are denying when you deny spontaneous outcomes.

**Connor:** I'm not denying them! I'm just trying to understand what they are. I mean, look, clearly, politicians are causal cogs in the policymaking machinery and, sometimes, this machinery works effectively: The Great Depression ended; World War II was a victory; men were landed on the moon, *et cetera*. In emphasizing the role of what you call "spontaneity," it sounds like you're saying that policymakers played no role in these successes.

**Emma:** I am not saying that. I am saying that their causal input, such as it was, was probably not sufficient for those policy successes, that something else – luck, fortune, the invisible hand, or some other accidental considerations – had to intervene in order for those outcomes to be realized. World War II was not won because Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt followed a rational plan determined in advance. They adapted – well, I might add, they adapted well, surely better than did Hitler and Hirohito, or Tojo, or whoever was in charge of the Japanese war effort – to ever- and rapidly-evolving circumstances. Historians love to play "what if"-games like this about WWII. What if Hitler had invaded Britain after Dunkirk? What if he had not turned against Stalin? What if the Japanese had attacked Vladivostok rather than Pearl Harbor? What if the Germans had won at Stalingrad? In the end, the victory emerged from the choices, actions, and interactions of millions of people, on all sides of the conflict, from the by-and-large evolutionarily superior adaptations to ever changing circumstances of many of the people on the Allied side and the relatively inferior adaptations of many individuals on the Axis side. Of course, I would never deny that Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt were important cogs in this machine, but I would insist that their ever-changing plans were at no point – except perhaps at the very last moments before the Japanese signed the Instrument of Surrender – *sufficient* to win the war without the intervention of spontaneous forces not encompassed in their plans. The *Allies* won the war – not the wisdom of three men – and they were in many respects *lucky* to do so.

**Andre:** Four men, if you include Truman.

**Emma:** Right, I always forget about him.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Jack:** He is easy to forget, oddly, given—

**Emma:** Given his world-altering significance? Yeah. Anyway, we don't need to reflect upon a six-year-long globe-spanning war in order to understand that unplanned considerations can and, I think, typically do, play a role in social outcomes. World War II is probably too causally complex to really illustrate the oft-decisive role that spontaneous forces play in our lives, not to mention, in world history. Even a much simpler example, another one that you mentioned – the Apollo 11 mission – ultimately hinged on spontaneity for its success. I assume I can take it as axiomatic that Apollo 11 succeeded? [Laughing] There are no secret moon-landing hoaxers among us, are there?

**Connor** [laughs]: No, of course not.

**Jack** [laughing]: No! My mother actually worked for NASA in the late 60s. She would have been in on it, had it been a hoax.

**Andre:** Really?

**Jack:** Yeah, but my mom can't keep a secret about anything...her favorite phrase is "Don't tell anyone I told you this, but..."

**Andre** [laughing]: Can we assume she's never taken you aside and said, "Don't tell anyone I told you this, but Stanley Kubrick directed the whole thing on a Hollywood soundstage!"

**Jack** [laughs]: Yeah, never.

**Emma:** OK, so the Apollo program will be our example of simple phenomena that—

**Jack:** Wait, that's your example of *simple* phenomena? Putting people on the moon seems pretty difficult to me...

**Emma:** Granted. But, as I'm using the term, complexity is not necessarily a measure of how difficult it is to realize some result, but of the number of and interrelations between causal factors that figure in the manifestation of some phenomena. Of course, the two notions of complexity often go together: phenomena that are causally complex in my sense will often be practically complex – or, as you put it, "difficult" – to make happen, but this need not be the case. If our knowledge of some causally complex phenomena is adequate, they may prove relatively simple to realize. Conversely, some phenomena may be relatively causally simple, yet prove difficult to realize inasmuch as our knowledge of the causes is inadequate. Indeed, this, I will argue, is precisely the case with regard to putting a man on the moon: causally simple, though – obviously – practically difficult. Actually, to get at the point, let's start by distinguishing the parts of the Apollo program that concerned physics from those parts of the program that did not concern physics.

**Connor:** For what purpose?

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** When I say that the Apollo program is an example of a simple phenomenon, I should be clear that what I mean is that its specifically *physical* aspects were simple. I am happy to grant that other aspects of the program – the socio-political elements and those aspects that involved individual psychology – may have been quite complex. Indeed, my argument will hinge precisely on the generally greater complexity, as I defined it in causal terms before, of these non-physical, as opposed to physical, phenomena.

**Connor:** OK.

**Emma:** Considered as a physical phenomenon, landing a person on the moon is a very basic problem in applied Newtonian mechanics, terrestrial and celestial. This is true not only with respect to the problem of the projectile's trajectory from Cape Canaveral to the Sea of Tranquility – a problem that is only slightly more difficult than accounting for the trajectory of a baseball struck by a bat, given knowledge of relevant initial conditions – but also with respect to each of the individual engineering problems that collectively constituted the rocketry aspects of the program.

**Andre:** There are sciences or, at least, branches of sciences, and engineering specialties dedicated to each of these problems.

**Emma:** Indeed. Perhaps more importantly, controlled experimentation presents relatively few difficulties in these fields. Scientists and engineers are able to isolate and experiment upon relevant phenomena in a variety of controlled environments. Given that we're in a Newtonian context when we talk about space travel, moreover, there is no need to worry about emergent effects from the combination of isolated causal factors and, importantly, the scientists and engineers know this. In short, inasmuch as landing a person on the moon is a physical phenomenon, our knowledge is relatively secure. We know how to do it.

**Andre:** So, what you're saying is that, to the extent it was casually complex, in your sense, to put a man on the moon, the complexity was a function of the non-physical factors, of the socio-political, the psychological, factors, involved in, say, acquiring and sustaining adequate political support from Congress to finance the project, in keeping the *human beings*, the astronauts, administrators, and engineers, involved in the program adequately focused on their respective tasks.

**Emma:** Exactly right. Don't forget that it was only Armstrong's skill as a pilot that kept the lunar module from crashing into the Moon's surface at the last moment. Despite our command of the physics involved – well, not *our* command [laughs], but *human* command, of the physics involved – the success or failure of the Apollo program, or, at least, the Apollo 11 mission, ultimately hinged on a causal factor – one person's ability to respond under pressure to unexpected circumstances – that can be said to have figured in policymakers' plans for the program only in a very loose sense. Naturally, they always intended to put the best possible people inside that capsule, but they could not have foreseen, much less did they intend, the specific combination of circumstances to which Armstrong was made to respond in order to prevent disaster. Put one of the other Apollo astronauts in that landing-craft or – hell – change Armstrong's state of attention just slightly, and who knows what might have happened?



## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Jack:** So, even this, the Apollo 11 mission, perhaps the most planned-down-to-the-moment-and-minutest-detail policy pursuit in the history of mankind ultimately hinged on luck or, what you're calling, more generally, spontaneous forces.

**Emma:** Yes, that's exactly what I am saying. I haven't conducted a comprehensive survey of world-historical events, but I suspect that, if you were to perform such a survey, you would find similar elements of spontaneity at work in nearly every one of them. I imagine that no one here has read Hume's *History of England*, in whole or in part?

**Jack:** It's 2,400 pages!

**Emma:** I know. It took me the better part of a year to read it. That's why I said, "in whole or in part"! You wouldn't have to read all 2,400 pages to get a feel for Hume's central theme, which is that history is a concatenation of mostly random, unforeseen, and often unforeseeable events, at best only feebly controlled by capricious and venal, selfish and short-sighted, idiots, basically.

**Connor** [laughing]: Jeez. What a hopeful message!

**Emma:** If you're looking for hope, Connie, read self-help books. We're doing political philosophy in the light of world history. There are no grounds for optimism.

**Connor:** That's uplifting.

**Emma:** One more thing before I turn to other matters. You said you weren't denying spontaneous forces, just trying to understand them. I think that reflecting on what it would mean to deny spontaneity might be a good way to understand what it is.

**Connor:** OK.

**Emma:** Rejecting invisible-hand or spontaneous forces is akin to believing that everything that happens in society, whether you judge it good or bad, or whatever, is the deliberate result of advanced planning, that social outcomes can never be the consequence of causes unplanned, unintended, and unknown by anyone. It amounts to believing that society is always and everywhere under the control of some uniquely knowledgeable and capable puppet-masters. It amounts to believing that every aspect of World Wars I and II, Apollo 11, and the Challenger disaster, were deliberate products of someone's advanced planning. I shouldn't have to say it, but that is an incredibly stupid thing to believe...

**Andre:** Unless you're a conspiracy theorist...

**Emma** [excitedly]: Exactly! Denying that spontaneity operates in society makes someone a conspiracy theorist about many things. It implies that there is some deliberate decision or some sequence of purposeful decisions behind everything that happens in society, that nothing happens without someone first aiming and planning to make it happen, and then successfully realizing that aim as planned.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Andre** [pondering]: Doesn't that mean there can be no accidents? Does someone who denies spontaneity necessarily deny accidents?

**Emma**: I think so. A driver who goes off the road after skidding on a patch of ice is necessarily the victim of someone's plan, if not his own, because, without spontaneity, everything that happens must result from a pre-made plan successfully implemented.

**Connor**: But, aren't you equivocating on "accident" there? It's one thing to say that car accidents happen. It's one thing to say that our personal lives don't always go the way we plan. It is another thing to say that accidents happen *in society*. I'm still not sure I understand what that means.

**Emma**: To say that accidents happen in your personal life is just to say that no one – not you or anyone else – is in complete control of your life or of the various results of your actions. This is all it means to say that accidents happen in society: no one is in complete control of society or of the various outcomes that emerge from the actions and interactions of the individuals in society. To admit accidents in your personal life is to deny that your life has a puppet-master; and this is all it means to admit accidents in society. In both uses of the concept it is to admit that humans are not marionettes and that life, personal or social, has no buttons, levers, or pulleys. To put it another way, accepting the operation in society of the invisible hand or of spontaneous forces is identical to acknowledging that society is not always the product of design, whether of gods or of men, or, what is much the same thing, it is to point out that policymakers are neither omniscient nor omnipotent, that they're nothing like gods. Indeed, I suspect that you might be struggling to get the point precisely because you have been raised, like all of us, to think of politicians as the prime movers of society, as possessing knowledge and powers sufficient to *make particular things happen in society*, as if by taking an oath of office they come to understand mystical secrets and to possess magical powers inaccessible to the unelected. The policymakers' disease is overestimation of their own capacity to control social phenomena; the constituents' disease is overestimation of their rulers' capacity to control events. Everyone, regardless of political perspective, implicitly attributes special knowledge to policymakers, seemingly mindless of the crucial role that spontaneous forces play in society and world history. Political thought – whether we're talking *The Republic* or Fox News – is a complete hash on this question.

**Connor**: I'm sure that's the first time Fox News and Plato's *Republic* have been mentioned in the same breath.

**Jack** [smiling]: False! I told you to watch *Glenn Beck*!

**Connor** [laughing]: Oh my god. Why am I friends with you?

**Jack** [smiles]: I ask myself the same question.

### **Book Four: For Further Reading**

*On Spontaneous Order*

## ***Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics***

Scott Scheall

Adam Smith – *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* ([1759] 1994), Liberty Fund

David Hume – *History of England* ([1754–1761] 1985), Liberty Fund

Adam Ferguson – *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ([1767] 1996, Cambridge University Press

Adam Smith – *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* ([1776] 1982), Liberty Fund

Carl Menger – *Investigations into the Method of the Social Sciences with Special Reference to Economics* ([1883] 1985), New York University Press

F. A. Hayek – *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek, Volume 15: The Market and Other Orders* (2014), Bruce Caldwell (ed.), University of Chicago Press

Thomas C. Leonard – “Reflection on Rules in Science: An Invisible-Hand Perspective” (2002), *Journal of Economic Methodology*, 9 (2), 141-168

### ***On the Distinction between Simple and Complex Phenomena***

F. A. Hayek – “Degrees of Explanation” ([1955] 2014), in *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek, Volume 15: The Market and Other Orders* (2014), Bruce Caldwell (ed.), 195-212, University of Chicago Press

F. A. Hayek – “The Theory of Complex Phenomena” ([1964] 2014), in *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek, Volume 15: The Market and Other Orders* (2014), Bruce Caldwell (ed.), 257–277, University of Chicago Press.

Scott Scheall – “Lesser Degrees of Explanation: Further Implications of F. A. Hayek’s Methodology of Sciences of Complex Phenomena” (2015), *Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics*, 8 (1), 42-60

### ***On the History of the Apollo Program and the Apollo 11 Mission***

W. David Woods – *How Apollo Flew to the Moon* (2011), Springer

Jonathan H. Ward – *Rocket Ranch: The Nuts and Bolts of the Apollo Moon Program at Kennedy Space Center* (2015), Springer

Jonathan H. Ward – *Countdown to a Moon Launch: Preparing Apollo for Its Historic Journey* (2015), Springer

James R. Hansen – *First Man: The Life of Neil A. Armstrong* (2018), Simon & Schuster

James Donovan – *Shoot for the Moon: The Space Race and the Extraordinary Voyage of Apollo 11* (2020), Back Bay Books

### **Book Four: Discussion Questions**

1. Consider and discuss the implications of advocating for a particular policy. What beliefs are implicit in a person’s advocacy of a particular policy?

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

2. What circumstances ultimately determine whether a policy succeeds or not? What role do policymakers' reasons, motives, intentions, etc., play in determining whether the policies they pursue succeed or not?
3. Given a particular goal, what kinds of knowledge do policymakers need to possess to deliberately realize the goal? How might the goal be realized, if they lack some of this knowledge?
4. Discuss the relationship between *spontaneity* and *luck*.
5. In what sense might the causal complexity of social phenomena be a problem for attempts to control society?
6. Discuss the relationship between *conspiracy theories* and the denial of the operation of spontaneous forces in society.
7. In what sense are personal *accidents* similar to and different from societal accidents?

### **Book Five**

**Book Five Synopsis:** Book Five continues the discussion of the role of experts in policymaking. Even on the dubious assumption that policy experts are always infallible, it does not follow that expertise always contributes positively to the quality of policy decisions. The structure of the various sciences does not map onto the structure of the various problems that we might want policy to address. There are more (and different) problems than there are policy-relevant scientific explanations. Some problems are not covered by any scientific explanation. Other problems require input from multiple sciences, each of which operates under *ceteris paribus* assumptions and which, therefore, cannot be simply combined or integrated into a coherent explanation useful for policy purposes. Relatedly, there are no experts about tradeoffs, about how to balance or choose between multiple priorities that may be in tension. There are no experts about experts that can counsel policymakers when the advice they receive from experts is inconsistent. Under such circumstances, whatever advice experts might be able to offer, even on the dubious assumption that they are infallible within their scientific domains, need not contribute positively to the quality of relevant policy decisions.

**Emma:** Boys...can I get back to it?

**Jack** [in a little boy's voice]: Aw, shucks, Ma. Don't ground us. It won't happen again. We pwomise.

**Emma:** You "pwomise"? I hate you.

**Jack** [laughing]: Dammit, will just make your point?

**Emma** [laughing]: OK, but I do hate you. I want that noted.

**Andre** [nodding]: It's on the record.

**Emma:** As I was saying, political thought from Plato to Glenn Beck, as it were, is a complete muddle on the significance of policymaker knowledge – or, more to the point, of policymaker

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

ignorance. In all political analyses that I know of, if policymakers are not treated as omniscient and omnipotent, they are at least treated as epistemically privileged, again, as if political office somehow bestowed special knowledge and abilities on otherwise normal human beings. This is true, as I noted, even in informal contexts: every voter assumes policymakers know enough to improve upon those states of the world the voter wants improved upon. Indeed, come to think of it, voters tend to make similar epistemic assumptions about members of rival political parties: it is not merely that these rival policymakers want to bring about states of the world that the voter disapproves of, but implicitly, the voter assumes that these policymakers are knowledgeable and capable enough to do so! Everyone reflexively and uncritically attributes unique knowledge and abilities to politicians. That's nuts! I mean, politicians...they're not wizards! They're just – at best – lawyers. Do you know any lawyers, Connie, or, for that matter, any law students?

**Jack** [groans]: My god, law students are the worst. They think they're smart! They're just good at memorizing things and recalling details.

**Emma**: We agree on that, Zippy.

**Connor**: Yes, unfortunately, I know some lawyers...and some law students. And you're right, Zippy.

**Jack**: “Unfortunately” is right: an almost universal reaction to the mere mentioning of the legal profession! Just hope that you never have to hire one...

**Emma**: The point is that human beings are not omniscient and omnipotent. People are not gods, neither can they become gods. Indeed, I see no reason to think of any particular class of human beings, especially not a bunch of former law students, as epistemically privileged in the respects relevant to *causing* effective policies. Civilization, modern society, and world history are products more of evolution than of design. Humans intervene in these evolutionary processes and affect their course, but not necessarily – indeed, I suspect, only rarely – as *rationally designed*. There is no reason to think that any person or any class of persons possesses special knowledge concerning relevant causal mechanisms sufficient to puppet-master society. I would think, Connor, to reiterate a point that Andre made earlier, that if you're skeptical of omnipotent and omniscient gods, you should be especially skeptical of omnipotent and omniscient persons. But, I also think you should be skeptical that normal people, simply in virtue of acquiring official governmental duties, suddenly secure epistemic advantages adequate to making effective policies. If you think that the absence of God means that nature is a product of evolutionary processes, you might consider that the non-existence of epistemically-privileged puppet-masters makes society no less a product of variation, mutation, adaptation, development, and selection.

**Connor**: That's what policy experts are for! It is not that policymakers become uniquely knowledgeable in virtue of being policymakers. Rather, scientists become experts in virtue of years of intense study of a specialized subject matter and then they offer this wisdom to policymakers. I agree with you that politicians aren't epistemically special, but improving their knowledge is precisely the role of scientific experts in the political process.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** I agree that experts are involved in the process only because policymakers would otherwise be ignorant, by and large, of much of what they need to know to make effective policies. It is the manifest fact of policymaker ignorance that brings experts into the policymaking process. The question is how well experts play this role or, perhaps better, the question concerns the conditions in which they play this role relatively well and the circumstances in which they add little to policymakers' rather destitute knowledge reserves. I'm not suggesting that experts never contribute anything to policy effectiveness. Obviously, professional physicists and engineers were crucial to the success of Apollo 11. I'm arguing there is no reason to assume that they always make such a positive contribution to policy effectiveness, which, I think, is how many people conceive of experts and of expertise. If we don't think of expertise as sufficient, we at least think it necessarily helps to solve a problem. But, there is no reason to think that Eagle landed safely and successfully *because* the psychologists who advised NASA on the choice of astronauts foresaw the suitability of Armstrong's individual psychology for the circumstances that he confronted at the crucial moment. There is no reason to think that psychological expertise rather than outrageous fortune put a uniquely capable person in that module. That expertise always makes a positive contribution is a dubious proposition. Indeed, I would argue it is questionable to assume that expertise *typically* makes a positive, rather than a neutral or even a detrimental, contribution to the effectiveness of policymaking.

