Academics as Public Intellectuals
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This edited volume grew out of a double session on The Types and Roles of Public Intellectuals at the world conference of the International Institute of Sociology (IIS) in Stockholm, July 2005. We wish to express our gratitude to the organizer of this conference, IIS and SCAS (Swedish College of Advanced Studies) in Uppsala. The volume also follows up activities within ANOVASOFIE, Analysing and Overcoming the Sociological Fragmentation in Europe (ANOVASOFIE), funded by the European Commission, DG Research, Sixth Framework Programme, Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge Based Society (Contract no. CIT2-CT-2004-506035), coordinated from Graz, by Christian Fleck and his team. Thanks and high appreciation are also due to Jakub Lengiewicz at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, for taking care of the formatting.
The terms “intellectual” and “intelligentsia”, and expressions such as “public intellectual” and “academics as intellectuals”, have many meanings and refer to different roles, categories and practices. We therefore give an ideal-typical clarification of what is meant in this collection with the academic in the role of public intellectual, namely that the academic communicates his or her specialized knowledge in an understandable and relevant way for a public outside of the specialty. The introduction ends with a short presentation of the separate articles in the collection.

“Intellectual”: One term and many meanings

The term “intellectual” is used with a large number of different meanings, often incompatible with each other. Some have used the word “intellectual” to refer to those with a university education (see Coser 1970: xv). If we count persons with a Master degree – or above – as academics, this means that the proportion of “intellectuals” in the best educated workforces in the OECD countries is approaching 10%. Others use the term to refer to scholars, professionals and artists that are going outside of their narrow specialty (as Schumpeter 1976: 146). The first definition creates a quite large group of “intellectuals”, larger than the one implied in the second meaning. On the other hand, there are those that underline that the potential number of “intellectuals” in principle can be coextensive with the number of political citizens in a liberal democracy. They argue that any citizen, irrespective of education, can become an intellectual and influence the public agenda and definition of a certain issue in a well functioning deliberative democracy, for instance in a local community. A more common use of the term is to classify as intellectuals only those persons, with or without an academic background, who influence large publics
relatively regularly for a longer period. According to that perspective the number of intellectuals is quite restricted, comprising such persons as Jean Paul Sartre, Bertrand Russell, Guenther Grass, Edward R. Murrow1 or Al Gore.

Such a terminological situation – one word and many meanings – is a common phenomenon in the social and cultural sciences and in general public discourse. In itself this is not a problem. Because it is so common as a linguistic experience, the basic semantic insight should be widespread, and can be formalized in the semantic triangle: A single term can regularly express several different thoughts (meanings, concepts) and refer to several things (practices, states of affairs) in our common social world. Problems regularly emerge when we forget the arbitrary relationship between terms on the one side, thoughts and “things” on the other.

It is often meaningless and usually uninteresting to ask for the “real meaning” of a specific term. But for some purposes it can be an interesting and important exercise to follow the history of certain terms, and trace a corresponding conceptual history (Begriffsgeschichte). The term intellectual primarily belongs to the 20th century. It came into more ordinary use in the French language (les intellectuels) at the end of the 1890s, referring to the definition and self-definition of people – writers, politicians, teachers, and artists – criticizing the prosecution of the Jewish officer Alfred Dreyfus (see Coser 1970: Ch. 16, Lukes 1973: Ch. 17, Habermas 1989: 72-73).

The term is also used to characterize groups in earlier history before the 20th century. The group of philosophes in Europe and North America during the 18th century of Enlightenment easily comes to mind as an example. Famous persons like Adam Smith, Voltaire, Benjamin Franklin and Immanuel Kant, and a large number of less known persons, are examples of such intellectuals (see for instance Gay ed. 1973, Wills 1978, Porter 2001). The new groups of independent scholars, scientists and artists emerging in early modern Europe before the Enlightenment – related to the Renaissance, Reformation and the Scientific Revolution – have also been labeled as “intellectuals”.

Despite the fact that the term intellectual was not in ordinary use in European languages before the end of the 19th century, it can nevertheless be appropriate to use it when we look back. We have a similar situation with the term “scientist” (see second part of Kalleberg’s article). The English term “scientist” was actually first created by Wilhelm Whewell during the 1830s, but it would be strange to claim that because of that it is inappropriate to talk about Isaac Newton as a scientist. The cognitive content and the practice existed before that specific term.
It is possible to go further back in history and in the history of other macro-regions than Europe, to find the origins of “intellectuals” in one or another meaning of the term. Several scholars have pointed to the importance of the institutional and legal revolutions in Western Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when autonomous, self-governing institutions like universities, towns and professional guilds emerged. These institutions also hosted new roles and role-requirement, for instance the role of the relatively autonomous scholar (Le Goff 1957/1993, Berman 1983, Huff 1993). It is a commonplace to refer to scholars and scientists such as Plato and Aristotle and their influence on Greek society in order to refer to early “intellectuals”. Plato’s teacher, Socrates – the gadfly on the Athenian society – can be interpreted as the exemplary public intellectual (see for instance Bloom 1987: 243-312).

