# *Introduction*

## A Crisis of Expertise?

We seem to be experiencing a crisis of expert authority. A consensus of scientists assures us that human activity is generating a global increase in temperature. Patient, careful research by communities of people who we might expect to know what they are talking about are telling us of climate change associated with our current patterns of production and consumption. Yet others are telling us this is a giant fraud, or at best a well-intentioned delusion. The contestation of the science of climate change speaks both to the projected consequences and to the material implications of the changes that may be needed to mitigate the threat. However, it symbolises a wider problem, to do with the capacity of empowered and critical citizens to challenge and contest expert knowledge. This can be a positive development. We might welcome the decline of deference to experts and the rise of questioning of authorised views of reality, and see value in a free and full contest among conflicting viewpoints. Yet it is also deeply disquieting. We might lament the apparent politicisation of expertise and the transformation of factual truths into mere differences of opinion, and emphasise the importance of deference to the well-grounded judgements of those who know what they are talking about. Hannah Arendt, in her essay *Truth and Politics*, captures something of this tension. 'All truths', she writes, 'are opposed to opinion in their mode of asserting validity' (Arendt, 2006: 235). They are implicitly positioned 'beyond agreement, dispute, opinion, or consent' (ibid.), and they thus seem to have 'a despotic character' (ibid.: 236). Yet at the same time, factual truths are incredibly fragile. While our time tolerates, and even encourages, diversity in philosophical or religious matters, 'factual truth, if it happens to oppose a given group's profit or pleasure, is greeted today with greater hostility than ever before' (ibid.: 231). She was disturbed by the way that 'unwelcome factual truths are . . . transformed into opinions' (ibid.: 232). While she

had in mind historical facts, her unease about the fate of factual truth in the public realm resonates strongly with anxieties about scientific expertise today. These two responses capture an important tension within contemporary anxieties about the fate of expert authority in a democratic society. We clearly need scientific and expert authority in order to formulate considered collective judgements and carry out collective decisions. Yet public questioning, criticism and rejection seem to make such authority ever harder to sustain. In this book I will address the problem that expert authority poses for democratic ideals and practices, and the problem that democracy poses for the ideals and practices of expertise in government.

In its general outline, this problem is by no means new. In the nineteenth century, Alexis de Toqueville and John Stuart Mill grappled with the problem, to put it grandly, of the fate of the ideals of the Enlightenment in a modern, mass participation democracy. Enlightenment for them meant the rejection of authority in matters of beliefs, opinions and morals, and particularly the rejection of tradition and religion as guides to belief and action, as captured in Immanuel Kant's famous motto: 'Sapere Aude! Have the courage to use your own understanding!' (Kant 1991: 54). This spirit imbued the work of the early utilitarians, for whom reliance on authority amounted to 'mental slavery'. Tocqueville, however, noticed some difficulties for this view in the context of a democratic society. He argued that under the social condition of equality – which was more or less what he meant by 'democratic society' – people are not disposed to trust the authority of any man. His Americans did not readily defer to men of learning or to traditional religious authorities or political elites. Was this a case of Enlightenment heroes throwing off the yoke of 'mental slavery', rejecting dogmas and courageously using their own understanding? Not at all! Intellectual authority, Tocqueville wrote, does not – and cannot – disappear; it merely relocates. Tocqueville thus emphasised the unavoidability of what John Hardwig (1985) has called 'epistemic dependence'. But he added a democratic twist. Under America's condition of equality, Tocqueville argued, men look not to aristocracies or elites for the sources of truth, but to 'themselves or . . . those who are like themselves' (de Tocqueville 1990: 9). That is, they switch the source of their reliance to 'public opinion', a far more tyrannical master, and thus the bonds of rank and privilege are broken only to be replaced by 'a new physiognomy of servitude' (ibid.: 11).