**Connor:** You're suggesting that experts are not really expert?

**Emma:** No, actually. Well, yes. I do think that expertise is often, perhaps generally, time-sensitive: it often has an expiration date, in the sense that the experts of one generation are frequently the fools of the next. It also tends to be highly contestable. At any given time, on any given topic, there might be competing experts pushing mutually-exclusive accounts of relevant phenomena. One would need an expert about experts to choose between them! Inasmuch as expertise incorporates the theoretical outputs of science, this tentativeness and contestability would seem to be in the nature of expertise, to return once again to Andre and Zippy's earlier point. But, my worries about expertise as a policy tool do not hinge on the possibility that experts are sometimes wrong. Indeed, even if experts were infallible in their particular domains of expertise, I would still insist that there are few reasons to think they typically contribute positively to policy effectiveness.

**Connor:** How's that? How could experts be expert – by which I mean, how could the advice they give to policymakers be true or, in some sense, correct or adequate – yet they fail to make a positive contribution to policy?

**Emma:** Simply put, because social phenomena are typically far more causally complex than is reflected in the division of expertise into distinct specialized domains. There are more causes involved in most social phenomena than there are distinct domains of expertise. Even granting that experts are always fallible in their particular domains, there may be – indeed, as the relevant phenomena grow increasingly complex, I think, there *must* be – causal considerations encompassed by no one, by no expert.

**Connor:** Andre made a similar point earlier. He said there need not be an explanation of every phenomenon that might be pertinent to policymaking. I granted it at the time.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** Yes, but I need to develop his point a bit in order to show the silliness of the assumption that experts always make a positive contribution to effective policymaking.

**Connor** [sighs]: Oh. Joy.

**Emma:** Actually, I think I can state my argument relatively straightforwardly.

**Connor:** I cried “uncle” a while ago, if you recall.

**Jack** [laughing]: Oh, stop it! You love this. It’s because of discussions like this that you’re a graduate student in philosophy rather than, I don’t know, a corporate accountant. No one has arrested you and forced you to stay. Yet, you stay.

**Emma:** Indeed, you do.

**Connor** [smiling]: Proceed, please.

**Emma:** As you wish...Even if there were infallible scientific experts with regard to each and every individual causal factor that figures in the manifestation of the phenomena that we need to control in order to make some effective policy, even if each expert provided counsel that was true, correct, and adequate with regard to their respective domains of inquiry, there need not – indeed, as a practical matter, would oftentimes not – be experts about any *emergent* consequences of *interactions* between and *integrations* of individual causal factors. The notion that some expertise is always better than no expertise, that experts necessarily make a positive contribution to policy effectiveness implicitly assumes either that there are no relevant emergent phenomena or that such emergent phenomena as are relevant are easily tractable by experts, either because there are experts about the emergent phenomena themselves or because experts about, say, political phenomena, are able to determine, in company with experts about, say, economic and sociological phenomena, the emergent consequences of the interactions and integrations of these diverse phenomena. I see no reason to accept this assumption. I see no reason to assume that experts about distinct phenomena can, individually or collectively, account for what happens, say, when physical and physiological, or psychological, factors interact and amalgamate, or when political considerations interact and commingle with economic and sociological factors. A physicist knows physics, but not – or, at least, not much about – physiology and psychology, and probably less about the consequences of confrontations between specific physical stimuli and particular physiologies and / or psychologies. Psychologists know psychology, but not physics. Go back to Apollo 11: in the last analysis, the success of the mission hinged on the interaction of Neil Armstrong’s physiology and psychology with incoming physical stimuli, an amalgamation of factors the consequences of which are not and may never be explained by any science. There is no science that I’m aware of capable of explaining or predicting exactly what was occurring in Armstrong’s central nervous system such that he successfully responded to incoming stimuli in a way that prevented him and Aldrin from dying like so many flies on the windshield of the moon. We might be able to account for how the human nervous system responds to stimuli in general, but there are no experts who could have known the specific stimuli that would confront Armstrong in the moment and the prevailing

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

condition of his extremely causally-complex nervous system, and then have predicted the consequences of cross-temporal interactions of physical stimuli and nervous system. That Armstrong or, more exactly, that someone with Armstrong's psychology, rather than someone else was at the controls in that capsule at the operative moment was more a matter of spontaneity – luck or fortune – than of deliberate design.

**Andre:** Part of what you're pointing to – I think – is that much of science operates and is learned under *ceteris paribus* clauses. There aren't experts about what happens when other things are not equal or constant, when *multiple* factors operate at the same time.

**Emma:** Yeah, I think that's right. So, even if there were infallible experts with regard to all of the individual phenomena relevant to some policy, inasmuch as what is really needed is expertise not about the individual causes, but about their interactions and integrations, the experts need not make a positive contribution to the effectiveness of the policy. As phenomena grow increasingly causally complex, the scope for such ignorance of the policy significance of causal interactions and integrations, and, thus, the scope for the impotence of expertise, expands as well. Indeed, there is no reason to assume that such advice as experts can offer under circumstances like these will not be *detrimental* to the effectiveness of the policy. The assumption that experts necessarily make a positive contribution to policy effectiveness is without ground.

**Jack:** Actually, Emma, you're understating the case. It is not just that the scope for impotent, if not detrimental, expertise expands as complexity grows, it expands *exponentially*. Under the simplest assumption concerning how causal factors might combine, there is one way to combine two causal factors, four ways to combine three causal factors, uhhh, eleven ways to combine four causal factors, and – um, let me think – twenty-six ways to combine five factors.

**Emma:** Right, Zippy. Yes, thanks. There's one more point, related to this last one, that I would like to make.

**Connor:** Before you go on, can I just add that I hate Zippy, too?

**Emma:** Of course you can. We're approaching consensus.

**Jack:** I have nothing but love for both of you.

**Andre** [laughs]: You're such a liar.

**Emma:** Connie, what about *tradeoffs*?

**Connor:** Tradeoffs? What do you mean?

**Emma:** I mean, sometimes, oftentimes, we cannot have everything we want, we cannot realize all potential goals at the same time or in near succession, but must choose between goals, weigh considerations that are in tension. Who is there to assist the policymaker when competing considerations have to be balanced, when, for example, the negative socioeconomic effects of a public-health policy have to be weighed against the positive health effects of the same policy?



## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

Again, I'm assuming here that there are infallible experts about, respectively, socioeconomic and public-health considerations, but where is the expert about tradeoffs between competing factors? Who tells the policymaker what to do in such a situation when, say, the same policy that will save lives will destroy livelihoods?

**Connor:** That's not a problem at all. Lives always outweigh economic concerns.

**Emma:** Oh, really?! So, you would sacrifice the entire world economy – the engine that produces enough food to feed over 7 billion people – to save one human life? No, I'm quite sure, you wouldn't.

**Connor:** Well, when you put it that way—

**Emma:** So, there *is* some number of lives you would be prepared to sacrifice in order to ensure that the food-producing machine that is the world economy continues to function effectively for the survivors of your culling?

**Connor:** Yeah. I don't know how many lives, but you're right. I am not so much a deontologist that I am willing to sacrifice a reliable supply of food for the rest of the world in order to avert a single death.

**Emma:** Of course you wouldn't, but I think you're missing part of the point. Even a dogmatic deontologist cannot pretend that the issue in this example is simply one of weighing human lives against economic considerations. Economic considerations affect *lives*, too. There is plenty of evidence concerning the deleterious health effects of economic loss, unemployment, and material poverty. This is particularly obvious when you consider the likely effects of disabling the food-, shelter-, and clothing-producing machine that is the world economy. A lot of people are going to die without this machine in full working order. So, you can't pretend that what is at stake here is simply lives *versus* trivial economic concerns of relevance only to the bougie. Indeed, the people likely to suffer most from knee-capping the economy are the poor and those with lower incomes, who can least afford it. The economic concerns at stake are relevant to the *lives* of everyone.

**Connor:** I see the point.

**Emma:** Also, is there not a moral difference between the consequences of a *disease* and the consequences of *human-made policies meant to counter the effects of a disease*? Are not one set of consequences more [makes air quotes] “natural,” for lack of a better word, and the other set more “manmade”? Aren't human policymakers *responsible*, both causally and morally, for deaths due to their policy measures, but not responsible for deaths due to disease?

**Connor:** If politicians fail to act to counter the effects of a disease, then they are responsible for its effects.

**Emma:** Only – at best – on the dubious assumption that they *know* how to counter these effects. I might agree that, to the extent that policymakers know some way of mitigating the effects of a disease, but fail to act to mitigate them, then they are to a similar extent morally responsible for

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

these consequences, but why *assume* that they know anything? Why assume *a priori*, without knowing anything about the relevant circumstances, that they know how to address the problem at hand? As always, like everyone, you're assuming that the necessary knowledge is well within the grasp of policymakers and their expert helpers. Stop treating this assumption axiomatically. It is an empirical claim and you have no empirical evidence to support it. It is an empirical claim, but you take it on faith. More to the point, in the present example, if policymakers do not know how to effectively counter the effects of the disease, it is either false or just plain meaningless to assert that they are morally responsible for the relevant consequences. Indeed, you yourself would have to agree, on pain of inconsistency, that, if policymakers were so ignorant that their best policies could only exacerbate the problem – by, say, failing to mitigate the effects of the disease while, at the same time, making other circumstances *worse*, then they should not act to lessen the effects of the disease. You said it yourself, you would not support a policy that you believed policymakers were too ignorant to avoid bungling.

**Connor:** I did say that.

**Emma:** So, who are the experts that will advise policymakers in this scenario? Who are the experts about such tradeoffs? Who are the people knowledgeable enough about both the health effects of diseases and the socioeconomic effects of policy efforts to mitigate the health effects of diseases that can accurately predict the consequences of different policy options? Moreover, who are the morality experts qualified to advise policymakers with respect to the thorny ethical questions surrounding acting versus not acting to mitigate the effects of a disease that policymakers and their scientific advisors might not understand very well.

**Connor:** Econodemiologists? No, I'm kidding, I don't know.

**Emma** [laughs]: There are no experts about such tradeoffs. In the end, in such a scenario, policymakers will have to act on such competing expert advice as they receive either from public-health experts or from social scientists – that is, they will have to simply ignore the need for trading off such concerns and choose to favor either mitigating health concerns from the disease while indulging all of the negative socioeconomic and health effects from this policy choice, or favor socioeconomic concerns while indulging all of the negative health effects from the disease – or they will have to decide such tradeoffs themselves, without recourse to an expert on such tradeoffs, who, again, does not exist. Experts cannot advise policymakers with regard to the best policy when the best policy requires that concerns of different kinds be weighed and traded off against each other. All an expert can offer is advice about what would be the best policy with respect to their field of expertise *were other considerations irrelevant*, but the crux of this example is precisely that other considerations *are* relevant. What's more, in cases where what is really needed is a tradeoff between competing goals that cannot be simultaneously realized, there's no reason to think that knowledge of the policies which would be best, were other considerations irrelevant, is particularly helpful to the policymaker. Such knowledge might just as easily distract the policymaker from discovering a rational tradeoff. In short, there's no reason to assume *a priori* that experts can contribute to effective policymaking where either emergent phenomena are relevant or tradeoffs are required.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Connor:** I suppose you are going to insist that such cases are typical, that it is only rarely, in relatively causally simple cases, that it might be reasonable to assume that expertise contributes to policy effectiveness.

**Emma:** You read my mind. Right. It is more reasonable to assume that expertise contributes positively to policy effectiveness the more causally simple the case. Unfortunately, causally simple problems, like the purely physical aspects of the Apollo 11 mission, are comparatively rare in society and politics.

**Connor:** Yeah, I don't know. If your premises are true, you've given me a lot to think about, but I'm not sure I agree with your premises, though – I admit – it's not immediately obvious to me which of them to reject, if any.

### **Book Five: For Further Reading**

#### *On Society as a Product of Evolutionary Processes*

Bernard Mandeville – *The Fable of the Bees or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* ([1714] 1924), Clarendon Press

David Hume – *Treatise of Human Nature* ([1739] 2000), Oxford

Charles Darwin – *The Origin of Species* ([1859] 2003), Signet

Carl Menger – *On the Origin of Money* ([1892] 2016), Ludwig von Mises Institute

F. A. Hayek – *The Constitution of Liberty: The Definitive Edition*, in *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek, Volume 1: The Market and Other Orders* ([1960] 2011), Ronald Hamowy (ed.), University of Chicago Press

Gerald Gaus – “Hayek on the Evolution of Society and Mind,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hayek* (2006), Cambridge University Press

#### *On Emergent Phenomena*

David J. Chalmers – *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Theory of Conscious Experience* (1996), Oxford University Press

Mark Bedau and Paul Humphreys – *Emergence: Contemporary Readings in Philosophy and Science* (2008), MIT Press

#### *On the Health Effects of Economic Loss, Unemployment, Etc.*

P. T. Martikainen and T. Valkonen – “Excess Mortality of Unemployed Men and Women during a Period of Rapidly Increasing Unemployment” (1996), *The Lancet*, 348 (9032), 909-912

J. Pharr, S. Moonie, and T. Bungum – “The Impact of Unemployment on Mental and Physical Health, Access to Health Care and Health Risk Behaviors,” (2012) *ISRN Public Health*, 1-7.

A. Milner, A. Page, and A. LaMontagne – “Cause and Effect in Studies on Unemployment, Mental Health and Suicide: A Meta-Analytic and Conceptual Review” (2014), *Psychological Medicine*, 44 (5): 909-917

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

J. E. Brand – “The Far-Reaching Impact of Job Loss and Unemployment” (2015), *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41, 359–375.

### *On Deontological versus Consequentialist Ethical Theories*

Larry Alexander and Michael Moore – “Deontological Ethics” (2020), in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-deontological/>

Walter Sinnott-Armstrong – “Consequentialism” (2019), in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/>

### **Book Five: Discussion Questions**

1. In what sense do people tend to attribute special knowledge and capacities to policymakers of both their preferred party (or political perspective) and the opposing party? Consider and discuss some of the implications of the assumption that policymakers are epistemically privileged.
2. Consider and discuss the significance of the fact that humans cannot be omniscient and omnipotent for the notion that society is more a product of evolution than of rational design.
3. Why is the (presumed) infallibility of experts no guarantee of the positive value of their advice for policymaking?
4. What is a *ceteris paribus* clause? How do *ceteris paribus* clauses complicate the application of scientific expertise to the design of government policies?
5. What are *emergent* phenomena? What is the significance of emergent phenomena for the policymaking value of scientific expertise?
6. Discuss the significance for policymaking and policy experts of the need to make *tradeoffs*.
7. Under what circumstances is scientific expertise likely to improve (or impair) the quality of policies made on its basis?

### **Book Six**

**Book Six Synopsis:** The implicit assumption that policymakers are epistemically privileged is further explicated and shown to figure among the assumptions of otherwise politically skeptical libertarians. Indeed, libertarians, who assume that policymakers are self-interested, if not selfish, confront a problem converse to the variation on the problem of evil that progressives face. Libertarians cannot explain any altruistic decisions that self-interested policymakers might make; indeed, libertarians cannot explain any decisions that such policymakers might make that ultimately fail to produce results in their own interests. The fact that both progressives and libertarians start from motivational assumptions that implicitly attribute adequate knowledge to policymakers which they may not actually possess ultimately leads defenders of both political perspectives astray, methodologically speaking, unable to explain particular political decisions and the consequences of these decisions.

**Emma:** Well, while you’re contemplating your navel, I’m going to get back to my original point. All of this was meant to be preparatory to attacking the Wonderdork here.

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Andre:** That's right! I forgot...

**Jack** [laughing]: I thought, was hoping, Em, that maybe you had forgotten...in all the hubbub.

**Emma:** No, Zip, you're not getting off that easily.

**Jack:** Alright. Dammit...

**Emma:** Where was I before Connie's insolence led me into this spontaneous digression about spontaneity?

**Andre** [to Connor, laughing]: Your insolence!

**Connor:** Always. You know it.

**Jack** [smiling]: I believe you were engaged in a rather tedious examination of the obvious implications of political belief. You were boring us all, babbling on and on about what it means to advocate for a policy. Andre was pretending to pay attention, because he's your boyfriend and he has to, but I was thinking about otters and swimming pools. I can't speak for Connor, but he seemed equally non-plussed – or plussed – whichever one means “unimpressed with your nonsense.” Could I keep a pet otter in a swimming pool, I wonder?

**Emma** [laughing]: Oh my god, I hate you so much. Why do you do this to me? You realize you leave me no choice but to destroy you now?

**Jack** [smiles]: Destroy me? I can't be destroyed. I'm rubber and you're glue, whatever you say bounces off me a—

**Emma** [to Andre]: It's like dealing with a twelve-year old...

**Andre:** Just like Connor, you're not trying to leave...

**Emma:** I'm sticking around to disembowel this dork!

**Andre:** That's gross.

**Emma:** Not literally.

**Connor:** I think it would depend on whether otters can survive in chlorinated water, right?

**Emma:** Oh, so you're going to help him now?!

**Connor** [a bit timidly]: Well, it's an interesting question.

**Emma:** No, it's not!

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Jack:** Let's see what the web says. This is why Al Gore invented the Internet [reaches for phone].

**Emma:** I swear to God, if you pull your phone out, I will strangle you with your own *vas deferens*.

**Jack:** That's not physically possible.

**Emma:** Do you want to find out?

**Jack** [laughing]: Dammit, Emma! Will you just make your point? I am eager in anticipation of my impending disemboweling.

**Emma** [breathing deep]: Deep breaths, Emma, deep breaths. It's just Zippy. No one likes him. No one loves him. He goes home every night and drinks all by himself and rubs himself to sleep while crying.

**Andre:** Wow, she knows you really well...

**Jack:** Have you been spying on me?

**Emma:** No. OK, I'm better now. I'm ready. Are *you* ready, Zippy?

**Jack:** Emma, I've been standing here for an hour now, waiting patiently and peacefully, as if I have nothing better to do, for my long-promised dialectical demolition. Yes, I'm ready.

**Emma:** You *don't* have anything better to do. Never forget that.

**Jack:** I will think about that as I buff myself to sleep tonight to the taste my own tears.

**Emma:** So...If believing some policy goal ought to be pursued implies that the advocate believes the policy to be an effective means to realize the relevant goal or that the policy will otherwise improve the state of the world, and if policymakers are ultimately responsible – causally responsible, at least – for bringing about these results, then the policy advocate must also believe that either policymakers' relevant causal knowledge or extant spontaneous forces are adequate to realize these results. Advocating for a policy implies that the advocate believes either that policymakers possess all of the knowledge necessary to either realize the goal of the policy or to otherwise improve upon the condition of the world, or that spontaneous forces are adequate to compensate for the relevant ignorance of policymakers.