If we look at non-Western cultures, we can identify certain groups of systematically educated people that have sometimes been designated as intellectuals. The scholar-bureaucracy of Imperial China is a case in point. But in a critical comparison of Western Europe and China during the thirteenth century, evaluated on the basis of values and norms constituting the ethos of science, it can be argued that China lacked an adequate institutional and cultural infrastructure, with appropriate roles and stable discussion arenas where only arguments should matter (see Huff 1993: Chs. 7, 8, and pp. 22-25).

**On the academic role set and academics as public intellectuals**

Following from the insight about the arbitrariness of terms, the important task is to be precise and consistent enough in the use of terms in specific contexts. In this book we focus on “academics as intellectuals”, naturally without implying that only academics could or should be intellectuals. We focus on the task and practice of being an intellectual as an ordinary role for academics. In our terminology academics are simply persons who have got an academic education and certification, today ordinarily on the level of Master or PhD. When we speak about academics as public intellectuals, we think of the task of translating knowledge and insights out of the academic specialty so that it becomes understandable and relevant for persons outside of the specialty. In order to highlight the point about translation out of a specialty, we talk about “publics”, be they on a local level just for some persons or on higher level for many persons. It is worth noting that the use of “intellectual” in this context is in tune with the vocabulary of Parsons and Platt in their masterful description and analysis.

In our terminology one does not have to be an active researcher to be identified or identify oneself as an academic intellectual. High-school teachers trained as historians may for example use their special knowledge in public discourse in a local newspaper and thereby practice in an intellectual role, different from the teacher role. It is, however, most easy to specify the ideal-typical meaning of “academic as intellectual” if we take as our starting point an ordinary academic position in a research university of the Western type. It is generally the case that any social position (or social status) – such as being a parent, a nurse, a football coach or a professor – “involves not a single associated role, but an array of roles”, a role-set (Merton 1996: 113). Roles are institutionally located, constituted and regulated by different sets of values, norms, expectations and sanctions. Positions and role-sets in work organizations, be it industrial firms, hospitals or universities, are primarily designed to achieve efficient and reliable “production” of commodities or services that the outside society wants to have, be it automobiles, medical operations or scientific articles. The “output” from such operative production processes is the *raison d’être* of any formal organization (Mintzberg 1979: Ch. 2).

Scientists and scholars in universities function in five different roles, taking place in different arenas and contributing to different kinds of academic out-put. Academics function 1) as scientists in interaction with other scientists, 2) as teachers with students, 3) as intellectuals with citizens, popularizing specialized knowledge and use of such knowledge in public discourse, 4) as experts with clients and customers, and 5) as members of organizations with other members and relevant outside actors. Academic activity and interaction result in quite different out-puts, such as scientific articles from academics as scientists, students with an exam from academics as teachers and successful medical treatment or consultancy from academics as experts (or professionals). (See the first section of Kalleberg’s article for more on the typology.)

But which are the end-results of academics in the role of intellectuals? What is the purpose(s) of such activity, its ordinary methods and typical arenas for interaction? According to our experiences in many universities in Europe and North-America, it has become difficult for institutions and individual members to give clear answers to such questions. Two inadequate answers are often given. Firstly, there are strong tendencies to think of “intellectual” activities basically as a kind of PR, for instance for one’s own institution, discipline or research group. PR is a perfectly legitimate task in academic institutions, but it belongs to the function of
institutional governance and should not be confused with the intellectual task of individuals and institutions. Secondly, there are strong tendencies to confuse the intellectual role with the expert role. The role is then conceived as the task of producing useful services for clients, also including contributions to the commercialization of scientific knowledge, such as new processes, products or innovation systems. These instrumental tasks for clients, consumers and other kinds of users are (also) important and legitimate for academics and academic institutions, but the academic is performing such tasks in the role of expert, not in the role of intellectual.

A problem with such answers is generally a too narrow concept of the range of ordinary, legitimate roles and arenas in a liberal, pluralist democracy. During the last two decades, it has become easy to see consumers and clients and the corresponding markets and public sectors. It has become more difficult to perceive cultural and political citizens and the corresponding civil societies and public spheres. But the intellectual task of academics is primarily oriented towards cultural and political publics. As Habermas succinctly observes in a short analysis of the deterioration of quality newspapers: “Radio and television audiences are not just consumers, that is market participants, but also citizens with a right to participate in culture, observe political events and form their own opinion” (Habermas 2007). As an intellectual the academic operates in the roles of disseminator (“popularizer”) of scientific knowledge in different cultural contexts and as a debater in democratic public discourses (see first part of Kalleberg’s article).