Mill voiced a similar concern in an early essay on 'The Spirit of the Age'. The authority of the man who knows what he is talking about, he worried, is widely being rejected only to be replaced by 'the authority of the person next to him' (Mill 1986 [1831]: 15). Mill thought that a vulgar version of Enlightenment might 'bid each man to look about for himself, with or without the promise of spectacles to assist him' (ibid.: 9). In this 'age of transition', as he put it, men certainly 'reason more' on the great questions of the human condition, but they 'may not reason better' (ibid.: 7). There are particular inquiries which may be undertaken into 'physical, moral and social truths' such that some can become 'masters of the philosophical grounds of those opinions of which it is desirable that all should be firmly persuaded, but which they alone can entirely and philosophically know' (ibid.: 12). However:

> The remainder of mankind must, and, except in periods of transition like the present, always do, take the far greater part of their opinions on all extensive subjects upon the authority of those who have studied them. (ibid.: 13).

Mill was primarily concerned here with moral knowledge.[1] But his reformulation of Enlightenment for an age of mass democracy prefigures a common idea today that deference to well-grounded claims to expert authority is a precondition for the exercise of public reason and political decision. And a common lament about contemporary democracy turns on the 'erosion' of expert authority (Kitcher 2011: 15–40) and the decline of public deference to hard-won expertise. The crisis of expertise, then, has to do with the apparent tension between the inequalities in knowledge, experience and skill that characterise expertise, and democratic ideals and practices of equality and contestation.

This presents a problem for developed democracies because governance in complex, technologised societies often involves both the authority of command and the authority of expertise. Complexity and interdependence have led to more and more of the consequential decisions of governments to be framed and constrained by claims to expertise and often delegated to those with epistemic authority on the questions at hand, leading one author to write of the 'rise of the

[1] Though we should note that while he regards the subjects of morals, religion, politics and social relations as 'infinitely more complicated' than the subjects of 'natural philosophy', he did not think they differed in kind (Mill 1977b [1859]: 244).

unelected' (Vibert 2007).[2] Standard-setting committees, for instance, make decisions with respect to, say, food safety, that carry the force of law yet are grounded in their specific expertise. These decisions can be highly consequential, and for this reason expert advisory committees have been suggestively described as a 'fifth branch' of government (Jasanoff 1990). Against the insistence that science and expertise merely provide neutral knowledge for policy, it seems that expert authority is often enmeshed with the practice of political authority, and that political contestation extends to expertise and scientific claims as readily as to the programmes and policies of political parties. It is in this context that problems of politicised expertise take on their salience.

The crisis of expertise that I refer to here is focused on expert authority as it bears on or is implicated in political authority.[3] In short, nobody worries about the authority of the physicists who tell us about the Higgs boson, but we do worry about the authority of climate experts and vaccine specialists. The complex of problems that have

[2] It is worth noting, however, that Frank Vibert's argument addresses a different problem to the one I address in this book. Vibert's argument is that institutions of unelected experts serve as information sources that are not tainted by the machinery of government, which in turn shows up politicians as opportunistic spinners. The public's deference to experts, on his account, is what feeds their cynicism with regard to elected politicians. My argument, by contrast, begins from the observation of a widespread *lack* of public deference towards experts, evidenced by political struggles over the science of climate change, vaccines, GMOs and so on. The problem, on my account, is how to conceptualise and construct expert authority in a context of widespread public capacities to challenge and contest it. A further difference is that Vibert's approach insists on a sharp distinction between value judgements and the empirical component of public policy, which frames expertise as standing outside politics. My aim, which I develop in particular in Chapters 3 and 4, is to draw on social epistemology and political theory to develop a democratic model of expert authority, in which public judgement is partly constitutive of expert authority.

