BRINGING THE NORMATIVE CONTENT INTO (PARLIAMENTARY) TA

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PTA AND THE DEMOCRATIC IDEAL

Parliamentary Technology Assessment (PTA) as an attempt of modern societies to overcome a technocratic approach in Research and Development policies and to democratize the governance of new and emerging science and technologies.

- Evolution from top-down towards bottom-up approach (Smits et al, 2008)
- From goal of early warning to one of providing options for policy development (Van Einjdhoven, 1997)
- Interactive and participative approach of TA (see DBT, Klüver et al, 2000)
- Focus "product" of TA, the "process" of TA is considered as valuable in itself (van Eijndhoven, 1997)

TA progressively enacted a series of expectations regarding the emergence of a (more) deliberative democracy within representative democracies.

HOWEVER,

- participation is considered as much as traditional expertise subject to framing conditions (Blok, 2007; Bruun Jensen, 2005),
- pervaded by power relations (Mouffe, 1993, 2000), vulnerable to strategic behaviour (Van Oudheusden, 2012)
- organised as a lab experiment controlled by professional participation specialists (Bogner, 2012)
- aiming at reducing the diversity and being too often consensus-oriented (Horst and Irwin, 2009).
- influenced by the normative choices of social scientists when engaging in TA participatory practice (Van Oudheusden and Laurent, 2013).

>> participation and deliberation do not equate to democratization of the decision-making process.

FURTHERMORE: CRITIQUES WITHIN TA

- "normative deficit" in institutional (participatory) forms of TA (Grunwald, 1999)
- It privileges stakeholders' *factual acceptance* and dodges evaluative exercises on the *normative acceptability* of technologies

Bargaining takes the factual preferences and values of the concerned parties as valid merely because they are factually given – a kind of naturalistic misconception, which neglects the necessity to argumentatively legitimate actions, and decisions [...] factual acceptance is, indeed not sufficient to allow conclusive decision as to the normative acceptability. (Grunwald 1999, 175)

- value-related positions or "lay" questions on the good life are restricted to the subjective sphere (see also Sclove 1995; Swierstra and te Molder 2012)

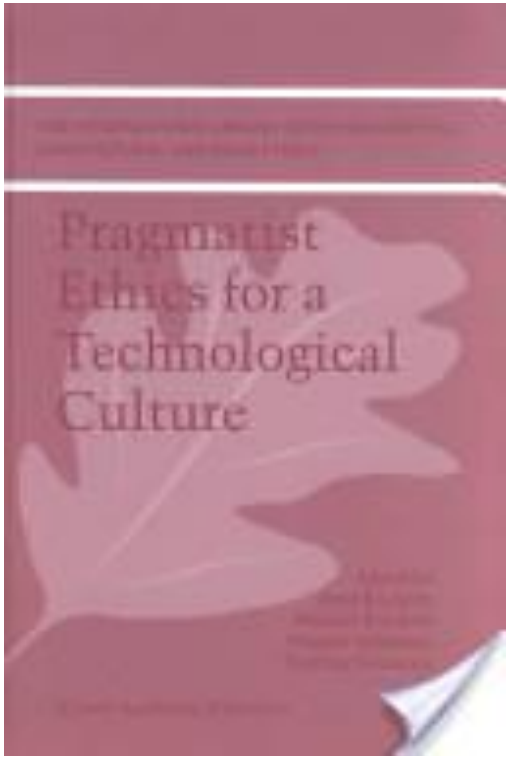
THEREFORE,

whereas PTA seems to strive towards a strong normative ideal of deliberative democracy, many questions and criticisms arise concerning

- how the normative ideal of deliberative democracy is enacted in/through PTA
- its engagement with questions of “normative acceptability” of emerging technologies