The institutional context of an intellectual is one or another type of public forum, for instance a journal read by a general public, a newspaper with opening for public discussion, a TV-channel, a broader forum in a university, an association in civil society, an open forum in a school, a museum or a discussion site on the internet. Academics as intellectuals communicate in forums where arguments are essential. The academic is here in dialogue with other people in their roles as cultural and political citizens. The aim is to influence on the definition of cultural and political issues, and also seek to get new issues on the public agenda(s). We could also say that the aim is to strengthen the rationality in cultural reproduction and contribute to deliberative-democratic discourses (on deliberative democracy, see Dahl 1989, Elster ed. 1997). The intended end results, the out-puts, are the maintenance or improvement of cultural traditions and enlightened democratic discourses, on all levels from micro to macro. We therefore in this context speak about contributions to cultural and political literacy.
On of the public intellectuals discussed in several articles in this book, is the Swedish economist and sociologist Gunnar Myrdal. He is internationally best known for his 1944 study *An American Dilemma*. That contribution can serve as an excellent example of how social science both can become part of the broader culture and influence public policies and legal praxis. The book – two volumes and around 1500 pages - was widely read outside of the social science community. It influenced the general cultural understanding of race relations in America and the civil rights movement. The study also influenced mainstream politics and the US Supreme Court decision in 1954 to outlaw racial segregation in public schools (Brown vs Board of Education) (see Southern 1987, Jackson 1990, Eliaeson 2000b).

Academics can be active in an intellectual role. There is, however, little systematic knowledge about how widespread such activity actually is, for instance among all university academics in the member states of the OECD. In one of the few studies we have, it is documented that 70% of Norwegian social scientists at least once popularized insights, participated in public discourse or were reported in national or local media during a three years period. For this nation one can conclude that it is a relatively widespread activity also to perform in the role of academic intellectual. Kyvik (2004: 99) also documents in the same studies that “those who publish for a lay public are the most productive in terms of scientific and scholarly publishing”. The surveys also show that very few Norwegian academics only did publish for a lay audience. (See part four of Kalleberg’s article for more information). It will be interesting and important when we get the same type of representative documentation about such activity in other nations.

We may say that the specialized academic as intellectual communicates with “lay persons” if we remember that everybody in a pluralist modern society is a lay person in relation to almost all specialized knowledge fields. Consequently, one important category of people to popularize for, translating and condensing knowledge and insights from a specialized area so as to make it understandable for people outside that field, are the research specialists in other fields. Such mutual popularization between specialized researchers – for instance between economists and chemists – takes place within a horizontal, symmetric relationship, not in an asymmetrical, paternalistic one. It is a distortion of a fruitful conception of academic intellectuals simplistically to define it as monological communication with non-academic audiences.

During the last few years, there has been an important debate in American and international sociology, referred to as the debate on “public
sociology” (see especially Burawoy 2005; and the contributions in the following issue of The British Journal of Sociology). This debate highlights the importance for sociologists and other academics to popularize insights to broader publics and to participate in public discourses. The terminological and conceptual confusions in the debate also demonstrate the difficulty of creating a clear understanding of the complicated role sets and bundling of academic activities characterizing academic institutions (Kalleberg 2005).

We think it is useful to give such an ideal-typical definition of intellectual as is done here. In practice, the different academic activities in the fivefold role-set are bundled together and can often only be analytically separated. The academic is in addition also active in other positions outside of the academy. A typical academic intellectual as Gunnar Myrdal used his specialized knowledge in several other positions (and corresponding role-sets) than being active in the position of professor. He was Social Democratic member of the Swedish parliament from 1932 and minister of trade from 1945 to 1947 (see Eliaeson 2000a and the three contributions on Myrdal in this book). He was director of ECE, the UN’s Economic Commission for Europe 1947-1957, in Geneva, before he joined his wife Alva who had become Swedish ambassador to New Delhi, to work on Asian Drama. In Geneva he tried to bridge the Cold war gap in Europe, by promoting infrastructure such as road construction.

In modern liberal democracies science is an essential institution, as is art, in the common culture of society. In that way the sciences are already located in the public realm. As we here ideal typically define the role of academic intellectual, to contribute to public fora (primarily) regulated by the force of better arguments, “public” is implied in the concept of intellectual. It therefore sounds tautological to speak about “public intellectual”. There are however strong tendencies in contemporary academia predominantly to think about academics as scientists and teachers within specialized organizations, not also as intellectuals. We therefore hold on to this contemporary pleonasm.