[3] I share this focus with Turner (2003) and Brown (2009). Turner distinguishes five types of expertise, and focuses on those that are drawn on within government and public policy rather than on the expertise involved in what he calls 'science proper'. Brown gives special attention to the problem of expert advice in government, and develops in his book an account of the democratisation of expertise in terms of the multiplication of sites and modes of representation within expert practices. Dahl (1985) frames the problem of expertise in terms of the privileged position of policy elites, and Fischer (2000) talks about the problem of the dominance of expert discourses. By contrast, Kitcher (2001; 2011), Fuller (2000) and Greenberg (2001), for instance, are more concerned with the place of science proper within democracy.

to do with public scepticism and questioning of scientific and technological projects, new risks to health and environment and the role of expert knowledge in 'technocratic' forms of government have generated local legitimation crises and brought forth creative governmental responses and institutional innovations. From the consensus conferences pioneered by the Danish Board of Technology Assessment to various minipublics to bioethics commissions, there has been a huge amount of experimentation in new forms of governance, new ways of involving publics and new ways of structuring public deliberation. We can view these innovations as at least in part a response to the crisis of expert authority, and as ways of securing or recovering the legitimacy of expertise within government. The task of this book is to reflect on these practices and relate them to conceptual questions about the relation between democratic ideals of autonomy and the value of deference to expert authority.

## Critical Elitism

These challenges to expert authority have sometimes been described in terms of a democratisation of expertise. However, I prefer not to talk of the democratisation of expertise, for two main reasons. One is that the term 'democratization' here is ambiguous. Scholars in the field of science and technology studies have often used it to describe the rise of 'techno-scientific controversies' and public contestation of expert claims and practices (Callon et al. 2009). Yet democratisation can also refer to the governance innovations, new ways of involving publics and new ways of structuring public deliberation that have arisen at least partly in response to these public challenges to expertise. That is, 'democratization' can be taken to refer both to extra-institutional political action valorised in what Mansbridge (2012) calls the 'resistance' tradition in democratic theory and to the consolidation and development of the formal institutions of democratic government. These two senses of 'democratisation' invoke two different problems of expertise in modern democracies. One problem is to do with the perception that expertise amounts to a form of unaccountable power, that expert authority is frighteningly powerful, that the licence to define reality for the purposes of political deliberation and decision grants a subtle, hidden power to experts in the policy process. The other problem, from a quite different direction,

focuses on the democratic goods of expertise, of its potential for informing and enabling collective action, identifying and anticipating consequences of policy in a complex environment and for telling truth to power. Thus, to talk of the democratisation of expertise is to mask an important tension between the goods of expertise within democratic government in the service of collective will-formation and coherent collective action, and the democratisation of expertise in the sense of the increasing capacity of citizens and associations to challenge and contest expertise.

The other reason I prefer not to talk of the democratisation of expertise is that it invokes the suggestion that expertise itself can become democratic. This prospect is viewed with alarm by some observers, who take it to imply a sort of levelling or erasure of the inequalities and exclusiveness involved in expertise (Solomon 2009; Collins and Evans 2007; Kitcher 2001). While such fears seem exaggerated, it is a confusion invited by talk of democratisation. For this reason I prefer to talk of critical elitism as a framework for understanding the ways in which expertise is *not* in itself democratic but can be integrated into a wider democratic system. The idea of critical elitism, I hope, captures the way in which expertise is distinct from and difficult to reconcile with democratic ideals and practices, but also frames the ways in which it can become open to public judgement, scrutiny and influence.

Critical elitism has three key features. First, it recognises that expertise necessarily involves inequality. I define expertise in generic terms as the possession of special skill, experience, information or knowledge rooted in the methods, norms, practices and goals of a specific community and which is recognised as legitimate by the wider society. On this relational account, expertise is a social relation among unequals, which depends on recognition by a given audience (Schudson 2006; Turner 2003; Haskell 1984). This contrasts with realist accounts, in which expertise is identified with making true statements (Goldman 2006; Christiano 2012; Fricker 1998) or possessing real skills (Collins and Evans 2007), regardless of whether they are recognised by anyone. Yet in either case, experts claim to possess knowledge, skills, information and experience that others do not. This means that critical elitism is concerned not with a conceptual levelling down of claims to expertise, to the effect that 'everybody is an expert' (Solomon 2009: 2009). Neither is it concerned with levelling up. While anybody can in