**Jack:** Yes, you have established this...to what end? We've been waiting breathlessly to find out...

**Emma** [smiling]: Part of my point is that most people never consider the causal role of these spontaneous forces in political and social life. Indeed, we've just heard Connor question them—

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

or insolently try to assimilate them to miracles. Few people consider the possibility that their favored policies might succeed only if spontaneity, perhaps a heaping helping of spontaneity, intervenes to compensate for the effects of policymaker ignorance. In other words, most people – although they would likely deny this, if you brought it to their attention – attribute, implicitly at least, if not omniscience and omnipotence, then special knowledge and abilities to policymakers. More exactly, they attribute special knowledge and abilities to do *good* to members of their favored party, and they attribute special knowledge and abilities to do *bad* to members of the party rival to their own.

**Connor:** I do not consider the politicians of my party to be uniquely epistemically privileged.

**Emma:** I think you do! Implicitly, at least. As I said, many people would deny it if you brought to their attention the absurd epistemic capacities they implicitly attribute to policymakers. In your case, up until about ten minutes ago, you apparently believed that every social outcome was the result of either deliberate policymaking or a miracle, and since you reject miracles...Deny it all you like, but I think my assertion is well-grounded.

**Connor:** I'm still not convinced. Anyway, I certainly don't think that members of the other party are in any way epistemically special. They're a bunch of racist, invisible-man-worshipping, science-denying homophobes. They're morons, in other words.

**Emma:** You attribute to them the ability to bring about states of the world of which you disapprove while, at the same time, denying – or failing to fully appreciate – the role of spontaneity in society. These negative conditions cannot manifest spontaneously, on your way of thinking. They must be someone's *fault*. So, yes, you implicitly attribute to politicians of the rival party knowledge of relevant causal mechanisms adequate to realize states of the world that you would prefer to avoid. Consciously or not, you treat them like they're evil geniuses. In your mind, the opposing party is full of Ernst Blofelds.

**Connor:** Ernst Blofeld?

**Andre:** James Bond's archnemesis...

**Connor:** Oh.

**Emma:** My main point, which I've been trying to get to this whole time, is that it should never be just automatically assumed that policymakers are knowledgeable and capable enough to realize *anything*. There are ends with respect to which they are to some degree ignorant of the required causal knowledge. It is always an open question whether policymakers possess the knowledge required to realize some end without exacerbating social problems or whether, and to what extent, this objective can be realized only if spontaneous forces compensate for the effects of their ignorance. Yet, it seems that many, if not most, people make exactly this unjustified assumption about policymakers. But, people, including policymakers, are never all-knowing and all-powerful, a fact not modified by membership in a particular political party. In short, advocating for a policy assumes, usually without an explicit argument or empirical evidence, a positive answer to the open question regarding the adequacy of policymakers' knowledge for

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

realization of the relevant goal. Connor's Rousseauian political philosophy, for example, implies that policymakers know of what the common good consists and, relying ostensibly on scientific input, how to realize goals associated with it. This is a very dubious assumption.

**Jack:** Ha! In your face, Connor!

**Emma:** However! Zippy's Humean assumption, to wit—

**Jack:** —“To wit”?! What century is this?

**Emma:** Yeah, “to wit,” you twit. I'm an aspiring philosopher. Pretentiousness is my mother tongue.

**Connor:** The first of the twelve steps is admitting that you have a problem.

**Emma:** Shut it! Where was I?

**Jack:** To wit...

**Emma:** Right. To wit! The Zipster's Humean assumption that policymakers are always knaves unswervingly focused on their own personal satisfaction, strikes me as dubious for similar reasons.

**Connor:** In *your* face, Wonderboy!

**Emma:** He's a Wonderdork. Get it straight.

**Connor:** Sorry. In your face, Wonderdork!

**Jack:** OK, Em. Whattaya got?

**Emma:** I'll get to it. I need to clarify a few things first.

**Jack:** I can't wait.

**Emma:** What do you, or what did Hume, mean by “knaves”? To say that policymakers should be conceived as knaves sounds like they should be treated as, not merely *self-interested*, but as *selfish*. The difference is that self-interested policymakers might think their interests lie in promoting the interests of their constituents, but selfish policymakers, on the other hand, would always seek to maximize their own personal wealth and power. Which is the Humean committed to?

**Jack:** Selfishness. Policymakers always act to ensure that they get their own, regardless of what constituents demand.



## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** OK. But, in order for this assumption to have any explanatory force, it must be further assumed that policymakers are knowledgeable about their own selfish interests and how to realize goals associated with them. Otherwise, the assumption that policymakers are knaves can explain neither their decisions nor the consequences of these decisions. In other words, if you answer, in response to the question, “Why did policymakers choose policy *P* and why did *P* fail to manifest altruistic, constituent-minded, results,” that “Policymakers chose *P* because they are selfish knaves, who always selfishly choose policies that will lead to results that promote their selfish interests,” then you are implicitly assuming that the relevant policymakers knew what their selfish interests consisted of and that *P* would lead to results that promoted these interests. Aren’t the Rousseauian and the Humean making the same mistake of attributing knowledge to policymakers that they may not possess? Just as there may be cases where the Rousseauian assumption is false, can’t there be cases where the Humean assumption is false? What if policymakers don’t know where their selfish interests lie? Or, what if they know their selfish interests, but don’t know which policies will promote them? What if they don’t know how to be selfish *effectively*? I mean, think about the present case. According to you, in cutting the humanities budget and expanding funding for STEM, the University Administration is acting in the selfish interests of the Administrators themselves. But, what if the Administration’s decision to re-orient the budget away from the humanities leads to something like a revolt among humanities students or, more likely, what if the decision is eventually perceived by the Board of Trustees to have undermined the University’s mission and leads to successful calls for the Administration’s removal? If the social outcomes that we get are determined by policymakers’ pursuit of their own selfish interests, then how can the Humean explain cases where policy action fails to promote or even undermines policymakers’ interests? It seems plain to me that the Humean cannot explain such cases. If the Rousseauian is wrong to attribute knowledge adequate to promote the general will to policymakers that they may not possess, why is it not wrong for the Humean to attribute knowledge of their own selfish interests to policymakers that they may not possess? Isn’t the Humean illicitly assuming something like the infallibility of knowledge of one’s own mental states?

**Jack:** Surely, one is necessarily more fallible about the common good than about one’s own mental states.

**Emma:** “Necessarily” seems too strong, but, as a practical matter, yes, perhaps we tend to know our own mental states better than we know other persons’ mental states, much less the general will. But, consider another, perhaps more perverse, problem: what if the broader University community comes to accept and agree with the Administration’s budgetary decisions? How can the Humean, who thinks that policymakers always and only act in their own interests and never for the general good, explain *this* outcome? The only way, it seems to me, would be to say that the University community shares the interests of a bunch of selfish knaves, the Administrators. This strikes me as an ugly conclusion that you should try to avoid.

**Jack:** The problem with Connor’s view is not just that he conceives of policymakers as knowledgeable about and capable of realizing goals associated with the general good, he also believes that policymakers are well-intentioned with regard to the general good, and he infers from these premises – and possibly other normative assumptions, such as that policymakers ought to act on their good intentions; I don’t mean to accuse Connor of drawing an *ought* from

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

an *is* – that policymakers ought to act on their policy analyses. The problematic assumption here has nothing to do with epistemics, but with the preposterous notion that policymakers are well-intentioned with regard to the general good, a premise that, it should be noted again, he does not accord to *all* policymakers. It is this premise that leaves Connor in his current quandary, ostensibly committed to policies he actually abhors.

**Emma:** I'm not so sure that Connor's commitment to these policies can be so neatly separated from the dubious assumption that policymakers are adequately knowledgeable and capable to realize goals associated with the general good. Indeed, it seems to me that this assumption carries the weight of the commitment. I think it is likely that, if we could convince Connor of the falsity of this assumption, either in this or in some other case, if we could persuade him that policymakers are not epistemically equipped to realize goals associated with the general good, he would reject the relevant policy, *even if he remained convinced that policymakers are properly morally oriented with respect to the general good.*

**Jack** [laughing]: Well, we don't need to put words in his mouth. He is standing right here...

**Emma:** Connie, if we could convince you that the theories or the data that informed the Administration's decisions in the present case were inadequate to the task to which they were applied, would you remain committed to the policies?

**Connor:** I hate the policies! I don't consider myself committed to them! But, Jack keeps saying I am implicitly obliged to approve of them.

**Jack:** You *are* committed to them in virtue of your claims regarding the criteria of good policymaking. I merely pointed out that these criteria are not consistent with your rejection of the Administration's recent policy decisions.

**Connor:** Whatever. If what you're asking, Emma, is whether I would support a policy that I had reason to believe policymakers were too ignorant to make effective, I don't know. Maybe, maybe not. It would depend on the other policy objectives available and the conditions of policymakers' ignorance with respect to these.

**Emma:** Very good, yes. But, more than this, presumably, your support of a policy would also depend on your appraisal of circumstances beyond policymakers' ken – the aforementioned spontaneous forces – no?

**Connor:** Maybe. In any case, I would not support a policy that I believed policymakers were too ignorant to do anything but bungle, a policy likely, because of policymaker ignorance, to exacerbate circumstances that I care about.

**Emma:** Right. In effect, the "ought" claim to which you would otherwise be committed in virtue of your other commitments would evaporate, if you could be convinced to reject the assumption about the adequacy of policymakers' knowledge. On the other hand, even if we convinced you that policymakers were not rightly oriented with respect to the general good, you need not give up support for some policy, provided that *you* evaluated it as a tool to advance the general good,

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

isn't that right? You might remain morally committed to the wisdom of a policy relative to the general will, even if politicians were not.

**Connor:** Yes, I think so.

**Emma:** See, Zippy, in order to get out of the quandary that you claim Connie is in, he should give up the assumption concerning the adequacy of policymaker knowledge. The moral-probity assumption does little work in the end. If they accord with his moral perspective, Connor will support policies with regard to which he appraises policymaker knowledge to be adequate and not support – or, more exactly, not *automatically* support – policies with regard to which he appraises this condition to not obtain. In short, we have isolated the problem with Connor's conception of policymakers. The remaining question, however, is whether we have identified what seems to me the central problem with the Humean conception of policymakers.

**Jack:** Have at it.

**Emma:** There seem to be three problems, at least, with your conception of policymakers as selfish. First, as I have already noted, it is explanatorily inadequate: it starts from the implicit assumption that policymakers are infallible about both their selfish interests and the various policy maneuvers that will promote those interests, and any model that incorporates this conception of policymakers will systematically fail to explain outcomes not in their selfish interests. If policymakers act on their selfish interests, know both these interests and how to realize goals that promote them, how do we explain cases where their decisions lead to consequences *not* in their selfish interests, such as the possibility I mentioned earlier that the University's administrators will come to regret their present decisions? Simply put: we can't.

**Jack:** It wouldn't help matters – would it? – to go back on what I said earlier and claim now that *self-interest* rather than *selfishness* motivates policymakers. The implicit assumption would then be infallible knowledge of one's self-interest rather than infallible knowledge of one's selfish interests...and the explanatory problems would remain.

**Emma:** That's right.

**Jack:** OK. Let me modify what I said earlier in a different way. It is not their selfish interests *per se*, but their subjective *perceptions* of their selfish interests that motivate policymakers. They might be wrong about their interests, but, surely, they cannot be wrong about their perceived interests. We could then explain the present case, even if it ultimately goes wrong for the Administrators in the end, in terms of how they misperceived their interests.

**Emma:** But, you're still making the tacit – and I would argue, illegitimate – assumption that they automatically know how to realize goals that promote their interests, as they perceive – possibly misperceive – these to be. In other words, assuming the new policy goes awry for the Administration, in the way I suggest it might, the explanation could be either that they misperceived their interests or that they misperceived the policies that would promote their perceived interests.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Jack:** Right. So, to the assumption that policymakers act on their selfish interests as they perceive them, I need to add that they choose policies that they perceive, perhaps mistakenly, as means to the end of promoting their selfish interests...as they perceive them.

**Emma:** You could do that, but I don't think it would improve your position. It is not much better as a starting point for political analysis. Unless we could get some purchase on the relevant perceptions, empirical analysis of political decision-making would seem to be impossible. We would assume that policymakers act on their perceptions, but we would know little or nothing about these perceptions. We might be able to generate a sort of pure logic of political choice, but we could never draw empirical predictions from such an underspecified conjunction of theory and data. Without the relevant data about policymakers' perceptions of their selfish interests, such a pure logic would be of only limited value for empirical purposes, for explanation and prediction. In the absence of these data, a conception of policymakers as acting on their perceptions becomes almost a tautology: policymakers do what policymakers do...for reasons we do not really understand.

**Jack:** Yeah, I see that.

**Emma:** But, more than this, whether we assume it is their *interests* or their *perceived interests* that motivate policymakers, we will be unable to adequately explain a – presumably, non-empty – class of political decisions, namely, truly constituent-minded decisions. Given Hume's maxim as a starting point for political analysis, the only explanation that can be offered of a constituent-minded political decision is that the interests of constituents must have aligned with the interests or the perceived interests of a bunch of greedy knaves. This is like the example in which the broader University community comes to agree with the Administration's decision to favor business and STEM programs at the expense of the humanities: the only possible explanation – on the Humean conception – is that the interests of the members of this community must have aligned with the interests or perceived interests of the knavish Administrators. Whereas Connor and his Rousseauian assumption confront a problem similar to the traditional problem of evil – he cannot explain any failures on the part of knowledgeable altruistic policymakers to achieve results in the public interest – you and your Humean assumption confront a problem that we might call the “problem of benevolence”: you cannot account for any policy decisions that ultimately lead to results which accord with the public interest, except to damn the public as sharing the interests of knaves.

**Jack:** Fair enough. I see the problem.

**Emma:** This actually leads me to my second criticism of the Humean conception of policymakers: for all of the reasons I gave against Connor and more, how can it possibly fit with your own advocacy of particular political programs and policies?

**Jack** [laughing]: What do you mean? I'm a libertarian! Surely it is consistent with libertarianism to take a dim view of policymakers' motivations!

**Emma:** Do you advocate for liberal society, generally, and liberalizing policies, in particular, because you take these to be in citizens' interests or because you take them to be in

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

policy-makers' interests?

**Jack:** In citizens' interests.

**Emma:** Are they also in policy-makers' interests? Or do policy-makers perceive such policies to be in their own interests?

**Jack:** Probably not. Or, at least, probably not *generally* in their own interests.

**Emma:** Then in order to convince policy-makers – as knavish as you conceive them to be – to pursue liberalism, generally, and liberalization policies, in particular, you could not appeal to their good natures, their feeling for their fellow citizens, or their moral probity. You would need to convince them that liberalism and liberalization were in their own interests. Do you plan to bribe them? What set of incentives might you present them with that would convince them of the selfish or self-interested wisdom of liberalizing? Without some such system of incentives to turn self-interested policy-makers toward what you take to be best for citizens, you're effectively in the awkward position of advocating for things that you have little reason to think policy-makers will ever actually pursue. A policy-maker who would turn against his own interests, as he perceives them, to do something "good" for the people, like liberalize society, is a unicorn on your account. Unless you and your fellow libertarians can somehow convince policy-makers that liberalization is in their own interests – or otherwise incentivize them to act *as if* liberalization is in their interests – you have no reason to believe liberalism or liberalization will ever be pursued in this world.

**Jack:** Yeah, OK. It's a problem, admittedly.

**Emma:** Oh, but the problems don't end there, my Zipperrific friend. Recall what I said before – which you assented to – about what advocacy of a policy implies about its realizability. Do you believe policy-makers possess all of the knowledge necessary to liberalize effectively, which is to say, to liberalize in such a way that all of the wonderful properties which you and your fellow libertarians attribute to a liberal society actually manifest?

**Jack:** How could they not? It's just a matter of breaking down existing barriers to freedom.

**Emma:** Breaking down barriers to freedom might be quite epistemically challenging. First, you must identify the relevant barriers. Second, you must remove them in such a way that the properties libertarians attribute to an expansion of freedom actually emerge in the post-reform environment without exacerbating other problems, without undermining other values, that libertarians also care about. I don't see why we should assume that policy-makers necessarily possess either kind of knowledge, much less both. Why think these barriers are necessarily easy to identify, much less breakdown in such a way that the posited effects will manifest post-breakdown? Indeed, I see many reasons why we should *not* make this assumption about the epistemic capacities of the would-be liberalizing policy-maker. The evidence we have gathered over the last twenty or so years from, oh, China, the Balkans, post-Soviet Russia, various Eastern European and sub-Saharan countries, not to mention Iraq and Afghanistan, suggests that

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

liberalization can proceed in *better* and *worse* ways. Policymakers can screw up even something as seemingly simple as breaking down existing barriers to freedom.

**Jack:** Libertarians know all about such issues.

**Emma:** Knowing about them and having a strategy to address them are two different things—

**Connor:** A strategy other than crying “more freedom!” at every possible turn.

**Emma:** Exactly. Crying “freedom” is little help when freedom – or, more exactly, it’s beneficial effects – are hard to come by.

**Jack:** I suppose you’re not wrong.

**Emma:** Just as it is an open question whether policymakers possess the knowledge required to deliberately realize the goals of a progressive interventionist / borderline socialist / secret Nazi, like our friend Connor here, it is an open question whether they are epistemically equipped to deliberately realize a perfected liberal society, such as you cream over in your sleep, or even to liberalize *this* society. And, just as Connie assumed – illegitimately, as you correctly pointed out – an affirmative answer to the first open question, so you have no-less-illegitimately assumed a positive answer to the second open question.

**Jack:** Well, in any case, I wasn’t really meaning to advance a robust conception of the policymaker perfect for all explanatory purposes. I was just trying to irritate Connor by calling him a Nazi.

**Emma:** Oh, so this whole conversation has just been an exercise in you being a prickish troll?!

**Jack:** Yeah, pretty much

**Emma:** How do you feel about that, Connor?

**Connor:** It’s par for the course in our crowd. Anyway, I suppose I’ve given Zippy as good in the past as he just gave me. I’ve been known to act the troll merely for the fun of it.

**Emma:** Yes, but Jack does it so well. You really have to wonder whether he’s acting. That’s why he’s Zippy the Wonderdork.

**Connor:** True.

**Jack:** Screw you both.

**Connor** [laughs]: In any case, I think it’s an interesting question. “How should we conceive of policymakers for the purposes of political analysis?” That is essentially what we’ve been talking about, right?