**On the contributions**

This collection of articles is based on a double session at the conference of The International Institute of Sociology in Stockholm in July 2005. Presenters were invited to focus on sociologists as public intellectuals during the last three centuries. The papers presented were also focused on sociologists active in other fields, and on other academics than
sociologists. Gunnar Myrdal was a political economist, an institutionalist in the vein of Friedrich List, in posterity relevant both in economics and sociology. He received the new Nobel-Prize in economics in 1974, together with Friedrich Hayek. Franz Boas was an anthropologist and Otto Bauer influenced public debates in several different social positions, with insights from political science, history, social theory, economics and sociology (see Weiler and Schweiger in this book). Thomasius and Holberg, active in early European modernity, are not possible to locate in just one contemporary discipline (see Kalleberg and Stone). In some of the papers the Central and East European “intelligentsia” is discussed, a group that regularly had active participants with a background in the natural sciences. In the discussion of developments in India, insights from the natural sciences are central. The persons and themes discussed in this book are then about more than sociology and discussed in a way that we consider relevant for academic disciplines in general.

In Western universities the role of intellectual has belonged to the academic role set since the period of the European Enlightenment. Some of the articles in the collection – Kalleberg on Holberg and Stone on Thomasius – trace the lines back to this period when the modern role of academic intellectual emerged. In this period characteristic new public forums and institutions were created, such as coffee-houses, salons, associations, magazines, universities, scientific journals, theatres, newspapers and reading societies (see Habermas 1962/1989, Coser 1970).

Different types of societies are discussed in the articles – USA, Scandinavia, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Turkey, and India. In some of the articles the difficult and dramatic transformations from closed to open societies in our time are discussed, two articles on the transition in Eastern Europe from communism to post-communism, one on transformations in Turkey and one on developments in India. The contributions on Turkey and India open up for a discussion of multiple modernities (cf Eisenstadt 2004).

Six of the articles are focused on Scandinavia, including the role of Scandinavian public intellectuals outside of Scandinavia, such as Alva and Gunnar Myrdal in our time and Ludvig Holberg in the early modern period. In our view the historical and modern Scandinavian experiences is of a general interest, something that has been highlighted today with the renewed interest in the policies, institutions and cultures of the Nordic countries – Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland – now being able both to keep up well functioning welfare systems, stable democracies and high productivity and flexibility in their economies. During more than half a
century Scandinavia has had an innovating role in Europe that can be compared to the role of California in the US.

Ragnvald Kalleberg discusses sociologists as public intellectuals during three centuries of Norwegian history, starting with the influential contributions of Ludvig Holberg (1684 – 1754). Holberg was a university professor. He is the most influential role model of the academic as public intellectual in Norway and Denmark. His scholarly work was widely read and he was also able to combine enlightenment and entertainment in a large number of popular comedies. Kalleberg ends with a discussion of institutional challenges in Norway and other liberal democracies. He claims that the civil societies and public spheres of contemporary deliberative democracies are under pressure from commercialization and instrumental politics. He argues that universities, as strangely under-specialized institutions in a world of specialization, are well suited as inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional arenas for addressing the complex challenges we are facing today.

Bernd Weiler focuses on the founding father of American cultural anthropology, Franz Boas (1858 – 1942), and his critique of the American role during World War I. In his role as a public intellectual, both in the role of disseminator and debater, Boas raised and commented on a variety of contested issues, such as immigration, racism, eugenics, nationalism, imperialism, peace and war. His visibility as an academic public intellectual can be illustrated with the fact that his portrait appeared on the front page of *Time* magazine in May of 1936. Boas discussed traditions both as obstacles to progress and as empowering cultural entities to be actively maintained and further developed. Weiler argues that the tension in his work between universalism and relativism can (partially) be explained by Boas’s identity as an assimilated German Jew. Around 1900 one tenth of the American inhabitants were German-Americans. Between 1855 and 1880 New York was the third largest German city in the world, only behind Berlin and Vienna. In April 1917 USA went to war against Germany, accompanied by a strong repression of German language, music and culture in American public life. Weiler discusses how WWI made several US professors into men of war, illustrating the violations of the scientific norm of universalism, already so typical for scientists in the warring nations in Europe (see Merton 1968: 607-610).

Linda Holmås focuses on *The Norwegian Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture*, which was founded in 1922. It was established as a specialized research institute in the social and cultural sciences, with sociology in the Durkheimian tradition as a synthesizing framework. The institute was also founded to promote and restore the
international cooperation of scientists that had been severely damaged during World War I, as by nationalistic violations of the scientific norm of universalism among scientists in Germany, France and the UK. Norway had not taken part in the war and the leading idea was to create a research institution on neutral ground were scientists from the former warring nations could come together for reconciliation and scientific cooperation.

Marcus Schweiger contributes with a case study of the Austrian social scientist Otto Bauer (1882 – 1938). He was active in the spheres of specialized knowledge, politics and in general cultural and public affaires. Schweiger tries to remedy what he sees as a shortcoming frequently found in existing literature. Present research on public intellectuals is mainly concerned with academics or scholars who influence politics and society. However, little research is done on academics who contribute in positions located in different institutional spheres - scientific, political-administrative and in civil society organizations - without prioritizing one or the other. Bauer is a good example of such a public intellectual. On the one hand, Bauer was one of the most influential politicians of the Austrian social democratic party in the mid-twenties of the last century; on the other, he was a well-known and internationally renowned economist and political theoretician. A detailed investigation of his performance can therefore enable us to refine our view on the different role segments of academics acting as public intellectuals and how these segments are working together to gain public influence.