principle become an expert, limitations on time and resources mean that practically speaking there are many barriers to inclusion. These barriers have often – and rightly – been seized upon by critics of 'technocracy' (see Fischer 2000). However, critical elitism aims to make sense of the ways in which the relations of inequality involved in expertise can be maintained and yet at the same time be subjected to public scrutiny, criticism and judgement. It recognises that settlements of questions of expert authority in relation to political issues involve a range of decisions and judgements about how to frame a problem, which values to prioritise, and whose knowledge and interests to recognise and include. While recognising their fallibility and provisionality, critical elitism acknowledges that such decisions need to be made, and seeks to set those decisions against a background of critical scrutiny.

Second, critical elitism recognises the value of passivity on the part of a wider public. Debates in social studies of science about the 'democratization' of expertise are framed principally in terms of inclusion and exclusion. Harry Collins and Robert Evans, for instance, declare that one of the central problems of expertise in politics is that of 'extension': '[H]ow do we know how, when, and why, to limit participation in technological decision-making so that the boundary between the knowledge of the expert and that of the layperson does not disappear?' (Collins and Evans 2007: 10; my emphasis). Frank Fischer moves in the opposite direction along the same axis, declaring that the central problem of democracy and expertise is that of 'extending participation' (2009: 49). Brian Wynne and Ulrike Felt, in the report of a European Commission group convened to analyse the democratic implications of the 'knowledge society', describe the terrain in terms of 'invited' and 'uninvited' participation in technoscience.[4] However, whether it is limited or extended, invited or uninvited, democratisation is identified by these authors with participation. These approaches are implicitly framed by ideals of active citizenship, against which passivity appears as a problem to be overcome. However, it is worth distinguishing passivity in the dimension of judgement from passivity in the dimension of participation (MacKenzie and Moore 2016). One can be

[4] For further discussion of the debate within science and technology studies over lay involvement in expert practices, see the collections in *Social Studies of Science* (2003) and *Critical Policy Studies* (2011).

passive in both dimensions, and this is perhaps the typical image of the passive citizen. But it is also possible to make active judgements to remain passive in the dimension of participation. Passivity might be warranted where it is accompanied by active judgement and by the live possibility of choosing to engage in forms of participation, opposition and contestation. It is this possibility that I want to emphasise in the framework of critical elitism. I discuss it in the context of Mill's account of authority in Chapter 1 (see also Moore 2014), and further develop it in Chapter 7, where I discuss the interdependence and implicit distribution of labour between active and passive citizens in the work of vigilance and scrutiny of expertise. Against the participatory bias of many science studies approaches to the democratisation of expertise, with the idea of critical elitism I want to draw attention to the value of creating the conditions which can support good ways of being passive.

Third, critical elitism recognises that expertise needs to be authoritative in order to deliver its goods, but it frames expert authority as deliberatively constituted (Warren 1996; Hajer 2009). It is common to suppose, as Nancy Rosenblum puts it, that expert authority stands wholly apart from the 'liberal dynamic of trust, distrust, and judgment' and relies instead on a sense of 'inferiority and faith' (Rosenblum 1987: 112). But expert authority need not be construed in terms of blind deference. In Chapter 3, I discuss and elaborate on conceptions of authority as a hierarchical relationship that depends ultimately on the exercise of judgement of those under it, and I extend this account to conceptions of epistemic authority. In this connection I emphasise the possibility of distinguishing belief in expert claims from 'acceptance', where the latter involves the exercise of critical judgement. While in order to be effective, claims need to be accepted as authoritative; it is vital that over time and across institutions there are live possibilities for contestation and challenge. Authority, I will suggest, is not simply a 'voucher for truth', as Mill once put it, but rather a voucher for discursive justification, and it is vital for its ongoing strength that it can meet such demands for justification as are placed on it.