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma** [smiling]: Yes, I do believe that is the question that has been on the table—a question I’m quite sure we won’t settle tonight. Anyway, I’m bored with this conversation. And I’m thirsty... [walks away from the group]

### **Book Six: For Further Reading**

#### ***On the Conception of Policymakers as Selfish (or Self-Interested)***

Niccolo Machiavelli – *The Prince*, David Wootton (trans.) ([1532] 1995), Hackett

Thomas Hobbes – *Leviathan*, Edwin Curley (ed.) ([1668] 1994), Hackett

Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu – *The Spirit of Laws* ([1748] 1989), Cambridge University Press

David Hume – “Of the Independency of Parliament” ([1741, 1747] 1994), in *Hume: Political Essays*, Cambridge University Press

Jeremy Bentham – *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* ([1780] 1823), Clarendon Press

Publius (Collective pseudonym of Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay) – *The Federalist Papers* ([1787-1788] 2012), Penguin

James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock – *The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy* ([1962] 1999), in *The Collected Works of James M. Buchanan, Volume 3*, Liberty Fund

James M. Buchanan – “Public Choice: Politics Without Romance” (2003), *Policy: The Quarterly Review of The Centre for Independent Studies*, Spring 2003

Geoffrey Brennan and James M. Buchanan – *The Reason of Rules: Constitutional Political Economy* ([1985] 2000), in *The Collected Works of James M. Buchanan, Volume 10*, Liberty Fund

Mark Pennington – *Robust Political Economy: Classical Liberalism and the Future of Public Policy* (2011), Edward Elgar

### **Book Six: Discussion Questions**

1. What knowledge does the “Rousseauian” assumption implicitly attribute to policymakers? What knowledge does the “Humean” assumption implicitly attribute to policymakers? Why is each of these assumptions doubtful? Why is each of these assumptions *methodologically* problematic, i.e., what does each assumption fail to explain?
2. Discuss the difference between *self-interestedness* and *selfishness*. What are the different implications if policymakers are self-interested rather than selfish (and *vice versa*)?
3. Consider and discuss the tension between the libertarians’ preference for liberalism and liberalization policies, and their tendency to conceive of policymakers as self-interested, if not selfish.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

4. Consider and discuss some of the difficulties that policymakers confront in acquiring the knowledge required to liberalize society effectively. How have these difficulties manifested in particular historical contexts, e.g., in post-Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe, Afghanistan, and Iraq?

### **Book Seven**

**Book Seven Synopsis:** Several weeks have passed since the first part of the dialogue. The discussion proceeds to a positive defense of the conception of policymakers as ignorant. The main question addressed in Book Seven concerns the criteria that a plausible conception of policymakers should satisfy, if it is to function effectively in explanations of both policy decisions and their results. The characters determine that their goal is to discover the simplest conception of policymakers that most plausibly reflects aspects of their intellectual characteristics significant for explaining their decisions and the consequences of their decisions.

[Late October 2009. It is a month since the start of the Fall semester. The Administration has just announced its further plans for the re-organization of the University. The graduate students are drinking at a local pub. Andre is recalling the meeting where the changes were announced to University staff, which he attended in his role as Academic Advisor to undergraduate philosophy students.]

**Andre:** The meeting began with the same self-congratulations with which everything begins with this Administration. Applications to the University are up so-and-so percentage over last year. More grant money is coming in. Enrollment is up. Student retention is up. Everything is up, up, up, except for educational standards, which are, apparently, down, down, way down [laughs].

**Connor** [laughing]: None of that is surprising. It's gotta be pretty easy to expand enrollment when the University has given up on enforcing admission criteria.

**Andre:** Right?! Anyway, the big news is that the Philosophy Department will lose its autonomous status next year.

**Connor:** What does that mean? They're instituting a full-on dictatorship?

**Jack:** They haven't already?

**Andre:** It means that departments are going away as an element of the University's organizational structure.

**Emma:** To be replaced with?

**Andre:** To be replaced with "units" [makes quotation marks in the air].

**Emma:** Isn't "unit" [makes quotation marks in the air] a slang term for dick?

**Andre:** Umm, yes. Yes, it is. Each "unit" [makes quotation marks in the air] will be combined with other "units" into another new entity called—



*Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** Wait, let me guess. A “package”? A “bulge”?

**Andre** [laughs]: No. Depending on their size, they’ll be called “Colleges” [makes quotation marks in the air], “Schools,” or “Centers.”

**Emma:** Well, “Center” [makes quotation marks in the air] is a little bit phallic, at least. Or maybe it’s vaginal. Definitely pudendal, in any case.

**Jack:** Especially if you think about inserting your unit into a center or – wait, even better – if you consider conjoining your unit with other units in a center!

**Emma** [laughs]: Well done, Jack! I knew we were gonna get screwed, but...let me count the ways!!

**Connor:** So, what will be the fate of the Philosophy Department, pray tell? What erstwhile departments will be our partners in this profane *menage*?

**Andre:** Uhhh, they didn’t say.

**Emma:** They didn’t say?

**Andre:** Yeah, they’re keeping it a secret. Either they haven’t decided yet or there’s some other reason they want to keep it on the QT. They’ve promised to announce it by the end of the semester.

**Jack** [exhales]: Wow...well, keep us informed. What a mess!

**Andre:** Yeah, I will. I know.

**Connor:** Emma, this reminds me of something I’ve been meaning to bring up with you.

**Emma:** I didn’t do it! I swear. Whatever it is, Andre made me do it [pointing at Andre].

**Andre:** Hey! You’re always throwing me under the bus...

**Emma:** He’s lying! He actually forced me to lay under a bus the other day...

**Andre** [laughing]: Oh god...

**Connor** [laughing]: No, it’s nothing bad.

**Andre:** The bus wasn’t moving. What’s the big deal?

**Emma** [laughs]: What is it, Connie?

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Connor:** Remember when we were arguing about politics at Andre’s party a few weeks ago?

**Emma:** I remember Andre’s party. I remember drinking a lot...and I remember...[makes quotation marks in the air] “Zippy the Wonderdork”!

**Jack:** Oh my god...

**Connor:** Yes! That’s the conversation I mean.

**Emma:** Whatever happened to that? We all agreed to refer to Jack exclusively by his new nickname, but I haven’t heard it since then.

**Connor** [a bit sheepishly]: Well, it’s easier to refer to him as “Zippy the Wonderdork” when we’re drinking on Andre’s patio than it is, I don’t know, in the seminar room within earshot of faculty members.

**Jack:** I appreciate your consideration...

**Emma:** Are you kidding? That’s the *best* time to use it. You should maximize Zippy’s embarrassment...both quantitatively and qualitatively.

**Connor:** Alright. I’ll try harder to use it, especially in uniquely embarrassing circumstances.

**Jack:** Come on, man.

**Emma:** That’s all I ask. Anyway, what did you want to ask me about Zippy the Wonderdork?

**Connor:** No, my question’s not about Zippy.

**Emma:** Oh, damn. I was looking for new opportunities to insult Jackie boy.

**Connor:** Well, by all means, don’t let me stop you, but—

**Jack** [sighs]: I’m sitting right here.

**Emma:** Would you rather I insult you behind your back?

**Connor** [smiles]: But, I wanted to ask you about something else...

**Emma:** Shoot!

**Connor:** If you recall, you were arguing that night that political inquiry should start from neither an assumption that politicians are especially altruistic and concerned with the general welfare of society, nor the assumption that they’re selfish and uniquely concerned with improving their own welfare, but then—

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** I did? I don't remember that. Politicians seem pretty selfish to me.

**Jack:** Yes, I win! Finally!!

**Emma:** Wait, that means Zippy wins? We can't have that. What are my alternatives?

**Connor:** That's actually what I wanted to ask: if you reject both of those assumptions, what is left? Where should political analysis begin, if not with one of those assumptions? You argued against me as a defender of the public-interest or "Rousseauian" view, as you called it, and then against Jack—er, Zippy—and the self-interest or "Humean" view, but then you left us hanging, without any idea where you think political analysis should begin, if not with one of those options.

**Jack:** Yeah, it was a real ruined orgasm, as I recall.

**Emma:** Gross. I don't want to think about your orgasms, completed or not.

**Connor:** You really don't remember what you were arguing that night?

**Emma:** Eh, vaguely. It's coming back to me. I smoke a lot of pot. You shouldn't expect too much by way of memory from me.

**Connor:** What we were discussing that night, what I'm asking is, if not as self-interested and if not as public-interested, how should we conceive of politicians for the purposes of explaining and predicting their decisions, and the consequences of those decisions?

**Emma:** Well, I could say, flippantly, that we should conceive of policymakers as they actually are, as far as possible, that our conception of politicians should be *realistic*. But, maybe realisticness is too much to ask. Our conception should at least be *plausible*.

**Jack:** And the notion that politicians are selfish or at least self-interested is implausible, not realistic enough, for you? You just got done saying that politicians seem selfish!

**Emma:** I don't know.

**Jack:** You don't know whether you said that?

**Emma:** No, I mean, I don't really know whether politicians are selfish or not. The degree to which someone is driven by personal rather than altruistic motives is not empirically discoverable. I can't evaluate the plausibility of the assumption or, for that matter, of its negation. I can't look inside a person's head to discover the nature of their motives, whether selfish or altruistic. If you ask me how it *seems* that politicians act, I will say, as I just did, that they seem to act more selfishly than altruistically. But, mere appearances, how things seem, are inadequate in the present context. Given the ever-present potential for unintended consequences, I cannot infer the quality of a person's intentions from the quality of the results of their actions.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

The road to hell is indeed paved with good intentions, as the road to heaven is occasionally paved with evil or, at least, morally neutral, intentions. What's more, if memory serves, you noted yourself, Zippy, when arguing against Connor that same night, how dubious it is to think that the truth of these assumptions varies with party membership. There is no reason to think that the Rousseauian assumption is false and the Humean assumption true for one political party, and the Humean assumption false and the Rousseauian assumption true for the other. There's no reason to think that all the humanitarians congregate in one party and all the knaves in the other.

**Jack:** The testability stuff would seem to be a problem for Connor's view, but not for mine. He fetishizes falsifiability. I don't.

**Emma:** It's not necessary to fetishize falsifiability, or to consider it a necessary and sufficient condition for science, to think it better than not for a theory to be grounded on empirical, to-some-degree testable, assumptions...keeping in mind, of course, the standard difficulties with testing any proposition in isolation that we associate with the names Duhem and Quine.

**Jack:** Fair enough. I would rather build my political theory on testable assumptions, yes.

**Emma:** I think that may well be possible. We'll see. But, we may not need testability as such. It will be enough, I think, if our conception of politicians is such that everyone – or most everyone – accepts it or, an even weaker condition, if most everyone agrees that it plausibly reflects aspects of policymakers' mental characteristics that are relevant to the causes and effects of policy decisions. This requirement is clearly not satisfied in analyses built on the Rousseauian and Humean assumptions, right? There is considerable disagreement – like between the two of you [gesturing at Connor and Jack] – as to whether it is more plausible that political decisions are motivated by policymakers' concern for themselves or for others, correct?

**Connor:** Correct.

**Emma:** Before I get too deep into this, before I rest my neck in the guillotine, by suggesting what I think might be the proper – or, at least, a more promising – starting point for political analysis, we should clarify our terms. We should do a bit of methodology.

**Jack:** Aren't we doing methodology already? What is the question, "How should we conceive of politicians for the purposes of political analysis?" if not a methodological question?

**Emma:** No, true. You're right, Skippy. We need to do some *meta*-methodology, some methodology of methodology, if you will.

**Jack:** Zippy.

**Emma:** Huh?

**Jack:** Zippy, not Skippy. You called me "Skippy" just now. I'm *Zippy*.

**Emma** [smiling]: I know, I was just testing you. I'm glad to see that you're embracing it.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Jack:** Jesus Chr—

**Emma** [interrupting]: So! What do we mean by political “inquiry”? What kind of inquiry are we talking about?

**Connor:** What do you mean? Inquiry into, or analysis of, the causes and effects of political decision-making. What other kind of political inquiry is there?

**Emma:** Right, but I mean, who’s doing the analyzing? There seem to be at least two kinds of political analysis: formal analysis, such as political scientists, political philosophers, and political theorists do, and informal political analysis, such as the media and constituents do. Which kind of political analysis are we talking about here?

**Connor:** The formal kind, I would think.

**Jack:** I don’t see why it should matter, frankly. Shouldn’t we want one conception that is appropriate in both formal and informal contexts? It seems unparsimonious to conceive of policymakers one way in one context and a different way in another context. In keeping with Occam’s Razor, we should want the fewest conceptions suitable for the totality of our purposes – conceptions of policymakers should not be multiplied beyond necessity – and if a single conception will suffice for our purposes in both formal and informal settings, that would seem all to the good.

**Emma:** Yes. Good, Zippy.

**Jack:** But, there’s also a certain psychological implausibility to the notion that policymakers should or could be conceived differently in formal and informal contexts. At least in democratic settings, every formal analyst – every political scientist, theorist, or philosopher – is also a potential voter. That distinct conceptions of policymakers might operate in different contexts implies that political scientists, theorists, and philosophers should – or could – switch their mental conceptions of policymakers depending on the prevailing analytical context, which seems psychologically challenging, to say the least.

**Emma:** Very *good*, Jack.

**Connor:** Isn’t it really a question, though, whether the conceptions of politicians employed in formal and informal contexts are conducive to the analytical goals of inquirers in those contexts? If the purposes of constituents are not well served by the conception of policymakers employed in formal analyses, there would seem to be few grounds to insist that constituents adopt the formal conception. And *vice versa*: If the purposes of formal analysis are not well served by the conception of policymakers that constituents use, there would seem to be little reason to insist that the formalists adopt the layman’s conception of policymakers.

**Jack:** But, for the reasons I just mentioned – and possibly others – it seems likely that the purposes of formal analysis are closely connected with those of informal analysis. The latter

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

seems to be mainly directed at the realization of constituents' interests, preferences, goals, *et cetera*. That is, constituents analyze policymakers in order to determine whether, to what extent, and why or why not, the policy objectives constituents personally value are pursued or not, and, if pursued, why these objectives are either realized or not. To the extent that formal analysts are also constituents, this same concern seems likely to motivate professional political thinkers, as well. At least, there's no obvious reason why the latter should lose their interest in the worries of constituents when they enter the realm of formal analysis.

**Emma:** Are we prepared, then, to say that both kinds of political analysis, formal and informal, including analyses offered by the media and pundits, should conceive of policymakers in the same way? We would need some independent reason to think there are benefits to treating policymakers differently for the purposes of formal and informal analysis.

**Connor:** What about this for an independent reason? Generally speaking, professional political analysts know more about politicians and, thus, are better able to conceive of them more realistically than are amateur analysts. Professional political thinkers are experts about politicians and, thus, their expert conceptions of policymakers should carry more weight than those of non-experts.

**Emma:** Beg the question much? That's not an independent reason. Its significance depends on the truth of the contention that professional political analysts are really uniquely knowledgeable about politicians, a contention you've asserted, but not argued for. The issue at hand is how we ought to conceive of politicians for the purposes of political analysis. Your answer affirms without evidence or justification that an existing conception – that of professional analysts – is sufficient.

**Jack:** Plus, even if professional analysts were uniquely knowledgeable about policymakers and even if there were agreement among formal political analysts about the proper way to conceive of policymakers, it might be a reason to convince amateur political analysts – constituents and media pundits – to adopt the professionals' superior conception, but it wouldn't license two distinct conceptions, one for the pros and another for laypersons. We would still want one conception of policymakers, not two.

**Connor:** Why are you including the media in the amateur class rather than the professional class? Some journalists spend their whole careers thinking about politics. Most of the political analyses we hear come from the media, not from academic political scientists or economists.

**Emma:** God help us! What do you mean when you say that journalists "think about politics"? Do you mean that they think about whatever flatulence happens to be emitted from Washington, London, Moscow, or Brussels in any given week? Yeah, members of the media think about day-to-day political events, but they don't think *deeply* about political decision-making, its causes and effects. I assume that part of what distinguishes formal from informal political analysis is the comparative perspicacity and rigor of the first relative to the second, and, moreover, that no one can seriously believe that journalists generally analyze political affairs in an especially rigorous or astute fashion.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Jack:** They typically don't bother to follow up the consequences of political decisions, except perhaps in the most simplistic way. *Post hoc ergo propter hoc* is the typical inference that journalists make about political causation. They see something happen and attribute it to the nearest politician.

**Emma:** True enough, Zip. I include the media in the amateur class, Connie, because the vast majority of journalists have nothing more advanced than a bachelor's degree in journalism and, more to the point, little intellectual ability to think beyond the narrow confines of their education. Journalism, like teaching, is one of those careers that people occasionally fall into because they have no other skills or interests. Those who can, do, those who can't, sometimes write about people who can.

**Jack** [laughs]: That's funny.

**Emma:** Do you have any idea what students are taught in journalism classes, Connie? They learn about the "Five Ws." You remember the Five Ws from elementary school – "Who?" "Whaah?" "When?" "Why?" and "Where?" – and they learn about, I don't know, the Internet, the threat the Internet poses to newspapers, who knows? Do you know what they don't learn much about? They don't learn much about history, except, maybe, the history of journalism. They're not taught the history of politics. They don't learn military history, intellectual history, or the history of science. Indeed, beyond the most basic introductory science courses that every college student must take, they don't learn anything about science, except that it's something that really smart people do. They aren't required to learn economics. As a glance at the logical fallacies that tend to pass for cogent arguments on a newspaper's opinion page reveals, they aren't required to take philosophy courses. They don't understand the need for trade-offs in a morally complex and ambiguous world. For that matter, they don't learn how a business operates, how market competition works, what is involved in having to meet expenses while producing for profit, or the duties that come along with employing people. If the public ever stopped to think seriously about how ignorant members of the media tend to be relative to the intellectual requirements of their professional duty to inform the public, they'd stop paying attention to journalists.

**Connor:** It sounds like you've taught some journalism students [smiles]...

**Emma** [laughs]: Ha! Yes, I have. In order to count as a professional political analyst, to my mind, you have to at least be reasonably knowledgeable about logical arguments, philosophy, the sciences, social and natural, and about world history. I might add that you should be well-read, in general, and capable of writing proper sentences, with subjects and predicates, and everything. Many, I'd say most, journalists fail to meet some of these criteria. But, by all means, any journalists who happen to satisfy these conditions are welcome to join the vaunted category of professional political analysts.

**Connor:** Fair enough. I'm not going to fight you on a point that you seem strangely passionate about. I mean, you really dislike a lot of people, don't you? [laughs] Not only that, but you seem to have oddly specific reasons that you have really...uh, considered, put some thought into.

**Emma** [laughs]: Are you trying to imply that Andre's a saint?

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Andre:** For the record, I am a saint, but not necessarily because Emma is demanding. That fact just contributes to my saintliness on the margin.

**Emma** [laughs]: OK, so what's next? We know what we're looking for: the simplest plausible conception of policymakers upon which we can all agree. Or is it the most plausible simple conception? Maybe it doesn't matter. We are looking for a simple and plausible conception of policymakers that we can all agree reflects aspects of their mental make-up significant for explaining the causes and consequences of the policy decisions they make. Agreed?