Sven Eliaeson discusses Gunnar Myrdal (1898 - 1987). Myrdal was a very successful academic public intellectual both as a disseminator and debater, influencing cultural definitions and political initiatives, especially in Sweden and USA, but also in other countries. Gunnar Myrdal was a brand name for social engineering and welfare reforms in Sweden in the 1930s and 40s, a period during which the political power and the intellectuals were closely intertwined. He never wrote his memoirs but Myrdal 1982 brings a lot of biographical information and above all a very critical perspective on the social engineering he himself pioneered in Sweden. His book, however, never became a “starter”, yet remains very informative for the understanding of the “Swedish model” in a comparative perspective; especially the American model being used as an “identity giving other” in a positive sense. He was not known for being very historical in his approach, more “Saint-Simonian” top-down than adjusting to traditions and cultural context, but in old age he emphasizes the importance of using the rear mirror when driving forward.

Hedwig Ekerwald and Örjan Rodhe analyze Alva Myrdal (1902 – 1986). Alva Myrdal combined many positions and corresponding role
sets, such as being a social scientist, a member of parliament, a minister in cabinet and an ambassador to India. She got the Nobel Peace Prize – awarded by the Norwegian Nobel Committee – in 1982 (Ekerwald 2000). At the time of her appointment as principal director of the United Nations Department of Social Welfare in 1949, Alva Myrdal was already a well-known public intellectual. Responding to a need for a more gender-sensitive understanding of public intellectuals, Ekerwald & Rodhe analyze some of the conditions of being a female public intellectual in New York in the late 1940s and early 1950s, based on an archive study of Alva’s letters to her husband Gunnar. Hard work is taxed from a newcomer, in this case a female in a male-dominated organization such as the United Nations. The lonely side of her mascot position, her inability to grip gossip, her misinterpreted democratic style and her instructions not being obeyed are other factors making her career even more remarkable.

Per Wisselgren´s chapter on academics as public intellectuals, is concerned with the role of extra-academic social research and the relationship between social science and social policy in the Swedish interwar period. It focuses on the intersection between, on the one hand, the long domestic tradition of governmental commissions and, on the other, Gunnar and Alva Myrdal’s trajectories as public intellectuals. Special attention is paid to the so-called Population Commission (1935-38), which was one of the Alva and Gunnar Myrdal’s earliest and most important works but also one of the largest and most influential commissions in the history of Swedish social policy. By analyzing the Population Commission in terms of a historically situated “trading zone” or “boundary organization”, i.e. a place where different knowledge cultures have met and spheres of action for social expertise have been negotiated and stabilized, Wisselgren argues that the Myrdals both conceptualized and re-formulated the science-policy boundary in a new way on the discursive level and practically and institutionally widened the sphere of action for social researchers.

Joanna Bielecka-Prus and Aleksandra Walentynowicz discuss the influence of social and political factors on the reception of Gunnar Myrdal’s work in Poland, biased by the changing historical context, with a rich variation in political regimes and ideological legitimacy. It is the fate of social science scholars to be victims of selective perception, and that posterity renders their works a life of their own. Myrdal is an illustrative case, and his Polish reception history a “barometer” for the shifting climates of cold war and detente. He was controversial – as was the „Swedish model“ – and his economic thought could not be constructively integrated into a social policy agenda. He was used more for support than
for Enlightenment. In the case of political economists the risk for presentist imprint in the interpretation of their work is particularly manifest. During the Cold war anything with a smack of convergence theories – indicating that Marxism was not indispensable – was anathema to „politruk”-scholars, accommodating with the regime, yet a temptation for policy analyses. This case study highlights and nuances obstacles to intellectual activity under dominant national-state-party ideology. The contribution is telling for the perils of intellectuals to generate a space for cognitive discourse, over many decades, and scholars having to accommodate with most different regimes; yet sociology survived in Poland as an endeavour with a high status in the international scholarly community.

Ken Roberts claims that public intellectuals can exist in any society where there are intellectuals, i.e. in all literate societies. Some modern societies have possessed an intelligentsia – strata of intellectuals – which have been accorded a collective recognized role, a platform from which individuals were able to establish a public reputation. He argues that these strata played a crucial role in the communist version of “democracy” in Eastern Europe during the communist period. Under post-communism such intellectual strata have disintegrated. A main argument is that the instability of the party system, lack of trust in institutions and weak civil society in post-communist Eastern Europe, makes it unlikely that these countries will ever develop into western-type democracies. But they may nevertheless produce outstanding individual public intellectuals of the Western type.

