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Journalism as Procedure, Journalism as Values
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Introduction

Historical research has shown that Anglo-American journalism, at least in its "informational" form (Schudson 1978) is in part an inheritor of Enlightenment values (Anderson 2018; see also Mindich 2000; Ward 2006). Part of this Enlightenment commitment can be seen in journalism's embrace of procedural mechanisms for determining social truth, alongside a professional belief in the importance of institutional fora as the field in which these procedures play themselves out. In other words, one of journalism's primary values is its' belief in process. The difficulty lies when these processual values contradict other values also inherited from the Enlightenment tradition. This, I argue, is the situation in which Anglo-American journalism finds itself today, and untangling the conflict between processes and values constitutes the primary challenging facing the profession in the 21st century. In this, journalism can serve as a case-study of the crisis facing Western democratic institutions in general.

In this brief overview, I want to compare the proceduralism of journalism to several other forms of procedural democratic practice— voting, deliberative democracy, and participatory culture. I next highlight the manner in which journalism's practices and professional codes embody a certain type of procedural faith in the clear separation of facts from values and compare journalism to science, its' epistemological cousin. I invoke two Cold-War era figures—J. Robert Oppenheimer and I.F. Stone as a way to tease out what happens when a faith in proceduralism fails, and conclude by discussing how the present political moment highlights tensions that lie at the heart of journalism's liberal, Enlightenment project.

Proceduralism and Democratic Decision Making

Liberal democratic practice, as well as the communicative processes that underpin democratic life, can be generally understood as *proceduralist* in nature. By proceduralist I refer

to the notion that, while modern pluralistic democratic states cannot reasonably agree on any substantive conception of justice that could command agreement from the entire society, they can be expected to agree on certain democratic procedures to ensure that political outcomes are largely viewed as fair or legitimate. While I do understand that within modern political theory this argument about substantive and procedural justice is a nuanced and controversial one[1], for the purposes of this very short article I will simply assert that both *voting* and *deliberation* can be primarily understood as normatively valuable procedures whose processual orientation serves to bracket larger and more substantive questions of justice. Modern liberal democracy, in short, is concerned with fair means, not with just ends.

Consider, for instance, voting. The fundamental tenet of the modern democratic process is that voting itself must be as free and fair as possible, with various possible state interventions designed to ensure a level playing field, but that the outcome of any vote is itself "just" insofar as it accurately reflects the "will of the people." What the people voted for is ipso facto just, regardless of the substantive outcome of that vote. Of course, this is an extreme exaggeration, as most liberal democracies possess constitutions and bills of rights which enshrine various normative goods into law and set them at a remove from the possibly fickle will of the populace. Nonetheless (and as the recent history of illiberal democratic regimes in Turkey, Russia, Venezuela, and parts of Eastern Europe attest), substantive political legitimacy adheres to the voting process itself. Or take deliberation, which is often portrayed as the counterbalance to mechanistic and aggregative voting. But *deliberation* (especially in its Habermasian form) can also be seen, in McCarthy's terms, as a "proceduralist conception" of democratic decision making. In other words, for Habermas, deliberation is less about outcomes than it is about ensuring a particular set of ethical understandings and normative practices that help ensure a rational and legitimate outcome.

Communicative Practices as Procedure

[1] The publication of John Rawls' *Political Liberalism* in 1993, alongside the growing appreciation of Habermas in Anglo-American philosophical circles (1989), generated a voluminous debate in the 1990s about the degree to which these philosophers balanced substantive conceptions of the good with a basic faith in democratic procedures. It is far beyond the scope of this article to capture the depth pf this debate here; but see, for example, McCarthy (1994) and Cohen (1994).

As already noted, here is a well-trodden literature in political theory probing the minute differences between representative, deliberative, communitarian, and liberal proceduralist forms; communication and journalism, on the other hand, are usually not thought about in these terms. A strong argument can be made, however, that much of the public discussion about both the affordances of the internet as well as the underlying belief systems of a great many professional journalists embraces a proceduralist notion of communication and its relationship to democratic life (see Kreiss 2016 for the strongest and most detailed analysis of this position).