**Connor:** Agreed.

**Jack:** Yeah, agreed.

**Andre** [smiling]: I obviously have no choice here. You guys have figured out who wears the pants...

**Emma** [laughs]: Oh, shut it, you ass.

**Andre:** See how she treats me?

### **Book Seven: For Further Reading**

#### *On Realism and Anti-Realism in Science*

Michael Liston – “Scientific Realism and Antirealism” (Undated), *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://iep.utm.edu/sci-real/>

#### *On Underdetermination of Theory by Evidence (i.e., Duhem-Quine Thesis)*

Pierre Duhem – *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, P. W. Wiener (trans.) ([1914] 1954), Princeton University Press

W. V. O. Quine – “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” in *From a Logical Point of View*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition. ([1951] 1961), Harper and Row.

Larry Laudan – “Demystifying Underdetermination,” in *Scientific Theories*, C. Wade Savage (ed.) (1990), 267-297, University of Minnesota Press.

#### *On Occam's Razor and Parsimony*

Roger Ariew – *Ockham's Razor: A Historical and Philosophical Analysis of Ockham's Principle of Parsimony* (1976), University of Illinois Press

Elliot Sober – *Ockham's Razors: A User Manual* (2015), Cambridge University Press

### **Book Seven: Discussion Questions**



## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

1. Why might we prefer a *realistic* – or, at least, a *plausible* – conception of policymakers? What are some of the potential problems with employing a less realistic, less plausible, conception of policymakers in our analyses of political decision-making?
2. A conception of policymakers might be realistic or plausible in respects not relevant to explaining their policy decisions. Consider some of these alternative plausible conceptions and their explanatory shortcomings. Why might we prefer a conception of policymakers that plausibly reflects their specifically *intellectual* characteristics?
3. Why does the potential for unintended consequences complicate the possibility of determining the moral quality of a person's intentions on the basis of the quality of the results of their actions?
4. In what, if any, respects is formal political analysis as defined in Book Seven different from informal political analysis? Do these differences justify using distinct conceptions of policymakers in the two kinds of analysis? Why might a single conception be preferable in both analytical contexts?
5. Are media pundits *generally* experts about political matters? What sorts of expertise might they possess and what kinds of expertise might they lack?
6. Consider the significance of the logical fallacy *post hoc ergo propter hoc* ("after this, therefore, because of this") for the manner in which the media reports on and assigns responsibility for many political (and related) events.

### **Book Eight**

**Book Eight Synopsis:** The elucidation of the posited conception of policymakers continues in Book Eight. The characters consider the appropriate definitions of *policy* and *policymaker*, and of *knowledge* and *ignorance*. The discussion leads to the conclusion that policymakers are a kind of *surrogate* decision-maker. The distinguishing mark of surrogate decision-makers is that they are distinct from the persons on whose behalf and in whose ostensible interests they decide. This means that they are more likely, other things equal, to be ignorant of either these interests or how to promote them than a person who decides on their own behalf and who tends to have better, if not infallible, knowledge of their own interests and how to promote them. The distinguishing mark of policymakers, in other words, is their tendency to be *ignorant* of some of the knowledge required to realize the tasks they are charged with realizing, in particular, goals that promote the interests of their constituents. Several arguments are given to prefer this conception to the traditional conceptions of policymakers. Unlike policymakers' motivations, the nature and extent of their knowledge can be investigated empirically. Furthermore, given the complementary relationship between the nature and extent of relevant policymaker ignorance regarding a particular goal and the need for the intervention of spontaneous forces, if the goal is to be realized despite this ignorance, these forces are likewise opened up to a degree of empirical inquiry. These arguments are then illustrated by way of plausible examples of policymaker ignorance.

**Emma** [smiling]: OK...so who are *policymakers*? Who do we include in this class and who do we exclude?

**Jack:** What do you mean? We include people who make policies and exclude people who don't.

**Emma:** Thanks, smart ass. No, actually, that's good, now that I think about it.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Jack:** I'm smarter than you give me credit fo—

**Emma:** No, you're not. Anyway, we should clarify what we mean by *policies* before we define who makes them. Or, rather, we might learn who policymakers are simply by defining policies first. Policymakers would then be the people involved in making policies, whatever these are.

**Connor:** A policy seems to be a *plan* or a *program*, a set of *rules* or *directives*.

**Emma:** True, but I think the defining aspect of a policy, the feature that distinguishes policies from other sets of rules, is a particular *expectation* that attaches to policies, namely, the expectation that the rules or directives be *followed*, or *adhered to*, by some persons. The persons expected to follow policies, let's call *constituents*, and the persons who make the policies that constituents are expected to follow are our policymakers. This doesn't get us very far, obviously.

**Connor:** Doesn't that imply that policymakers can also be constituents? If policymakers make policies that they are expected to follow themselves, doesn't this place them in both categories?

**Emma:** Yeah, but that might be OK. It works the other way, too. In democratic and republican systems of government, constituents are, in some way, directly or indirectly, involved in the policymaking process and, so, fall into both categories. Indeed, in a direct democracy, every constituent with rights of political participation is also a policymaker. But, I see no reason to assume *a priori* that the relevant classes must be mutually disjoint in order to arrive at a conception of politicians appropriate for political inquiry. It is hard to think of a historical government that featured entirely disjoint classes of policymakers and constituents, that is, where all policymakers were exempt from their self-made policies and no constituents were involved in making policy. Indeed, the more significant fact about the two classes might not be that they're typically not mutually disjoint, but that they're never identical; that policymakers always make policies for a class of constituents which, whether or not it includes the policymakers themselves, necessarily includes non-policymakers, people who are *merely* constituents, people who are expected to follow policies, but who play no part in their making.

**Jack:** That seems right. The only exception I can think of occurs in instances of *personal* policies, when a person sets a rule for themselves and only for themselves. Actually, I guess the same thing happens when a group sets a policy meant to apply only to its own members, provided that every member of the group is involved in making the relevant policy. But, I suppose, for our purposes, we can ignore such policies.

**Emma:** Right. I think so, too. Every other instance of policymaking – or, more exactly, the only kind of policymaking we are really interested in – involves some persons, policymakers, making policies for another group of persons, constituents, that, whether it encompasses the policymakers, necessarily includes other persons, *mere* constituents, who are not policymakers. Even in a direct democracy, unless every person has a right of political participation, policymakers make policies for some persons who don't have such rights, for example, infants and children, the mentally challenged, prisoners, non-citizen residents...

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Connor:** So, you're suggesting that the defining feature of policymakers is that they set rules or directives that other persons are expected to follow. The policymakers might be expected to follow these rules themselves, but, whether or not the policymakers are expected to follow the rules, there are some among the constituents expected to follow the rules who are not also policymakers. That sounds right to me, but doesn't that mean that a policymaker is just a kind of *surrogate* decision-maker? How do we distinguish policymakers from other kinds of surrogates?

**Emma:** That's a good question. I have to think about it.

**Jack:** I don't see why we need to distinguish policymakers from other surrogates. I think it's probably right to say that policymakers are surrogate decision-makers and that whatever is true about the mental characteristics of surrogates is equally true of the mental characteristics of policymakers *qua* policymakers. It actually might help to answer our main question to consider decision-making in surrogate contexts.

**Emma:** Very good, Jackie. I might also add – drawing the parallel with surrogate decision-making even closer – that most, perhaps all, policies are not only expected to be followed, but to be followed *ostensibly in some persons' interests*. It is never the case that one is expected to follow or adhere to a policy just for the sake, or for the fun, of it. Policies always have ostensible, purported, alleged, claimed, beneficiaries. Of course, in modern governments – hell, maybe in all governments, ever – the constituents themselves are the supposed beneficiaries of policymaking. At least, policymakers *claim* to make policy exclusively in their constituents' interests. More to the point, there is a universal expectation that policymakers *ought* to make policy in their constituents' interests, just as surrogates are always expected to decide in the interests of the persons on whose behalf they make choices.

**Connor:** OK, so a policymaker is a kind of surrogate decision-maker, who sets rules and directives that some other persons, namely, constituents, are expected to follow, ostensibly in their own, that is, in the constituents' own, interests, whether or not following these rules is *in fact* in their interests. Is that right?

**Emma:** Yeah, I think so.

**Jack:** What is the *scope* of policymaking, so defined?

**Emma:** What do you mean, Zip?

**Jack:** I mean, you've been talking about policymakers as people “involved in the policymaking process,” which means that constituents in democratic systems are also policymakers. But, what about all of the people involved in the policymaking process who are not mere voters, but are not elected officeholders either? What about the bureaucrats, the administrators, the public librarians, the DMV employees, the state functionaries charged with cleaning roadkill off the highways, the administrators and staffs of publicly-funded schools, what about police officers and police staff, what about legislative aides, what about judges, clerks, and bailiffs, are they all policymakers?

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** Yes, I think we should include them. We are looking for a conception of policymakers conducive to explaining both the causes and the effects of policy decisions, right?

**Jack:** Right.

**Emma:** Then we should include everyone in the policymaking process whose professional activities have any bearing on the causes and effects of policy decisions. I think we should include everyone involved not only in the *design* of policies, that is, in their *making*, narrowly construed, but also everyone involved in how policies are *digested* by constituents. A well-designed, but poorly implemented or poorly enforced, policy can fail to bear the effects expected of it. Failures of policy implementation or enforcement can lead to constituent disappointment no less than can failures of policy design, so I think we should include in the category of policymakers everyone involved in any stage of both the policymaking and, as it were, policy-digesting, processes, from design to implementation, enforcement, and administration. At least, we should see if we can use this wide-scope definition of policymaking to arrive at a conception of policymakers that meets our criteria and, if not, adjust what falls under the scope of policymaking accordingly. Sound good?

**Connor:** OK, I'm game.

**Jack:** Ditto. Sounds good to me.

**Emma:** Andre?

**Andre:** No one wants to hear from me. I'm just an observer here.

**Emma:** Oh, come on, sad sack. Play the game. It's fun.

**Andre:** You really seem to have this well in hand, but I'll play along.

**Emma:** OK, Andre's in! So, how should we proceed? Should we maybe take up the Wonderdork's suggestion to think a bit about the nature of surrogate decision-making?

**Andre:** Wouldn't that mean giving Zippy credit for a good idea?

**Jack:** Aghast!

**Emma:** Eh, I guess pigs can fly.

**Andre:** Which is the flying pig, Jack's good idea or your giving him credit for it?

**Emma:** Zippy's good idea is the flying pig. My crediting him for it is a pig flying around hell-frozen-over [smiles].

**Connor** [laughs]: So...uh, surrogates. What about them?

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** If we can determine what makes cases of surrogate decision-making unique, as compared to cases in which persons decides for themselves, we might learn something about the mental characteristics of policymakers that is relevant for their policy decisions and, more to the point we are most interested in, that is conducive to explaining the causes and effects of these decisions.

**Jack:** Haven't we already basically said what makes surrogate decision-making unique, namely, the fact of a disconnect between the decision-maker and the person on whose behalf, and ostensibly in whose interests, a decision is being made?

**Emma:** Yes, but I don't think we've clarified why this disconnect is important, not that it's not rather obvious...

**Jack:** It's important because, unlike when a person decides for themselves, in surrogate cases, there's no guarantee that the decision-maker *knows* either what is in the surrogated person's interests or, what is sometimes the same thing, what the surrogated person would decide.

**Emma:** Very good, Jack, but be careful. There's no *guarantee* in cases of personal decision-making that the decision-maker has infallible access to their own mental states. We don't want to be Cartesians about...well, we don't want to be Cartesians about anything in epistemology [laughs]. It's *possible*, when a person decides for themselves, that the person does not know their own interests or what decision will promote their own interests. However, I agree that such a disconnect is far more likely – if not a necessary consequence of the decision-maker being distinct from the person whose fate is decided – in cases of surrogate decision-making, and that such a disconnect is important precisely because of this greater likelihood in surrogate cases.

**Connor:** So, what does this mean for the question of how we should conceive of policymakers for the sake of political analysis?

**Jack:** Isn't it obvious? Don't you see what Emma's done? She's led us back to where we left off when we first had this discussion. She basically gave us the answer to the question how to conceive policymakers then, but we were too dense to see the point.

**Connor:** Wait, I'm still dense. What's the point?

**Jack:** She was arguing then that both of the leading conceptions of policymakers, the Rousseauian notion that policymakers act in the general interest and the Humean conception of policymakers as self-interested, implicitly and illicitly attribute unique knowledge and abilities to policymakers that there is no reason to believe they possess. She argued against me on the grounds that the Humean conception illegitimately assumes that policymakers know both their own interests and how to achieve goals that promote their interests. She argued against your position on the grounds that there is no reason to assume *a priori* that policymakers know either of what the general will consists or how to promote it, and then she argued similarly against the notion that expert advice necessarily buttresses policymakers' limited epistemic capacities. Well, she's now shown that surrogates – and, therefore, policymakers – far from being epistemically special, are likely, if not destined, to lack knowledge that they need to make effective policies,

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

because of the disconnect separating them from those on whose behalf they decide, their constituents. How should we conceive of policymakers, Emma?

**Emma** [smiling broadly]: As ignorant. As lacking knowledge and as limited in their epistemic capacities. Not only should we *not* attribute knowledge to them *a priori* that there is no reason to assume they possess, we should recognize the manifest fact of their ignorance and build our conception upon this fact. Human beings are necessarily cognitively limited. Policymakers are human beings—of a sort. Political office does not bestow special epistemic powers or provide privileged access to truth. Were you or I elected to political office, we would not suddenly become less ignorant of the causes and consequences of social phenomena. Indeed, if we accept that people tend to have better, albeit fallible, knowledge of their own mental states, then as persons come to acquire policymakers’-*cum*-surrogates’ remit of deciding on behalf of and ostensibly in the interests of constituents – in other words, as persons shift from primarily making personal policies meant only for themselves to also making political policies meant principally for others, they become *less knowledgeable, more ignorant*, in respects relevant to the success of the policies they make. It is epistemically easier for a person to make a successful personal policy than to make a successful political policy. The scope and scale of the knowledge required for policy success in the first instance is typically far more limited than in the second case. For the purposes of analyzing the causes and effects of political decision-making, we should conceive of the persons making political decisions as more ignorant, as less knowledgeable, than individuals as conceived for the purposes of analyzing personal decision-making. Surrogates and, therefore, policymakers, are *uniquely* ignorant among decision-makers.

**Jack**: You see?

**Connor**: I get it. Did you plan this?

**Emma**: Connie, how could I have planned it? How could I have known that you would ever bring the topic up again?!

**Andre**: You brought it up yourself, Connie!

**Emma**: Not everything is the result of planning, Connor. Some things are just fortuitous. Or, if you prefer...spontaneous! [smiling]

**Connor** [laughing]: Jeez. OK, yeah, I suppose.

**Emma**: The only question left, I think, is whether this conception meets the criteria we set out earlier. Can we agree that conceiving of policymakers as ignorant is simple, plausible, and relevant to explaining the causes and effects of their policy decisions? Zippy?

**Jack**: I’m on board.

**Emma**: Andre?

**Andre**: Yeah, I think you’re onto something.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** Connor?

**Connor:** Eh, I still have some questions. I mean, what do you mean by *ignorance*? Or, more exactly, what do you mean by *knowledge*? What would it mean for policymakers to *not* be ignorant in some case?

**Emma:** Good question. I'm clearly using the words "knowledge" and "ignorance" in broad senses here. I mean "knowledge" to encompass both *propositional* and *non-propositional knowledge*, knowledge of facts and theories, but also abilities, capacities, talents, and powers.

**Connor:** So, knowledge includes both *know-that* and *know-how*? And ignorance encompasses *does-not-know-that* and *does-not-know-how*?

**Emma:** Correct. For every potential policy goal – indeed, for every potential goal, full stop – there is some combination of know-that, of theoretical and factual knowledge, of theory and data, and of know-how, of abilities and capacities, that is necessary to realize the goal. If a person possesses all of this knowledge or, more pertinent to the political context, if a group of persons, like a group of policymakers, collectively possess all of this knowledge, then they can, at least in principle, design, implement, and administer a plan for the *deliberate* realization of the goal.

**Jack:** So, if the actors possess the required knowledge, they can realize the goal without assistance from spontaneous forces?

**Emma:** Exactly. The nature and extent of the spontaneous forces required to realize a goal bear a kind of complementary relationship with the nature and extent of the actors' ignorance regarding the goal. If the goal is to be realized despite actors' ignorance, the former forces must compensate for the latter ignorance. Oh, I should also add that knowledge need not be *explicit*. Knowledge can be merely *tacit*.

**Connor:** In other words, if you know something, you know it, even if you don't know that you know it? Is that tacit knowledge?

**Emma:** Yeah, right. For some philosophers, tacit knowledge is identical with know-how, but others argue that tacit knowledge is just knowledge that can't be enunciated or otherwise expressed, and, if this is all it means, I don't see why one couldn't have tacit know-that. If it's possible to possess knowledge of facts, knowledge that you don't know that you possess or, at least, can't explicate, then tacit know-that is possible.

**Connor:** That is a very broad conception of knowledge you're positing...

**Emma:** I know. But notice how much it accomplishes that can't be accomplished on the basis of the other conceptions we've considered. Unlike the question of the extent to which policymakers are constituent-minded rather than self-interested, policymaker ignorance, as I've defined it, can be investigated empirically. Perhaps more importantly, given the inverse relationship between

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

the nature and extent of policymaker ignorance, and the nature and extent of the spontaneous forces that must intervene in order for a goal to be realized despite policymaker ignorance, these spontaneous forces are also opened up to empirical inquiry, at least to a degree.

**Jack:** So, if we can figure out the knowledge necessary to realize some policy goal and if we can figure out the relevant knowledge that policymakers actually possess, we will automatically learn about both the knowledge that they still need to acquire, if the goal is to be realized deliberately, and something about the kind and extent of spontaneous forces that must intervene, if the goal is to be realized despite their ignorance. And, what? We can then use this knowledge to look for, analyze the prospects for the emergence of, spontaneous forces of the required kind and degree? Is that what you're saying?

**Emma:** Yes, basically. I don't want to overstate the case. It's not as if we learn everything that we might need to predict in detail the consequences of some policy decision, but we learn more from such an approach than we could ever learn by building an analysis on assumptions about the motivations of policymakers. It puts us in a better position to predict whether or not some policy will achieve its stated goal, to know that policymakers' knowledge is or is not adequate for its deliberate realization, and, if not adequate, to acquire some grasp, albeit probably a far-from-perfect grasp, of the kind and extent of the spontaneous forces that must facilitate realization in the presence of policymaker ignorance, than it does to start from an uneducated guess about policymakers' motivations.