Critical elitism, then, is *elitist* in the sense that it involves inequality, passivity and authority, but it is *critical* to the extent that it is constituted in and depends on a context of public scrutiny and critique. While the presence of public criticism is often thought to undermine

expert authority, critical elitism recognises the potential of public criticism to strengthen expert authority. It depends ultimately on the exercise of public judgement in a context in which there are live possibilities for protest, opposition and scrutiny, and in which demands for communicative accountability can be both made and met. What I want to capture with the term 'critical elitism' is the importance of the inter-relation between expertise and the disciplinary influence of public judgement. This brings me to focus in particular on institutions and societal practices that support and enhance the capacity for public judgement.

## Expertise in a Deliberative System

I frame the democratic potentials of critical elitism in terms of ideals of public deliberation, and in particular the recent 'systemic' turn in deliberative democratic theory (Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012). The deliberative democratic tradition has long been opposed to the reduction of democracy to elections and formal representative institutions. However, part of the motivation for the 'systemic turn' in deliberative democratic theory was a sense that the field was becoming captured by a reductivism of its own. While it was natural for scholars to focus on the design and analysis of the wide range of institutional experiments taking place within many democratic regimes, those institutions were being overburdened with democratic expectations and implicitly expected to function as microcosms of democracy. Democracy risked being reduced to small-scale deliberative innovations. This meant on the one hand that there was a tendency to focus more on their internal operation than on their effects on wider public deliberation or their function within policy-making processes. And on the other, it seemed to distract from the centrality of elections and formal representative institutions to *any* democratic system (Knight and Johnson 2011: 103–104).[5] With the systemic turn, deliberative democrats

[5] Jack Knight and James Johnson thus forcefully argue against those deliberative democrats, such as Dryzek (2000) and Benhabib (1996), who would 'decenter' elections and locate democracy in the associative realm of civil society. They recognise the value of informal, oppositional and insurgent associational forms in supporting a 'vibrant democratic politics', but they emphasise the incompleteness of proposals that would 'substitute such associations for formal political institutions' (Knight and Johnson 2011: 103).

are moving away from the image of 'the best possible single deliberative forum', and focusing attention instead on the interdependence and interaction between different sites and institutions within a larger democratic system (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 1). These particular sites need not in themselves manifest deliberative democratic ideals. What matters is how they interact and support (or undermine) one another in the generation of inclusive public deliberation. The systemic approach is of particular value in thinking about the role of expertise. The idea that people ought to have equality of opportunity to contribute to deliberation on matters that affect them seems to be undermined by the inequalities in knowledge that are necessary for the analysis, regulation and management of social and technological problems. This generates difficulties for the ideal of government by discussion that is at the heart of deliberative democratic theory. As Dennis Thompson recently noted, democratic theorists have failed to show 'how to incorporate the need for expertise and technical administration in a deliberative democracy' (Thompson, 2008: 515). The idea of critical elitism aims to address the problem of how to reconcile the asymmetries of knowledge and power, the exclusiveness and the authority of expertise with the idea that matters of public concern should be open to public discussion by all affected by them. In complex, interdependent societies, expert knowledge both mediates and facilitates public apprehension of problems, yet also threatens to insulate and exclude the public from consequential judgements and decisions located in technical domains. The puzzle is how to have inclusion without collapsing the very concept of expertise, how to engage public judgement in expert practices in a way that does not reduce to populism.

The 'systems' turn in deliberative democratic theory is especially well suited to making sense of expert authority in democracy in four main ways. First, it opens up the concept of deliberation as a mode of communication. Deliberation is often understood as a mode of communication based on inclusive, respectful dialogue, characterised by the exchange of reasons and (ideally) leading to consensus. This was understood in 'classic' (Mansbridge et al. 2010) or 'type 1' (Bächtiger et al. 2010) theories of deliberation as a counterpoint to the strategic behaviour associated with the realm of electoral politics, where words are used to win battles, not to achieve understanding. Thus, many early formulations of the deliberative ideal emphasised that deliberation is a process that 'aims to arrive at a rationally motivated consensus–to find