Nilgun Celebi discusses a Turkish public intellectual, the sociologist Emre Kongar (borne 1941). He comes from a modernized family and supports the Kemalist nationalists, but is nevertheless independent and difficult to classify according to established power-centers. Celebi describes and analyze him as a successful researcher, teacher, disseminator, expert and academic citizen. Before focusing on him, and in order to locate him in a broader framework, she presents a bird’s view on Turkish history. She argues that the interest shown by the Turkish public in the writings of Kongar can be taken as an indication of the Turkish public’s high regard and need for sociological knowledge.

Govindan Parayil tells a story that most Westerners know too little about, summed up like this in his introduction: Nehru and his followers of post-colonial India strongly believed in science and industry and looked at dams, industrial complexes and technological institutes as the ‘temples of modern India’. Despite the powerful counter ideology held by Gandhi and his followers that India’s destiny rested on traditional knowledge and
indigenous technologies, the modernizers prevailed. Against this background, there emerged in various parts of India, an activist agenda centered on science to build a modern society by fighting regressive social and cultural practices. There also emerged strong oppositional discourse on modern science and technology by critically analyzing the perceived problems associated with many state-led projects of modernization. The former movement could be dubbed under the slogan ‘science for social change’ and its adherents looked at educational institutions and civil society to carry out their mission. The latter movement coalesced around the idea of postmodern critique of modern science. They protested against large technological infrastructures like dams and factories, large-scale industrial pollution, the production and marketing of packaged drinks and sodas containing excessive amounts of pesticides and so on. However, the postmodern critique of modern science has been appropriated by right-wing political parties and religious fundamentalists. These “reactionary modernists” do not see any contradiction in accepting the benefits of modern science while rejecting the ethos of science. Parayil argues that the early optimism that many Indian leaders and intellectuals had in science to transform India into an equitable and enlightened state has waned.

Christopher Schlembach outlines the origins of Western intellectuality in a revolutionary momentum of Western medieval society known as the papal revolution, making the Church independent of secular control of kings and emperors (ca. 1072 – 1122; see also Berman 1983, Huff 1993). That transition brought intellect into a tensed relationship, located between the academic world and political power. It transforms the church constituted in liturgy and symbolism to a church constituted in law and logic. Within this transformation the figure of the intellectual emerges and positions itself in relationship to the worldly powers. At the same time the church is transformed into a „textual community“, which prefigures what is later on called the public. Following Edward Shils, the concept of the intellectual, the ambivalence between intellect as a power and as a virtue, is discussed.

Craig Calhoun observes that across the social sciences there are calls for academics to inform public discourse and policy. He discusses several important questions in this field. What are the different channels by which this can happen? What are the relations between academics and various intermediaries, including journalists, think tanks, and partisan policy experts? What are the relations among different publics: among scientists and broader, linked to social movements and specific issues, organized by various associations, and seeking to identify the general public interest beyond these. How can social science simultaneously engage contemporary
issues as formulated by advocates outside social science, contribute to helpful reframing of these issues, and build knowledge resources necessary for addressing issues - some not well anticipated - in the future? What are the implications of public intellectual projects for advancing social science itself?

Notes

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A widespread scientific illiteracy has been documented in the OECD nations. In survey studies it has, for instance, been shown that two thirds of the American population do not know that it takes one year for the earth to move around the sun, and half the population believe that dinosaurs and human beings lived together in prehistoric times (Sjøberg 1997: 13). Europeans are not much different from Americans. Because science is an essential element in the general culture of modern societies, studies like these document a more or less serious cultural problem in nations claiming to be knowledge societies.

Misinformation and lack of knowledge can distort democratic discourse and is therefore not only a cultural but also a democratic problem. Enlightened understanding is essential for democratic will formation (Dahl 1998: 37–40). Immediately after the election of President George W. Bush for his second term, a leading American historian, Gary Wills, provocingly asked if the leading democratic nation of the world could still be characterised as enlightened. ‘Can a people that believes more fervently in the Virgin Birth than in evolution still be called an Enlightened nation?… Respect for evidence seems not to pertain any more when a poll taken just before the election showed that 75% of Mr. Bush’s supporters believed Iraq either worked closely with Al Qaeda or was directly involved in the attacks of 9/11’ (quoted in Habermas 2005a: 122). I expect that readers of this article will be able to find comparable examples from their own societies.

Public spheres in modern democracies can be undermined and distorted by many forces, such as commercialisation, entertainment, lobbying and religious orthodoxy. A ‘deformed civic consciousness’ and ‘distorted public agendas’ are among the problems faced by citizens in
pluralist democracies (Dahl 1982: 43–47). Despite different cultural, religious and political inclinations, responsible cultural and political citizens share a common interest in stimulating the general cultural level in their society and the rationality of democratic discourse (Habermas 1996a: Chs. 7, 8).