**Connor:** Can you say how such an analysis would run in terms of a specific example?

**Emma:** I think so, yeah. Let's go back to the example we discussed at Andre's party. Imagine that policymakers want to address some public-health issue or, more exactly, that they want to mitigate as far as possible the deleterious health effects associated with some disease. What do they need to know in order to deliberately do so effectively, without the assistance of spontaneous forces? Obviously, the details will be different from one case to the next, depending on the disease or health issue at hand, but I think we can speak in a general way about the epistemic requirements of such an example. Let's imagine that policymakers want to minimize the incidence and severity of adult-onset diabetes, to stay close to our prior discussion. What do they need to know in order to deliberately minimize the incidence and severity of adult-onset diabetes?

**Jack:** Well, they need to know the causes of the disease and, more specifically, the causes of the particular effects of the disease – say, premature death – that they wish to mitigate and how to manipulate these causal factors such that the relevant effects are mitigated in virtue of their manipulations. For this, they need an adequate theory, a causal or etiological theory, of diabetes that implies various possible interventions that, with varying probabilities, will mitigate, to some degree or other, the particular effects they wish to mitigate.

**Emma:** You're getting good at this, Jack. What other knowledge, as we've defined it, do they need? You're almost changing my opinion of you [smiles].



## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Jack:** They need to know when and where to intervene in the ways, and to the extent, that, according to the theory, are necessary to mitigate the relevant effects to the desired degree. In other words, they need data concerning the incidence and severity of adult-onset diabetes. They need to know who has it and how bad, and, I would imagine, who is likely to get it in the future.

**Emma:** I think that's right. What else?

**Jack:** They need the ability to perform the required interventions. They need to be able to manipulate the relevant causal factors, to intervene on people affected by the disease, in the way implied by the theory.

**Emma:** Excellent. OK, so, this is the first part of our analysis. We've just determined what knowledge is required to realize the relevant policy goal. What comes next?

**Jack:** I would think that the next step must involve comparing the epistemic requirements of the goal with the knowledge actually possessed by policymakers.

**Emma:** Right, but in order to do that, you have to first get some grasp on the knowledge possessed by policymakers or, at least, on the knowledge accessible to them; you have to figure out as far as possible what they know and what they are in a position to learn about the relevant causal mechanisms, data, *et cetera*; you also have to determine as far as you can what relevant capacities they possess and any further capacities they are in a position to acquire.

**Connor:** How do you do that? How do you figure out what knowledge a person possesses – or what knowledge a group of persons, such as policymakers, possess – and what their capacities are? That seems no easier than determining whether a person is motivated more by altruistic than by selfish considerations. How is that an improvement on existing conceptions of policymakers?

**Emma:** Admittedly, this second stage is likely to be sketchier and vaguer than the first. There are likely to be multiple theories in endocrinology and in each of the other fields of medical science relevant to Type-2 diabetes. And some of these theories are likely to be in some degree of tension with each other. It may be no more obvious to the policy analyst than it is to the policymaker that there is an adequate etiological theory of the disease. Similarly, there may be different, mutually inconsistent, sets of data concerning the incidence and severity of the disease, or it may be otherwise unclear whether the available data are adequate to the deliberate realization of the policy, *given* the adequacy of policymakers' other relevant knowledge. Finally, it might not be apparent to the analyst whether policymakers have the know-how, whether they have the ability or capacity, required to perform the necessary interventions. But, I'm not claiming that political analysts will ever, much less always, be able to acquire comprehensive, unambiguous, and infallible knowledge of the knowledge possessed by policymakers. I'm merely arguing that political knowledge and, more importantly, political ignorance, can be investigated empirically, to some degree, and that any degree of empirical inquiry into political ignorance is probably better than other analytical methods that ignore the problem entirely.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Jack:** Every difficulty you just raised for the analyst is no less a problem for the policymaker, right? If the analyst cannot determine whether policymakers possess the required know-that and know-how, isn't this sufficient reason to doubt the adequacy of policymakers' knowledge?

**Emma:** What do you mean, Zip?

**Jack:** I mean, we're assuming – right? – that the policymaker and the analyst are similarly epistemically capable. The whole argument so far has been built on denying unique knowledge or special epistemic capacities to policymakers. Policymakers do not possess special knowledge mysterious to non-policymakers or unique powers not available to other mortals. So, if the analyst can't determine whether any of the available etiological theories of the disease is adequate for the purposes of mitigating its deleterious effects, or if the analyst can't determine the adequacy of either the data or the policymaker's capacity to intervene in the necessary way, isn't the policymaker likely to be similarly ignorant?

**Emma:** Ah, yes! Very good, Jack. What you're asking, I think, is whether political analysts can infer from their own ignorance of some of the knowledge required to deliberately realize some policy goal – or, more carefully, whether analysts can infer from the judgment that *were they in the position of the relevant policymakers, they would be ignorant of some of the requisite knowledge* – that policymakers who are in fact so positioned are similarly ignorant. Yes, I think so. Given that no epistemic privileges attach to being a policymaker, I think this conclusion follows. It is not that the analyst needs to look into the minds of policymakers to determine what bits of knowledge they possess. The analyst just needs to determine whether the required knowledge is publicly available. If the required knowledge is not available to everyone who might look for it, then it's not available to policymakers. Or, more to your point, if the policy adequacy of the publicly-available knowledge is obscure to the analyst, then – since policymakers cannot know the adequacy of this knowledge any better than the analyst can – the policy adequacy of the available knowledge is similarly obscure to policymakers.

**Connor:** And this is sufficient reason for the analyst to be skeptical that the relevant policy goal can be deliberately realized without the aid of spontaneity?

**Emma:** I should think so, surely, compared to a case where the adequacy of the available knowledge is apparent to all.

**Andre:** It doesn't seem that difficult, Connor, to get some grasp on the knowledge accessible to policymakers. Sticking with the public-health example, the analyst has to determine which fields of medical science are relevant and the prevailing condition of available theories in these fields. Is there consensus concerning the adequacy of competing theories in the relevant fields? Why or why not? If there is a consensus, is it one that has emerged endogenously from the interactions of scientists or is it one that has been exogenously imposed on the field by some government or corporate entity? If there is no full-fledged consensus regarding a particular theory, what are the various theoretical options available to policymakers as potential tools for deliberately mitigating the negative health effects of the disease? More generally, what is the state of the various theories in the relevant fields relative to the available evidence? Are there theories in the relevant fields that are reasonably construed as potential tools for the deliberate realization of the goal? If

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

not, then this is automatically a reason to be skeptical of policymakers' ability to realize the goal without the help of spontaneous forces. If such theories *are* available, then the analyst moves on to make similar inquiries regarding the data to be inserted into these theories: What data are available? Are they compatible with the relevant theories? Are there potentially causally significant phenomena that are not reflected in the data? If so, what is the significance of any such lacunae for the prospects of deliberately realizing the goal via policymaking? If the available theoretical knowledge and data are adequate, the analyst moves on to consider policymakers' ability to intervene in the causal nexus in the required way.

**Jack:** Analyzing policymakers' capacity to intervene in the required way, I think, is a matter of examining the efficacy of the government's implementation, enforcement, and administration apparatuses with respect to the relevant goal. How efficient is the prevailing governmental bureaucracy? What goals has it been put to work to realize? Has it been put to effective use in realizing objectives like the current one? Has it figured in the failure of any similar policy objectives? If so, which failures? What part did it play in these failures? In short, what is to be learned from the past successes and failures of the state bureaucracy that might be relevant to the question whether policymakers possess the capacity to deliberately realize the relevant goal in the present case?

**Andre:** I think that's right. If I understand Emma's argument correctly, the only situation in which it makes sense to think that policymakers can deliberately realize some goal is when the analyst is satisfied that policymakers' epistemic capacities are sufficient in all of these respects. If the analyst is not satisfied that policymakers possess or can acquire *all* of the required knowledge, then skepticism of the possibility of deliberate realization of the goal is the appropriate reaction and the matter then becomes whether there are any spontaneous forces operating in the relevant context that might compensate for the ignorance of policymakers.

**Emma** [smiling]: You understand my argument, indeed, love. My approach makes the nature and extent of policymaker ignorance with respect to particular goals a matter for empirical investigation. More to the point, it makes the success or failure of particular policy pursuits predictable and explainable, at least to a degree. Now, I have admitted and I fully accept that political analysis based on a conception of policymakers as ignorant is unlikely to yield complete, clear, and exceptionless knowledge of policymaker knowledge and ignorance, and, thus, that it is unlikely to yield perfect predictions of the success or failure of policy pursuits, but the fact that it yields *some* such knowledge – knowledge that conceptions of policymakers based on motivational assumptions are incapable of yielding – is compelling and, I would think, sufficient to recommend my conception over either the Rousseauian or Humean conceptions.

**Jack:** I'm convinced! I hereby renounce the Humean conception of policymakers! Knaves or not, politicians are definitely ignoramuses! Wait, ignorami? Did we ever settle that?

**Emma** [broad smile]: You are no longer Zippy the Wonderdork, my friend. I hereby anoint you [touching Jack on each shoulder] Zippy the Wondergenius.

**Jack** [laughs]: Gee, thanks. Not *Jack* the Wondergenius?

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** Nope. Zippy you are and Zippy you shall remain [smiles].

### **Book Eight: For Further Reading**

#### *On the Logic and Ethics of Surrogate Decision-Making*

A. E. Buchanan and D. W. Brock – 1989. *Deciding for Others: The Ethics of Surrogate Decision Making* (1989), Cambridge University Press

B. Kibbe and P. J. Ford – “What’s Knowledge Got to Do with It? Ethics, Epistemology, and Intractable Conflicts in the Medical Setting” (2016), *The Journal of clinical ethics* 27 (4): 352–358

D. Brudney – “The Different Moral Bases of Patient and Surrogate Decision-Making” (2018), *Hastings Center Report* 48 (1): 37–41.

Parker Crutchfield and Scott Scheall – “Epistemic Burdens and the Incentives of Surrogate Decision-makers” (2019), *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy*, 22: 613–621

#### *On Cartesian Epistemology*

Rene Descartes – *Discourse on Method* ([1637] 1999), Hackett

Antonio Damasio – *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (2005), Penguin

#### *On Tacit Knowledge*

Gilbert Ryle – “Knowing How and Knowing That” (1946), *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 46: 1–16

F. A. Hayek – *The Sensory Order: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Theoretical Psychology* ([1952] 2017), in *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek, Volume 14*, Viktor Vanberg (ed.), University of Chicago Press

Michael Polanyi – *The Tacit Dimension* (1966), Doubleday & Company

### **Book Eight: Discussion Questions**

1. We might define the class of *policymakers* more or less broadly. We might, for example, include only elected officials in the class and exclude anyone who does not hold elected office. Alternatively, we might include everyone involved in deciding policy and exclude everyone involved in implementing and administering policy. Consider and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different definitions of policymakers, given the goal of discovering a conception of policymakers that facilitates the analysis of their policy decisions and the consequences of these decisions.
2. What features distinguish *policies* from other sets of rules?
3. Different persons will qualify as either *policymakers* or *constituents* (or both) depending on the particular system of government, i.e., democracy (direct or representative), oligarchy, tyranny. Consider these different systems of government in turn and discuss the roles that different persons play in each, i.e., who counts as a policymaker and who qualifies as a constituent in each system of government?
4. Why are the classes of policymakers and constituents never identical?

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

5. Discuss the similarities and differences between policymakers and other kinds of *surrogate* decision-makers, e.g., medical surrogates, legal surrogates (i.e., persons with power of attorney), members of corporate boards of directors, parents of minor children.
6. How are cases of personal decision-making, in which persons decide for themselves, *epistemically* distinct from cases of surrogate decision-making, where persons decide on behalf and ostensibly in the interests of some other person(s)? That is, how does the decision-relevant knowledge of a person deciding for themselves differ from the relevant knowledge of a person deciding for others?
7. What is the significance of the relatively deficient epistemic circumstances of surrogate decision-makers for a conception of policymakers adequate to explaining the causes and effects of their policy decisions?
8. What knowledge is required to realize a goal *deliberately* (i.e., without assistance from luck, fortune, or any other spontaneous forces)? What does it mean to say that there is a complementary relationship between the need for spontaneous forces to assist in the realization of a goal and the actor's relevant ignorance of knowledge required to deliberately realize the same goal?
9. Why does analyzing policymaker knowledge and ignorance *not* require "looking into the heads" of individual policymakers to determine what they (do not) know?

### **Book Nine**

**Book Nine Synopsis:** The discussion of how to fruitfully analyze the nature and extent of policymaker ignorance, and the complementary need for spontaneity, continues in Book Nine. Conceiving of policymakers as ignorant serves to explain not only the effects, but also the causes, of their policy decisions. The extent to which policymakers are self-interested or constituent-minded is determined by the nature and extent of their knowledge, and ignorance, concerning self-interested and constituent-minded policy objectives. If we can get some grasp on the nature and extent of policymaker ignorance, we can also get some grasp on whether their decisions will be self-interested or constituent-minded; we will also find ourselves, moreover, in a better position to predict whether relevant policy objectives will be realized and to explain the success, or failure, of related policies. The limitations of political epistemological inquiry are also addressed.

**Connor:** But, what about the next part of the analysis? Given an analysis of the knowledge required to deliberately realize some policy objective and an analysis of the knowledge actually possessed by policymakers, what is involved in analyzing whether any spontaneous forces are in operation that might compensate for the ignorance of policymakers?

**Emma:** In this stage of the analysis, the analyst asks, in effect, "Given the nature and extent of policymaker ignorance relative to the epistemic requirements of the policy objective, how must spontaneous forces compensate, if this ignorance is to be overcome and the relevant goal realized?" The initial – and surely unsatisfying – answer to this question will always be that spontaneous forces must compensate to mitigate the consequences of the specific kind and extent of policymaker ignorance. That is, if policymakers' theoretical knowledge is inadequate to a degree, then spontaneous forces will have to compensate for this deficiency to the required degree.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Andre:** I would think that what this means, as a practical matter, is that the analyst asks, “What kind of spontaneous forces might compensate for this lack of theoretical knowledge and is there evidence that these forces operate in the relevant domain?” So, to return to the diabetes example, if an adequate etiological theory of diabetes is not available, the analyst might investigate the condition and past progress of endocrinology, and other pertinent fields of medicine, to gain some understanding of the potential for the required theoretical knowledge to emerge over time. In particular, the analyst might look at the nature and extent of any exogenous interference in the relevant sciences. To what extent are government or corporate interests involved in funding research in relevant fields? To what extent are such exogenous interests balanced between competing theoretical perspectives, such that none of the rival theories is likely to gain at the expense of the others merely in virtue of the greater ease with which funding can be found for research on this particular theory? If the funding available in some field of science appears to be under the control of governmental agencies or specific private interests, the analyst has some reason to be skeptical that prevailing conditions are favorable to the emergence of the required theoretical knowledge.

**Emma:** I think that’s right. Similarly, if the available data appear inadequate in some respect, if, say, they fail to include everyone with or susceptible to, or if they include people who do not have and are not susceptible to, adult-onset diabetes, or if they fail to encompass factors thought to be causally relevant to the disease, or if certain markers for diabetes are systematically neglected or misrepresented in the data, the political analyst must consider the state and development of methods of data collection, and of statistical analysis, with respect to relevant phenomena, and consider the prospect that these methods will spontaneously evolve in the required way.

**Connor:** Do you really expect political analysts to predict the future development of both theories and empirical methods in multiple scientific disciplines?

**Emma:** Only in the most rough-and-tumble kind of way. Connie, you keep trying to make the perfect an enemy of the good. I admit that my analytical approach is not perfect, but I insist that it is good, better than existing methods.

**Connor:** You keep saying that. I’m just road-testing your idea. I’m trying to see what it can do. Trying to keep you honest [smiles].

**Emma** [laughs]: Fair enough. I appreciate that.

**Connor:** I know you do.

**Emma:** Keep in mind where we are at this point in the analysis: the analyst has already determined that policymakers are too ignorant to deliberately realize the relevant objective. That is, the analyst has already discovered reasons to be skeptical that the goal will be realized. The only question remaining at this stage of the analysis is whether any evidence exists to moderate this skepticism. The analyst in this position need not predict in any great detail the future development of relevant sciences. The analyst need only consider whether there is reason to be

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

optimistic that the sciences will evolve in the way required to realize the objective. If there is such evidence, then, depending on the nature and extent of this evidence, the analyst should appropriately moderate their skepticism. If no such evidence exists, then the analyst should not moderate their skepticism about the possibilities for the goal's realization. It is only in the unlikely event that the analyst somehow knows with a degree of confidence approaching certainty that the relevant sciences will evolve in the required way that their skepticism should be annihilated.

**Andre:** So, skepticism is the appropriate attitude when policymakers are ignorant of some of the theoretical or empirical knowledge required to deliberately realize some goal. A high bar must be met to overcome this skepticism: the analyst needs reasons to believe that the missing knowledge will emerge spontaneously. As this condition will only be met in exceptional cases, skepticism should be the analyst's default attitude when policymakers are ignorant of theories or data required to deliberately realize a policy objective. Is that the idea?

**Emma:** Precisely. At this point in the analysis, the analyst is just looking for reasons to be less skeptical. But, under the circumstances, it is unlikely that their skepticism can – or should – be fully annihilated. The same thing can be said when the analyst determines that policymakers do not possess all of the know-how to bring about the relevant policy goal. As Zippy noted, this is primarily a matter of the inadequacy of the government's bureaucratic apparatus as a tool for effectively manipulating the relevant causal factors. In the public-health or diabetes example, this might be a matter of the government failing to possess the powers required to adequately coerce or otherwise incentivize the public to conform to whatever behavioral modifications are necessary to mitigate the negative effects of the disease. If eliminating adult-onset diabetes requires every American to suddenly become a gym warrior who abstains from chocolate and Cheetos, pizza and beer, in favor of lean meat and green vegetables, then America will never eliminate diabetes because not every American will voluntarily adopt such a diet and – thankfully – American policymakers lack the capacity to coerce every American to adopt such a diet.

**Jack:** Even if they had the capacity, that is, even if they were constitutionally permitted to coerce in the required way, it's not clear what the world would have to look like in order for policymakers to possess the *practical ability* to coerce in the required way. I mean, in effect, the production of every objectionable foodstuff would have to be outlawed and / or American consumers would have to be physically restrained from consuming such consumables. It would not be enough to constitutionally permit policymakers to coerce. Something like a nutritional holocaust would have to be implemented, with concentration camps for the sugar-addicted. It would be nothing short of barbaric to be effective, if the goal were full elimination of diabetes. More to the point, the political analyst would have to consider the – thankfully unlikely – spontaneous emergence of such circumstances in which policymakers might acquire all of the coercive know-how necessary to realize the goal.