The early years of the internet were marked by an excitement that the relatively low costs of digital content production, combined with the ease through which such content could be distributed, would mark of flourishing of creative practices more generally. Scholars like Yochai Benkler (2006) and Henry Jenkins (2008), along with more popular writers like Clay Shirky (2008), combined legal, economic, and socio-cultural strands of scholarship to sketch a 21st-century information utopia in which a relatively bottom up stream of digital content circulated relatively friction free, could be combined with other cultural products, and would be enabled by a relatively permissive copyright regime. Although the underlying political philosophy in which these ideas were grounded was never entirely articulated (although see Benkler 2002), the general background seemed to be an Americanist "marketplace of ideas" framework in which the more ideas in circulation at any one time, the greater the likelihood that truth would emerge from an open and transparent clash of perspectives. Also embedded in these notions of the participatory internet was a proceduralist concept of communication in which the *normative values* or purposes of digital participation were bracketed in favor of a focus on giving the greatest number of people the ability to engage in creating their own content. Coming, as it did, from the geek-dominated countercultural chat rooms of Silicon Valley the ultimate purpose of all this media making was never really questioned; it was widely assumed that norms of digital participation would combine some elements of rational, edgy expressive, diverse, and "reasonable" values, all of which would ultimately grounded within the liberal consensus that dominated writing about the internet in the mid and late 2000s.

Mainstream journalism, though often framed in opposition to the DIY ethnos of the internet, shares this notion of procedural justice. Indeed, this bracketing of values in favor of processes is exactly how many media scholars have defined professional objectivity (Schudson 1978). For American journalists, at least, truth emerges via reportorial methods, a reasoned consideration of all sides of a debate, the amassing of evidence, and the fair presentation of opposing arguments. Citizens are perceived as some combination of rational, autonomous, and self-interested actors who must be trusted to decide for themselves what the normative implications of a particular story might be. The values that might emerge from these reportorial practices (or what, in Jay Rosen's words, "journalism is *for*" [Rosen, 2000]) are not considered. If journalists get the practices and procedures right, then truth (and even justice) can take care of itself.

Conclusion

I argued in the opening section that this clash between normative substance and procedural justification represents the most significant challenge for journalism in the early years 21st century. To conclude, I want to briefly discuss three reasons why this is so.

First, it is fair to say that the post-Cold War interregnum in which democratic procedures could automatically result in relatively benign normative outcomes has ended-- on the Internet, in journalism, and in the world. The internet is increasingly seen as a toxic cesspool in which a variety of bad actors manipulate participatory procedures in order to achieve anti-liberal ends (Marwick et. al 2018; Anderson and Revers 2018). The American election of Donald Trump, the rise of China, and the emergence of democratic and populist regimes in Eastern Europe, Turkey, and Italy has challenged procedural hopes that either voting or deliberation might be enough to stand in as a bulwark for liberal norms and values. Faced with these developments, professional journalists are increasingly wondering if they ought to "take a stand" in defense of their Enlightenment beliefs.

The persistence of participatory culture, however, demonstrates that these is a deeper tension embedded in the way citizens of the West think about communication. Supposedly

marking the beginning of a radical shift in our understanding of the point and purpose of DIY media production, it turns out that it is possible to fold the digital participatory moment into a longer story about the way that political values are almost always subordinated to procedural ends. The ideology of Facebook ("empowering community"), Google (governed by black-boxed algorithms), and Twitter (which struggles with free-speech questions on a daily basis) demonstrates that the governing ideology of our time remains procedural, with the twist that these procedures are increasingly socio-technical and computational in nature.

Finally (and I admit this point is largely speculative and anecdotal) my time spent with younger people-- either in the classroom or virtually on social media—convinces me that there is an increasing generational impatience with proceduralism and a longing for the anchor of normative values. Whether the topic at hand is a discussion of professional journalism, free-speech, rampant sexual harassment, police brutality and deeply embedded racism, or the other myriad topics that dominate public conversation today, "process" is often viewed as a cop-out or an attempt to avoid the real issues at stake. I must admit that I occasionally feel discomfort when confronted with these sorts of arguments. But it would be foolish dismiss them out of hand. Professional journalism, also, is increasingly faced with these tensions between ends and means, between values and procedures. It would be the height of arrogant foolishness to ignore them.

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