Traditionally, Western academics have an ‘intellectual task’, a responsibility for contributing to definition of situations and rationality in public discourse (Kalleberg 2000a: 237–239). This article is focused on the intellectual role of academics, on academics as public intellectuals. The expression ‘academic as intellectual’ here simply refers to persons with a scientific education, communicating specialised (esoteric) insights from their specialty to outside (exoteric) audiences (publics), democratic discourses included.

The central actors in this article are Norwegian sociologists. The discipline is here defined so that it also includes general social theorists and ‘moral philosophers’ from early modernity. It is often useful to look back in history to get a better understanding of a social phenomenon. It is reasonable to commence an analysis of academic intellectuals in the Age of Enlightenment, opening up for a time span of three centuries. As a case, Norwegian sociology is interesting because of the size and influence of contemporary Norwegian sociology. Relative to population - 4.7 million - the two and a half thousand Norwegian sociologists today is probably larger - proportionally - than in any other nation. Perhaps, also, the influence of sociologists on the surrounding society is stronger than in other nations. That was at least an informed guess made in the mid-1990s by an international group of evaluators chaired by a Danish Harvard sociologist, claiming that Norwegian sociologists ‘quantitatively and perhaps also qualitatively /have a/ larger importance than in any other nation’ (Allardt et al. 1995: 31).

1. Historical projects of enlightenment

In mainstream sociology, traditions from Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim to Jürgen Habermas, Robert Merton and Talcott Parsons, it is argued that modern societies emerged in the north-western corner of Europe half a millennium ago. It is sociologically surprising that this happened in this macro region, the countries around the English Channel and the North Sea. For long periods, Arabic and Chinese civilisations had been more advanced than Europe, and the societies around the Mediterranean had traditionally been more advanced than those farther north. These developments cannot be explained with reference to just a
single factor, for instance technology. The Arabic and Chinese world did
have printing technology at the same time or before the Europeans, but the
new technology was not widely used and did not stimulate a revolutionary
transformation in these societies (Huff 1993: 222–226). Many of the
developments characterising the modernisation processes during this
period, were aggregated and unintended consequences of individual
actions. The classic analysis of this is Weber’s treatise (1920) on the inter-
institutional relationships between Protestantism and capitalism. His
analysis, and its further development represents one of the most robust
insights in modern sociology, able to compete with well-established
theories in the natural sciences (see Boudon 1986: 145–150, 190–197).
Another classic example of such paradoxical developments is the
productive relationship between Protestantism - especially in its puritan
variants - and the emergence of modern natural science. Science did not
emerge in spite of religion, but because of it (Merton 1938, 1968: part IV).

The three transformations and historical projects of modernity

In order to analyse the transition from pre-modern to modern society,
Talcott Parsons distinguishes between three transformations (revolutions) -
economic, political and ‘educational’ (1973: Chs. 7–9). An economic
revolution led to market societies and industry; a political transformation
created nation states, rule of law and democracy. Generally speaking, the
‘educational’ revolution refers to the development of school systems for
entire populations, where the secular sciences increasingly constituted
their primary knowledge base. These fundamental changes unfolded over
centuries. They can also be described as complex, interrelated, unfinished
historical projects (Habermas 1996b).

A fruitful element in Parson’s conception of Western modernisation is
the focus on three transformations and not the more usual two, namely the
English industrial and the French, and the American political revolutions.
Parson’s typology fits into a general model of modern societies consisting
of three institutional spheres: economy, politics and civil society. The
latter is heterogeneous, covering such institutions as families, universities,
religious associations, schools, voluntary associations and mass media. In
the terminology of Daniel Bell (1979), this is the realm of ‘culture’.
Instead of Parson’s ‘educational’ revolution we can more generally talk
about a sociocultural transformation, referring to a broad conception of
civil society and the possibilities for ‘rationalising’ and ‘modernising’ its
different institutions, practices and norms.
We can distinguish between different historical projects of modernity, consisting of three inter-related basic projects for the economy, state and civil society. The ‘enlightenment project’ primarily refers to ‘rationalisation’ of civil society and covers a broad range of fields. Examples are norms and values regulating behaviour in primary groups, norms related to freedom of speech, institutions like education, science, religion and art.

Here, the term ‘enlightenment’ is used in two different meanings. Firstly, the term refers to a specific historical period in a region. In that way we speak of the Age of Enlightenment in Europe, starting with the English Glorious Revolution in 1688, and ending with the French Revolution a century later. Understood in this way, the Age of Enlightenment belongs to the past in this region. In other nations of the world, such as India or South-Korea, the second half of the 20th century can be characterised as such an Age. Global developments during the last 150 years have made it clear that we have to distinguish between multiple Modernities (Sachenmaier et al. ed. 2002, Eisenstadt 2004), and not treat the Western version as the only one. Secondly, ‘Enlightenment’ can also be used to refer to a specific, ongoing, historical project, requiring to be actively maintained, regained and developed.