**Emma:** Very good, Zip. Of course, the relevant goal is unlikely to be full elimination of a disease like Type-2 diabetes rather than its mere mitigation, but the point remains the same. If the political analyst determines that policymakers do not possess all of the know-how required to deliberately mitigate the deleterious health effects of Type-2 diabetes in virtue of the

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

inadequacies of the prevailing state administrative apparatus, the analyst will have to consider the prospects for the spontaneous emergence of the required capacities and abilities, if their skepticism about the prospects for the realization of the relevant goal is to be moderated, if not annihilated.

**Jack:** Couldn't it also happen, though, that the spontaneous forces required to compensate for policymaker ignorance in some given case emerge from realms and in ways that have nothing to do with that ignorance? You've presented the analyst's problem in this scenario in terms of the spontaneous forces required for the emergence of the missing knowledge, but this is only one of possibly many ways that spontaneity might compensate for policymaker ignorance. In other words, policymakers might be ignorant in crucial respects and spontaneous forces may be inadequate for the emergence of the missing knowledge, but the relevant goal might be realized regardless, because spontaneous forces in other domains of society – that is, in domains other than the scientific and governmental-administrative realms relevant to the emergence of the missing knowledge – are otherwise adequate to compensate for the consequences of policymaker ignorance.

**Emma:** Oh, yes! Very good, Jack. I should not have suggested that the only way for spontaneous forces to assist the realization of goals in the presence of ignorance is by providing the missing knowledge to policymakers. There might be many ways, depending on the unique circumstances of a specific case, for spontaneity to facilitate the realization of a policy objective.

**Connor:** Doesn't that severely complicate the political analyst's task?

**Emma:** It makes it more complicated, yes. How much more complicated, I think, will vary from case to case. In addition to analyzing the prospects for the emergence of the missing knowledge, the analyst will have to consider the likelihood that other circumstances spontaneously emerge to compensate for policymaker ignorance, to correct its goal-defeating consequences.

**Connor:** What would such consideration look like in practice?

**Emma:** I think it would involve first trying to determine as far as possible the consequences of policymaker ignorance – in what ways and to what extent some policy will fail in virtue of this ignorance – and then considering possible ways that these failings might be corrected, and, finally, analyzing the prospects for the emergence of such solutions. So, consider again the diabetes example. Suppose we've determined that the knowledge that policymakers possess falls short of the knowledge required to deliberately mitigate the deleterious consequences of Type-2 diabetes and, moreover, that the missing knowledge is not very likely to emerge, what are the remaining possibilities for spontaneity to facilitate the realization of the goal?

**Jack:** Well, much will depend on what policy policymakers ultimately choose, right? I mean, imagine that they do nothing, that they adopt a policy of inaction, then the question will become whether the goal can be realized entirely spontaneously. In the diabetes example, the question will be something like whether the behavioral modifications required to meet the goal of mitigating the nasty consequences of adult diabetes are likely to emerge on their own, without top-down policymaking aimed at deliberately mitigating these consequences: how likely are



## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

Americans to spontaneously modify their behavior in the required ways without government direction?

**Emma:** Yes, right.

**Jack:** Or instead imagine that, in virtue of their ignorance, rather than adopting a policy of inaction, policymakers adopt the *exactly wrong* policy, by which I mean the policy that is diametrically opposed to the one they ought to adopt, the policy that would suffice to deliberately realize the goal, if it were chosen, the adequacy of which they are ignorant...

**Emma:** I think the analyst's problem is the same here as in the prior case. The question is, how likely are Americans to spontaneously modify their behavior in the ways required? However, unlike the prior case, where spontaneity had to compensate for a lack of advice from the government, here spontaneous forces must overcome the government's bad, counterproductive, nutritional advice. But, the analyst's question is the same in both cases: how likely are constituents to spontaneously modify their behavior in the ways required, given the policy choice actually made?

**Jack:** And, of course, this remains the question if the government's advice is less wrong than just inadequate or deficient, incomplete, but not incorrect, as far as it goes.

**Emma:** Yes, that's right. The hard part will often be figuring out how given policy failings might be corrected. The diabetes case is perhaps deceptively easy in this regard: we know enough about diabetes to know that appropriate behavioral modifications will be required in any case. But, the analyst will probably rarely be so lucky. So, yeah, this makes analysis of the sort I am proposing more complicated, but not impossible. Of course, I would like to reiterate, yet again, that I am suggesting this approach merely as an improvement – a significant improvement, I think – on existing methods. I am not claiming that this approach is perfect or always convenient to use.

**Andre:** It will help the political analyst, I believe, that there are existing sciences – biology and economics being the two most obvious examples – that primarily investigate spontaneous phenomena.

**Emma** [smiles]: Andre, my love, unless natural phenomena are the results of the design decisions of the invisible man who is said to live in the sky, *every* science investigates spontaneous phenomena. Every science studies the causes and consequences of *undesigned* phenomena. A science of intentional phenomena – a science that investigated why *X* followed from *S*'s deliberate performance of *X* – would serve no purpose.

**Andre** [laughs]: Ha! Yes, right. You got me. Sorry, a momentary lapse of reason. Anyway, there are various results of sociological, anthropological, and political-scientific research that should also assist the political analyst. Indeed, I would think that the kind of political analysis you're recommending would eventually lead to scientific inquiry of the sort that will improve such analyses over time.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** That may well be the case. There's a sense in which what I am suggesting is that we need a science of all of the many sciences that are relevant to effective policymaking, a second-order science that integrates the analyses of first-order sciences that investigate phenomena relevant to the success or failure of political action. The explanatory power of this second-order science of the sciences of policymaking will presumably improve as these first-order sciences progress. That is, the science of *political epistemology* will advance as we learn more about the relevant spontaneous forces that constitute part of the subject matter of different social and natural sciences.

**Jack:** Alright! So, are we agreed? Do we accept Emma's conception of policymakers?

**Emma:** Not so fast, Zippy. I think I still have some work to do. We agreed at the beginning to seek agreement on a conception of policymakers that would serve to explain both the policy decisions they make and the success, or failure, of these decisions. I have only shown that conceiving of policymakers as ignorant helps to analyze and explain the extent to which their policy decisions succeed, or fail, but I have said nothing about how treating policymakers as ignorant helps to explain their policy decisions. I actually have quite a bit to say about this.

**Jack:** Of course you do. Lo, far be it for me to lessen your burden, make your task easier, and declare your victory before the battle is won. You're still on the field, apparently, slaying the wounded. By all means, dazzle us, please.

**Emma** [smiles]: OK. Well, it seems to me that there's another problem with basing political analysis on assumptions concerning the motivations of policymakers. I mean, not only are such assumptions incapable of supporting explanations and predictions concerning the success or failure of policy decisions, they also don't actually explain why policymakers decide as they do.

**Connor:** What do you mean? Policymakers decide as they do because of how they are, either selfish or altruistic, because of how they are motivated, either in their own interests or in the interests of others, their constituents.

**Emma:** The claim that policymakers prefer policy *P* because they are selfish or self-interested, or, conversely, because they are constituent-minded, leaves something important unexplained, something that is, I believe, explicable, at least to some extent.

**Connor:** And what is that?

**Emma:** Motivational assumptions fail to explain why people – policymakers, in our case – are either selfish or altruistic, or, more exactly, since people are not typically all selfish or all altruistic all the time, such assumptions fail to explain the *extent to which people are selfish or altruistic in given circumstances*. Motivational assumptions treat the determinants of choice and action – *reasons, motives, motivations, incentives, and purposes* – as explanatory primitives, as if these things just pop into a person's head *ex nihilo* and are not themselves determined by other considerations.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Jack:** So, you're saying that building political analysis on motivational assumptions is to start from the notion that people, policymakers, are either all bad or all good, or that some people are bad and others good, but it is not to ask – indeed, it is to willfully ignore – why people are bad or good, when and where they are, to the extent that they are. Is that right?

**Emma:** Right. Human moral character, whatever it is, and however far it varies from person to person, besides being neither directly observable nor indirectly inferable from observation, is surely not entirely innate. It has origins in history, culture, general human psychology, individual psychology, logic, *et cetera*, that serve to explain it. Perhaps more to the point, the moral character of a particular decision is not well explained by the moral character of the decision-makers. It is rarely, if ever, sufficient to say that a decision is good because the decision-makers are good.

**Connor:** So, what are you proposing?

**Jack:** Come on, Connie, what conversation have you been listening to? She's proposing that epistemic considerations determine motives and that starting political analysis with epistemics serves to explain not only why some policy decision succeeds, or does not, but also why it was taken in the first place.

**Emma:** And the Wondergenius scores again! You're really killing it tonight, Zip. What are you on? Smart pills? Meth? Greenies?

**Jack:** Just coffee in the morning, whiskey in the evening, and pot all day long...

**Andre** [laughs]: The philosopher's diet!

**Jack:** Exactly.

**Emma:** What I'm saying, Connie, is that the best way to explain the moral character of a decision is in terms of the decision-maker's knowledge and, more importantly, in terms of their ignorance. Or, perhaps I should be a bit more circumspect: whether it is the *best* way to account for the moral character of a decision, the decision-maker's knowledge and ignorance is an important factor in any such account. To state the case in the starkest terms: a person who, in some set of circumstances, is entirely ignorant of morally good options, a person who knows only bad options, is exceedingly unlikely to make a moral choice or to choose a good option, *whatever their moral character*, whatever the moral quality of their reasons, motives, motivations, purposes, and incentives, unless, of course, spontaneous forces intervene to ensure a good option is selected despite the actor's ignorance. Conversely, if the only options available to you in some context are morally good ones – how rarely does this happen in real life? – you are unlikely to make a bad decision, even if you are a bad person with bad intentions, again, unless you just get lucky and make a bad decision despite your ignorance.

**Connor:** I don't understand. What would it look like to spontaneously make a good decision in ignorance of good options or, conversely, to unintentionally make a bad decision when ignorant of bad options?

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** It could happen, for example, if the moral character or the perceived moral character of an option changes over time spontaneously, which is to say, if its moral character changes in a way not foreseen or intended by the decision-maker. If an option that is good or that is thought to be good at one time later comes to be perceived as bad or just as not good, or even as less good, then a person can make a spontaneously bad, not good, or less good decision, despite their ignorance of bad, not good, or less good options. And conversely for the possibility of a spontaneously good decision.

**Connor:** Is that the only way it could happen?

**Emma:** Mmmm...well, the role of tacit knowledge in decision making raises a problem here. The question is whether the outcomes of decisions that you make on the basis of your tacit knowledge, the results of the actions that you take on the basis of the things that you know without knowing that you know them, should be counted as deliberately- or spontaneously-realized. I see arguments both ways. Such outcomes result from your knowledge, so they are deliberate in this sense. On the other hand, such outcomes result from knowledge you do not know that you possess, so they may well *appear* to you as spontaneous; tacit knowledge does not *consciously* figure in your deliberations, so the results to which it leads may appear to you to not have been purposely caused by you. Perhaps we should describe the contribution that tacit knowledge makes to an outcome as *quasi-spontaneous*: in fact, a consequence of the actor's knowledge, but not seen as such from the actor's perspective. Thus, one might quasi-spontaneously make a good decision, not in ignorance, but due to merely tacit knowledge of good options, and likewise for a bad decision made quasi-spontaneously.

**Jack:** So, whether a policymaker is altruistic or selfish – or, more carefully, the *extent* to which a policymaker is constituent-minded rather than selfish or self-interested – depends on their knowledge or, more importantly, on their ignorance of altruistic as opposed to selfish options.

**Emma:** Correctamundo! But, let's be a bit careful, I'm not claiming that epistemic considerations fully determine the choice a person makes and, therefore, that they fully determine whether a morally good or bad choice is made. I'm not claiming that epistemics are all that matter. I'm not arguing that other normative considerations such as the perceived moral, prudential, and pecuniary properties of different options are entirely irrelevant to the choice ultimately made, but I am claiming that epistemic considerations are important to decision-making and to explaining a decision. I would go so far as to say that ignorance is the fundamental consideration in decision-making, that knowledge and ignorance of options is logically prior to these other normative considerations.

**Jack:** So, it's not that Hume and Rousseau were wrong. They were just too quick.

**Emma:** Right. Starting with epistemic considerations, rather than leaping to assumptions about the moral character of policymakers, doesn't undermine the Humean and Rousseauian approaches, it just enriches them. It makes a better understanding of political decision-making possible. Rather than just saying that a particular decision was made because the decision-maker was good or bad, or whatever, we can say that a particular decision was made because of the

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

decision-maker's epistemic circumstances, which, as we showed earlier, can to some extent be investigated empirically. If we can get a grasp on the options that policymakers confront in virtue of their knowledge and, especially, the options that their ignorance obscures or hides from them, we can say something, at least, about the options they are unlikely to choose. We can at least predict the decisions that they will *not* make, even though we likely will not be able to specify the decision that they *will* make without more information about the normative considerations they consider important, which are less open to empirical inquiry, if at all.

**Connor:** It's all very obscure when you talk about this in general terms. What is the practical upshot of this point for the diabetes example, say?

**Emma:** Imagine that our analysis shows that policymakers lack some of the knowledge required to realize the goal of moderating by some percentage deaths due to Type-2 diabetes. We have examined the relevant knowledge that is available and have determined that it is deficient in some essential respects: theoretical consensus is absent in one or more of the pertinent fields of medical science; the available theories are immature, untested, internally incoherent, or just too numerous and mutually contradictory for policymaking purposes; the data are lacking in some important respect; or the government's bureaucratic apparatus is not up to the task of administering the policy. What conclusion can we draw from this set of circumstances?

**Connor:** That the goal of moderating deaths from adult-onset diabetes by a particular percentage will not be realized unless spontaneous forces intervene.

**Emma:** Correct. Imagine that our analysis has also determined that the prospects for spontaneous forces to compensate for the consequences of policymaker ignorance are dim. What further conclusion can we draw?

**Jack:** That the goal will probably not be realized, full stop.

**Emma:** Yes. Can we conclude anything from these circumstances about the likelihood that policymakers will *choose* to pursue the goal of moderating deaths due to Type-2 diabetes?

**Jack:** Um, I don't know. Do we know whether policymakers agree with the analyst's analysis?

**Emma:** Ah, very good, Zippy. Why should that matter?

**Jack:** I mean, whether policymakers choose to pursue this goal or some other will depend, at least in part, on how they assess their own epistemic circumstances and the prospects for spontaneous assistance with respect to the various goals. People generally do not choose courses of action that they think themselves too ignorant to pursue effectively, either through deliberate planning or spontaneous facilitation, or a combination of the two. So, much depends on whether policymakers agree with the analyst concerning their unfortunate epistemic position and the weak prospects for spontaneous assistance with respect to the goal of moderating deaths from adult diabetes.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma:** I set ‘em up and Zippy knocks ‘em down! Very good, Zip. Now, what if, among the options or goals that policymakers confront in the diabetes case is that of engaging in graft or corruption, or – less dramatically – what if they have the option of merely *pretending* to pursue the goal of moderating deaths due to Type-2 diabetes? What if, rather than earnestly pursuing this goal in their given, unenviable, epistemic circumstances, they have the option of instead engaging in a public-relations campaign to convince their constituents that they’re earnestly trying to moderate the negative effects of diabetes?

**Andre:** Politicians can often assuage their constituents’ worries by simply making it *seem* like they are trying, whether or not they are actually trying anything substantive, to address their constituents’ worries. Rather than earnestly pursuing the goal of moderating deaths due to adult diabetes, they might declare “war on diabetes,” form blue-ribbon diabetes panels or diabetes watchdog committees, or hire panels of experts and “put their best people” on the problem, all without doing anything very meaningful to address deaths from diabetes. They might, in other words, engage in obfuscating activities that, from their constituents’ perspectives, are indistinguishable from earnest pursuit of a particular policy goal, and then blame failure to achieve this goal on the recalcitrance of the rival party.

**Jack** [laughs]: Call it the “LePetomane Principle”...

**Connor** [perplexed]: The wha?

**Jack:** “The LePetomane Principle.” Haven’t you ever seen *Blazing Saddles*? Mel Brooks’ character? The Governor? William J. LePetomane? He says—

**Andre:** “We’ve got to protect our phony baloney jobs, Gentlemen! We must do something about this immediately!”

**Jack** [pointing at Emma]: “I didn’t get a ‘harumph!’ out of that guy.”

**Andre:** “Give the Governor a ‘harumph!’”

**Emma** [laughing]: Harumph! Ha! Yeah, I think you just described all of politics, ever. Now, here’s the really crucial point: what if, other things being equal, they judge themselves to be more knowledgeable, less ignorant, about playacting at pursuing a goal than they take themselves to be about earnestly pursuing the goal? Which are they likely to choose? Playacting or earnest pursuit?

**Connor:** It seems clear to me that they are likely to playact, especially if, as you said, they expect the same outcome – failure to mitigate deaths – either way, and their constituents cannot distinguish earnest from pretended pursuit.

**Emma:** And which is more likely to bear the lower epistemic burden in many contexts, earnest or pretended pursuit?

## ***Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics***

Scott Scheall

**Connor:** I am sad to admit that, in many, perhaps most, political contexts, it's epistemically easier to pretend to care than it is to actually care.

**Emma:** Meaning that?

**Connor** [laughs]: Meaning that my Rousseauian conception of policymakers is impossible to maintain...

**Emma:** Well, yes, but, not exactly...

**Connor:** I know, I know. Meaning that whether a policymaker is more Rousseauian than Humean is a function of the nature and extent of their ignorance with respect to Rousseauian, constituent-minded, policy objectives relative to the nature and extent of their ignorance with respect to Humean, more self-interested, policy goals.

**Jack:** So, are you done, Emma?

**Emma:** For now, yeah. I'll keep thinking about it, but I'm tired and, well, more than a little drunk.

**Jack:** So, are we agreed? Can we call it a night? Connie, you're the lone holdout. Do we accept Emma's conception of policymakers?

**Connor:** Yeah, we're agreed. Let's get the check. Post-booze tacos, anyone?

**Emma and Jack** [together]: Tacos!

**Andre** [laughs]: I'm in.

### **Book Nine: For Further Reading**

#### ***On the Effects of Ignorance on Incentives***

Scott Scheall – “Ignorance and the Incentive Structure confronting Policymakers” (2019), *Cosmos + Taxis: Studies in Emergent Order and Organization*, 7 (1-2), 39-51

Scott Scheall and Parker Crutchfield – “The Priority of the Epistemic” (2021), *Episteme*, 18 (4), 726-737

### **Book Nine: Discussion Questions**

1. Consider a contemporary policy or policy proposal.
  - a. What is the ostensible goal of the policy?
  - b. What theoretical knowledge must policymakers possess in order to deliberately realize the goal?

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

- c. What data do policymakers need, given the theoretical knowledge required, to deliberately realize the goal?
  - d. What abilities and capacities do policymakers require to deliberately realize the goal, given the required theoretical knowledge and data?
  - e. What theoretical knowledge do policymakers actually possess, i.e., what theoretical knowledge is publicly available? Is the theoretical knowledge available adequate to requirements? If not, what are the prospects for the spontaneous emergence of the required knowledge? What is the state of theoretical development in the relevant sciences with regard to exogenous interference of corporations and governments?
  - f. What data do policymakers actually possess, i.e., what data are publicly available? Are the available data adequate to requirements? If not, what are the prospects for the spontaneous emergence of the required data? What is the state of empirical analysis in the relevant sciences with regard to exogenous interference of corporations and governments?
  - g. What abilities and capacities do policymakers actually possess, i.e., are the government's policy implementation, enforcement, and administration apparatuses adequate to requirements? If not, what are the prospects for the spontaneous development of these apparatuses?
  - h. What are the prospects for the spontaneous realization of the goal, given the inadequacy of both existing policymaker knowledge and any spontaneous forces operating to provide policymakers with the missing knowledge required to realize the goal deliberately? In other words, are there any spontaneous forces operating in other domains of society that might compensate for the consequences of policymaker ignorance?
  - i. What conclusions, if any, can be drawn from this analysis as to whether policymakers will earnestly pursue the policy goal?
2. What does it mean to say that every science investigates spontaneous phenomena? Why would a science of intentional phenomena serve no purpose?
  3. Why is *skepticism* the appropriate response to a determination of the inadequacy of both policymaker knowledge and spontaneous forces to the realization of a policy goal?
  4. How do knowledge and ignorance help to explain a person's incentives and motivations, and, thus, their decisions and actions? What does it mean to say that knowledge and ignorance are *logically prior* to other normative (e.g., moral, prudential, pecuniary) considerations?
  5. How might a person spontaneously make a good decision despite their ignorance of good options? How might a person unintentionally make a bad decision despite their ignorance of bad options?
  6. What does it mean to say that starting with considerations of policymakers' knowledge and ignorance rather than with motivational assumptions enriches Rousseauian and Humean analyses?

## **Book Ten**

**Book Ten Synopsis:** The *Dialogues* conclude with a brief political epistemological analysis of a real-world case. A taxonomy of the varieties of policymaker ignorance is described. A novel political epistemological



## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

argument against John Rawls' political philosophy is offered. A novel argument against utopian theorizing in political analysis is also presented.

[Thanksgiving 2009. The graduate students are gathered to celebrate the holiday. The University Administration has finalized its plans for the University's re-organization, which will involve the integration of the erstwhile Philosophy and History Departments into a new administrative entity called...]

**Andre:** "The School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry and Thought."

**Emma:** Wait – SHPIT?

**Andre:** Yep, SHPIT.

**Connor:** Morons!

**Jack:** Twice one letter from disaster.

**Connor:** What is "Inquiry" if not "Thought"?

**Emma:** It's so nice, they named it twice.

**Jack:** They really like conjunctions, don't they?

**Emma:** Yes...and uh-huh.

**Andre:** What's worse than the name – which is awful, obviously – is the asinine explanation they're offering for merging or, to use their term, "integrating," the history and philosophy departments. They seem to expect historians and philosophers to work together, to co-author together, but, unless it's the occasional history-of-philosophy paper, I don't understand why the Administration would think such "synergies" – their term – between history and philosophy are likely to emerge. Just more colleagues to not talk to. History and philosophy are both humanities disciplines, and they might occasionally refer to each other, but there's no reason to think that merging the departments will improve research productivity, which I assume is part of what's meant by "synergy."

**Emma:** *Synergy* is a business-school concept...and we know the value of business-school education...

**Andre:** Yes, we do. When I worked in business, the dumbest people and worst businesspeople were invariably the MBAs. If there was a stupid and wasteful idea to promote, it was inevitably an MBA doing the promoting.

**Connor:** From what I understand, talking to other people around campus, the Administration basically combined as many former departments into coherent or, as the case may be, semi-coherent, wholes as possible. Political science and all of the other policy-related departments

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

have been combined into one entity. Architecture, design, and all of the other former departments that do design-y kinds of things have been merged into a new School of Design. It seems like they just ran out of other departments with which to merge History and Philosophy.

**Andre:** Right. The truth is that we are The School of Misfit Humanities Disciplines. This synergy shpfit is just a smokescreen to make it seem like they have some idea what they're doing.

**Emma:** Did you say "shpfit"?

**Andre** [smiles]: See my shpfit-eating grin?

**Jack:** That's a shpitty thing to say.

**Connor:** Yeah, that's not likely to catch on.

**Jack:** Eat shpfit, you shpthead!

**Connor:** Don't make me beat the shpfit out of you...

**Emma:** What do you want to bet the name has been changed by the time we get to campus on Monday?

**Connor:** I wouldn't take that bet...

**Andre:** We're dealing with ignoramuses scrambling to conceal their ignorance.

**Emma:** Well, be a bit careful. That *is* one possible implication of the analysis we are all now committed to, but there are other possibilities.

**Jack:** Wait, what?! After all your talk, you're now denying that our esteemed President and his administrative cronies are ignorant?

**Emma:** No, no, no, I would never deny that. What I'm saying is that we have not done the analysis necessary to determine whether and to what extent they're ignorant, what their ignorance consists of, and how it influences their decisions. There are four possibilities. They might be *knowledgeable of their ignorance* how to satisfy the University's educational mission or they might be *ignorant of their knowledge* with respect to this goal. In either case, since they believe that earnest attempts to satisfy the University's mission are likely to end in failure, they face an incentive to do something other than earnestly attempt to realize this goal; it is fair to say in either case that their efforts, such as they are, are in fact aimed at the less epistemically challenging goal of merely pretending to satisfy the University's educational mission or, in Andre's terms, that they're "scrambling to conceal their ignorance." However, alternatively, it could be that administrators are *ignorant of their ignorance* with respect to some of the knowledge required to deliberately satisfy the University's mission; in other words, that the President and Deans mistakenly believe that they possess all of the knowledge required. We could not say, in this case, that the Administration was trying to conceal their ignorance, because

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

they don't believe they're ignorant. It would be closer to the truth to say that they are flaunting their ignorance...of their ignorance [laughs].

**Connor:** How can we distinguish those cases in practice? How can we tell when policymakers are knowledgeable of their ignorance, rather than ignorant of their knowledge or ignorant of their ignorance?

**Andre:** I think we would actually have to do the kind of analysis that Emma has suggested. We would have to consider the first-order knowledge required to satisfy the University's educational mission and then examine the knowledge available to the Administration. If we determined that they lacked some of the required first-order knowledge, we could at least conclude that they were not ignorant of their knowledge, since they are in fact not first-order knowledgeable. However, it would still be difficult to determine empirically whether they were second-order knowledgeable of their first-order ignorance or second-order ignorant of their ignorance. We would need evidence whether or not the Administration agreed with the analyst's dim view of their epistemic position, but the observable evidence would be the same whether they earnestly pursued or merely pretended to pursue the goal of satisfying the University's educational mission: they would appear to be trying, but would ultimately fail, to satisfy it. So...yeah. I guess I can't say conclusively that they are scrambling to conceal their ignorance. They might actually believe they are not ignorant.

**Emma:** What do we believe?

**Andre:** They're dumb as rocks. And if they don't recognize that they're dumb as rocks, then they're dumb as...I don't know, especially dumb rocks. They're dumber than the average rocks.

**Emma:** Well put, Andre. Very articulate [laughs].

**Connor:** That's pretty dumb.

**Jack:** What's the fourth possibility, Emma?

**Emma:** Huh?

**Jack:** You said there were four possibilities for policymaker ignorance...

**Emma:** Oh right. The fourth possibility is that they're not ignorant and they know they're not ignorant – that they are *knowledgeable about their knowledge* – with respect to the goal. It is only these policymakers whose incentives cannot be distorted by ignorance. Following Plato, we might call them the “true pilots of the ship of state,” who possess the knowledge required to guide the ship through any and all tempests and storms, not to mention, mutinies.

**Andre:** I think we have a similar problem here, as before, in empirically distinguishing cases of ignorance of knowledge and cases of knowledge of knowledge, right? If they are ignorant of their knowledge, they will appear to pursue the goal, and, if they are knowledgeable of their

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

knowledge, they will also appear to pursue the goal, but only this latter pursuit will be earnest, the former will be playacting.

**Emma:** There is a relevant difference though: if they know that they know, then the goal will be realized, full stop; if they are ignorant of their knowledge, they will merely playact at pursuing the goal and it will not be realized, unless spontaneous forces intervene. Thus, if the goal is not realized, we can say, albeit only *ex post*, that policymakers were definitely ignorant of their knowledge and merely playacted at pursuing the goal. If the goal is realized, then we can infer whether or not policymakers were knowledgeable about their knowledge, if we can get some grasp on whether spontaneous forces were involved in the realization of the goal. If it seems that spontaneous forces were involved, we can infer that policymakers were ignorant of their knowledge, merely playacting, and that the goal was spontaneously realized, despite their ignorance. If there is no evidence that spontaneous forces were involved, we can say that policymakers were knowledgeable about their knowledge, and the goal was deliberately realized, because of their knowledge.

**Andre:** I think what we're running up against here are the observable limits of the sort of analysis Emma recommends. We can get some empirical grasp on policymakers' first-order knowledge and ignorance by referring to the deficiencies of publicly-available knowledge relative to the epistemic requirements of some potential policy goal. And this is surely useful for all the reasons Emma has mentioned. However, a person's second-order knowledge and ignorance is no more directly observable than their motivations, so were left with only the possibility of indirectly inferring their second-order knowledge and, thus, their motivations from the results of their decisions *plus* what we can learn about their first-order knowledge.

**Emma:** All true. But the really crucial point is that, up until now, political inquiry has treated all policymakers as true pilots of the ship of state, at least implicitly, inasmuch as it has failed to account for the distorting effects of ignorance on policymakers' incentives, motivations, reasons for acting, etc., and, perhaps more to the point, to the extent it has ignored the consequences of these effects for how we should conceive of ideal government. In other words, we can infer from the fact that the motivation- and incentive-distorting effects of policymaker ignorance have heretofore been ignored that policymakers have implicitly been treated throughout the history of political thought as true pilots of the ship of state. Once you grasp the significance of policymakers' ignorance and the way it distorts policymakers' incentives, you immediately understand the utter inanity of much political philosophy. I mean, see John Rawls.

**Connor:** Hey, hey, hey. Don't speak ill of Rawls. Rawls was awesome.

**Emma:** Rawls was awesome at pointless utopian wankery. He was awesome at speculating about a world very different from our own, the significance of which may be zero for the world we actually occupy.

**Connor:** Why do you say that?

**Andre:** Ah, Emma. Just wantonly slinging crap at the twentieth century's greatest political philosopher.....God, I love you.

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Emma** [smiles]: Connie, haven't we covered this ground already?

**Connor**: I'm sorry. I haven't taken the time to think much about the meaning of your approach to politics for specific political philosophies. Either that or I'm just dense. Take your pick.

**Emma**: Both. Both lazy and dense. But, it's alright. You'll learn.

**Connor**: Your confidence is inspiring...

**Emma**: Connie, like other political thinkers, Rawls wanted to make good government consist of a particular conception of *justice*, or of political "oughts," without first considering how epistemic considerations constrain the relevant possibilities. He conjured an allegedly ideal notion of justice without any consideration of the extent to which this ideal could be realized in the real world, whether or not with the assistance of spontaneous forces. The only people who are *not* behind the veil of ignorance in Rawls' system are, apparently, the policymakers charged with realizing a political system that embodies Rawls' ideal principles of justice as fairness. But, this assumption that policymakers' knowledge is adequate to the epistemic requirements of a political system based on the principles of justice as fairness is at the very least doubtful, if not manifestly false, always and everywhere.

**Connor**: But, this has no bearing on justice as fairness *as an ideal*. Surely, justice as fairness might be unrealizable, yet nevertheless be the relevant goal at which liberal politics should aim.

**Emma**: Maybe. Frankly, I've never understood the argument that we should aim at impossible ideals. If it were the case that aiming for impossible ideals necessarily brought us closer to such ideals, if aiming for impossible ideals necessarily meant *improvement* of our circumstances, but this is not the case. Aiming for impossible ideals *in the absence of adequate knowledge or evidence of the adequacy of relevant spontaneous forces* may well lead to deterioration of our circumstances, if not disaster.

**Connor**: Yeah, OK.

**Emma**: In any case, I would think that the extent to which Rawls' proposed ideal is realizable in practice has some bearing on its status *qua* ideal. Recall how Rawls arrives at the principles of justice as fairness. He asks what principles of justice people would choose behind a veil of ignorance with regard to their respective statuses in society, their race, gender, income and wealth, their moral conceptions of the good, *et cetera*. Is it not at least conceivable that the principles of justice these people would choose would depend to some degree on their judgments concerning the realizability of systems associated with different sets of principles? In other words, if they knew that policymakers were too ignorant and spontaneous forces too weak to realize political systems in line with the principles of justice as fairness, might they choose different – more realizable – principles? The allegedly ideal nature of Rawls' principles depends on a combination of unspoken and dubious premises. In order for people in the original position, behind the veil of ignorance, to settle upon the principles of justice as fairness, they must either *not care about*, or either *believe policymaker knowledge or spontaneous forces adequate to*,

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

the realization of the political systems the founding principles they are asked to decide.

**Connor:** Ah, OK. I see what you're saying. You're not questioning the value of utopian theorizing, of thinking about the kind of political world we would consider to be ideal, were realizability irrelevant, you're just arguing that, in Rawls' case, because of the way he sets up his argument, realizability – or, more exactly, non-realizability – is relevant to the question of the principles of justice that would be chosen behind the veil of ignorance.

**Emma:** No. No, no, no. I am very much arguing for the stronger claim. Generally speaking, an unrealizable “ideal” is no ideal at all. The concept of an unrealizable political utopia is internally incoherent, because any ideal or utopian system worthy of the adjective is necessarily realizable. Call it the *anti-ontological argument against unrealizable utopia*.

**Jack:** [smiles]: Oh, god.

**Andre** [sighs]: I know where this is going. I'm going to check on the turkey.

**Connor** [laughs]: The “anti-ontological argument”? Care to elaborate?

**Emma:** Simple. Imagine two otherwise identical, purportedly “ideal,” political utopia. The only difference between the two utopia is that one is realizable and the other is not.

**Connor:** How can they be “otherwise identical,” but one realizable and the other not? What could make the difference to their distinct realizabilities but some difference in the respective utopia, making them *not* “otherwise identical”?

**Emma:** Good question, but the relevant difference need not be *within* the political programs. The difference could be that one utopia is proposed in adequate political-epistemological circumstances and the other in deficient political-epistemological conditions. One utopia might be proposed in circumstances in which policymakers possess knowledge or spontaneous forces are adequate to its realization, and the other – otherwise identical – utopia might be meant for circumstances in which policymakers do not possess knowledge, and spontaneous forces are not, adequate to its realization.

**Connor:** Right, gotcha.

**Emma:** So, the obvious question is, which of these two utopias is actually ideal? The one that cannot be realized or the one that can?

**Connor:** Clearly, the one that can be realized.

**Emma:** So, unrealizable utopia are not in fact ideal?

**Connor:** It follows...

**Emma:** And what determines the realizability of a political system?

## *Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics*

Scott Scheall

**Connor:** The knowledge and ignorance of the policymakers charged with realizing it...

**Emma:** ...And?

**Connor:** And the adequacy of any available spontaneous forces that might compensate for relevant policymaker ignorance.

**Emma:** Boys...there's hope for you both yet.

**Andre:** [shouts from kitchen]: Turkey's ready!

**Emma** [to Jack and Connor]: Shall we?

[THE END]

### **Book Ten: For Further Reading**

#### ***On the Analysis of Policymaker Ignorance in Real-World Settings***

Ludwig von Mises – “Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth,” in F. A. Hayek (ed.), *Collectivist Economic Planning*, F. A. Hayek (ed.) ([1920] 1935), Routledge

F. A. Hayek – “The Pretence of Knowledge,” in *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek, Volume XV, The Market and Other Orders* ([1975] 2014), Bruce J. Caldwell (ed.), 362–372, University of Chicago Press

Scott Scheall – *F. A. Hayek and the Epistemology of Politics: The Curious Task of Economics* (2020), Routledge

Scott Scheall and Parker Crutchfield – “A Case Study in the Problem of Policymaker Ignorance: Political Responses to COVID-19” (2021), *Cosmos + Taxis: Studies in Emergent Order and Organization*, 9 (5-6), 18-28

#### ***On John Rawls and the Original Position***

John Rawls – *A Theory of Justice* ([1971] 1999), Harvard University Press

Robert Nozick – *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974), Basic Books

Ronald Dworkin – *Taking Rights Seriously* (1977), Harvard University Press

John Rawls – *Political Liberalism*, Second Edition ([1993] 2005), Columbia University Press

John Rawls – *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (2001), Harvard University Press

Timothy Hinton (ed.) – *The Original Position* (2016), Cambridge University Press

Gerald Gaus – *The Tyranny of the Ideal: Justice in a Diverse Society* (2016), Princeton University Press

## ***Dialogues Concerning Natural Politics***

Scott Scheall

David Schmidtz – “Ideal Theory,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Distributive Justice*, Serena Olsaretti (ed.) (2018), Oxford University Press

Samuel Freeman – “Original Position” (2019), in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/original-position/>

### ***On Ontological Arguments for the Existence of God***

Anselm, St. – *Proslogion, With the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, Thomas Williams (trans.) ([1078] 2001), Hackett

Gaunilo – “On Behalf of the Fool,” in *Proslogion, With the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, Thomas Williams (trans.) ([1078] 2001), Hackett

Rene Descartes – *Meditations on First Philosophy* ([1641] 1999), Hackett

Gottfried Leibniz – *New Essay Concerning Human Understanding* ([1709] 1896), Macmillan

Immanuel Kant – *Critique of Pure Reason*, Werner S. Pluhar (trans.) ([1781, 1787] 1996), Hackett

Graham Oppy – “Ontological Arguments” (2019), in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ontological-arguments/>

### **Book Ten: Discussion Questions**

1. Consider and discuss the implications of each of the combinations of first- and second-order policymaker knowledge / ignorance with respect to some policy goal for the questions (a) whether, under their given epistemic circumstances, policymakers are likely to pursue the goal or some other course of action (including merely pretending to pursue the goal) and (b) whether, if policymakers pursue the goal given their epistemic circumstances, it is likely to be realized without the assistance of spontaneous forces?
2. Why is it difficult to empirically distinguish cases of *knowledge of ignorance* from cases of *ignorance of ignorance*?
3. What distinguishes cases of *ignorance of knowledge* from cases of *knowledge of knowledge*?
4. In what sense have the various fields of political inquiry (political science, political philosophy / theory, political economy, economics) traditionally treated policymakers as “true pilots of the ship of state”?
5. How is the nature and extent of policymakers’ relevant knowledge / ignorance significant for the conception of *justice* that persons would choose in John Rawls’ original position, behind the “veil of ignorance”?