From the esoteric to the exoteric through communication in publics

Scientific institutions were essential in the formation and development of the new societies in early modern Europe (Weber 1920, Merton 1938, Habermas 1984/1987). The activities in academies and universities were esoteric. But the operations were also exoteric, motivated and designed so as to disseminate knowledge within society at large, both to be useful in economy, the military, politics, and civil society, and to stimulate socio-cultural modernisation generally. A cultural ambition in the European enlightenment period was, for example, to combat superstition of all sorts and stimulate tolerance between different religions.

The classic argument for the exoteric task of scientists was given by the towering figure of Enlightenment philosophy and social theory, Immanuel Kant. It is too often forgotten how essential Kant - as theorist of science, as moral philosopher and as social and political theorist – is for later developments in sociology. Kant is not only central in the German tradition but also an essential figure in American sociology (see Levine 1995: 253–54, 181–211). In his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant insists that scientific disciplines also are exoteric. He talks about ‘that in
/science/ which everyone necessarily has an interest’ (1781: 658). I take that to refer to our deep-seated shared knowledge-interests in relation to nature, society and culture. Kant not only presented ambitions for a future historical project. He also reflected on what had already been practised in centres of modernity, be it in London, Glasgow, Amsterdam, Berlin, Copenhagen or Philadelphia.

Communication, reception and discussion of scientific insights require adequate arenas and complementary roles, making possible the translation from esoteric to exoteric languages, from specialists to lay persons. Characteristic of modernisation is the creation of a peculiar new mode of social interaction. Habermas identified this as private people meeting in public forums (Öffentlichkeiten) to discuss issues of common interest. Publics were communication contexts characterised by a high degree of egalitarianism, openness for all kinds of topics of common interest and the opening for news people to participate in more inclusive publics, for instance as readers of periodicals (Habermas 1989: 36–37). The peculiar aspect of this new form of social coordination, was that the interaction should primarily be regulated by a specific ‘mechanism’, the force of the better argument, not by money, hierarchy, unquestionable religious beliefs, habits and traditions. If we say that exchange is a primary coordinating mechanism in the economy and (hierarchical) authority in the state apparatus, we can say that argumentation is a primary coordinating mechanism in civil society. Persuasion with public arguments is not only important in democratic discourse, but generally in opinion formation and interpersonal influence of all kinds.

Kant not only insisted on the motto saupere aude, dare to think for yourself, without being under tutelage of anyone (1784: 54); he also insisted on the importance of daring to think together with others, in dialogues and discussions in publics. His claim was based on a sociological understanding of the difficulty of thinking alone: ‘It is difficult for each separate individual to work his way out of the immaturity which has become almost second nature to him’. Therefore, publics are essential, be they specialised in science or more general: ‘There is more chance of an entire public enlightening itself. This is indeed almost inevitable, if only the public concerned is left in freedom’ (Kant 1784: 54–55).

According to Habermas, such public forums did not exist in England before the end of the 1600s and in France until the beginning of the 1700s (1989: xvii). In his modern classic, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1989/1962), Habermas primarily focused on publics connected to the arts and political discourse. He could also have focused
The complex role-set anchored in the structural position of a contemporary university academic as a professor, also includes exoteric roles, such as being an expert (for instance a therapist or consultant), or contributor in cultural and political discourse. In such roles, the specialist has to be able to communicate with non-specialists, be they clients such as patients in psychological therapy, or organisational leaders wanting to improve the efficiency of their organisation, or cultural and political citizens.

When academics communicate with publics as intellectuals, they interact with other people in their roles as political and cultural citizens. The primary task is not to sell something or make something visible (PR), as may be reasonable and legitimate tasks for the same persons in other academic contexts. The task is to contribute with scientific knowledge to lay people outside of the scientific specialty; and to public discourse. ‘Lay’ people here includes all kinds of non-specialists, also specialists in other esoteric specialties than that focused, as for example geologists in relation to sociologists.

Any particular position in a social structure, such as a mother in a family, a nurse in a hospital or a professor in a university, is not the basis for just one role, but an ‘array of associated roles’ (Merton 1968: 423). The social status or position is the structural basis for a role-set. The mother is engaged not only in interaction with children, but also with her husband, the immediate family, friends and neighbours, to mention just some. The nurse regularly interacts with patients, different types of colleagues, leaders, or friends and family of the patient, where the different relationships require different abilities.

The structural position of the university academic, such as a professor in a research university, is the basis for a fivefold role-set. The academic is researcher, teacher, intellectual (populariser and participant in public discourse), expert in relationships with clients, and member of a disciplinary institution (with governance responsibilities) (Kalleberg 2000a: 229–32, 2005: 388). The roles in the set are interrelated and contain several sub-roles. The teacher role, for example, includes that of lecturer, supervisor, participant in seminars and censor.

In the exoteric conversations with people in broader publics, it is useful to distinguish between two sub-roles under the intellectual role, which we