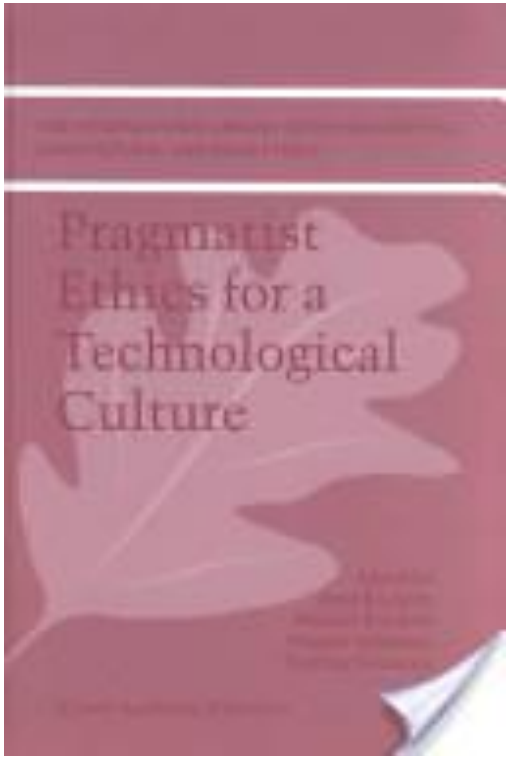
PRAGMATIST ETHICS MEETS TA

- John Dewey, William James, Richard Rorty
- no prior universally valid normative principles. some values are considered as “right” because they work in a particular context
- Morality: unquestioned values, traditional concepts
- Problematic situation generates the need to discuss the values, and find workable solutions
- Keulartz et al 2002: pragmatist ethics as an approach to understand our technological culture
- Technology creates problematic situations and shapes (and is shaped) by morality



PRAGMATIST ETHICS MEETS TA

- Pluralism without relativism (or descriptivism/factual acceptance)
- Habermasian facilitation of the process of deliberation and opinion formation (like PTA)
- Foucaldian sensitivity to power-relations and ideologies in interactions among subjects: need to articulate the reasons, make the meanings explicit, and show "to what people who use and apply concepts are committed" (de Vries 2002: 154)
- Beyond the process of deliberation: trigger the discussion of all relevant arguments and alternatives (Thompson 2002)



PRAGMATIST APPROACH TO TA

Pragmatist ethics provides a framework that can help TA to promote a more substantial intervention in the process of deliberation on emerging technologies. Such an intervention can be done in three ways (Keulartz et al 2002):

- defining the nature of the problem (mutual shaping of technology and society)
- sketching possible future scenarios identifying emerging "problematic situations" at an early stage of the technological development (beyond the current accepted values promoted by the technology)
- making actors more reflexive about their normative vocabularies and question whether these morally accepted ways of speaking require to be revised

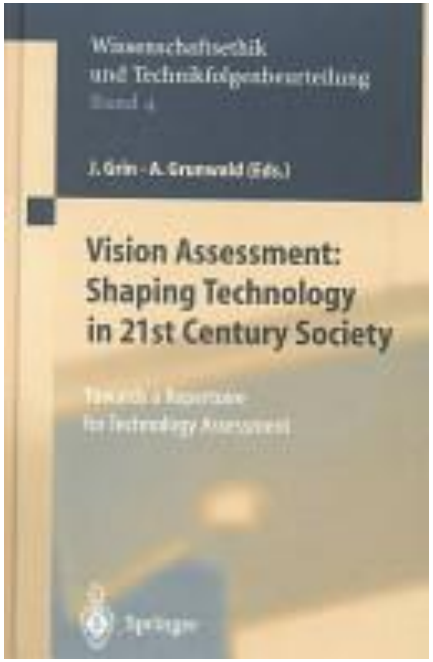
EXPECTATIONS AND VISIONS

Need for assessing the quality of the information that enters the space for deliberation:

- Technoscientific expectations are *visions* that “reflect the values, worldviews and deep preferences of those who hold them" (Grin and Grunwald 2000: 11) and they contain assumptions on what is a “desirable” world.
- *Leitbilder* or guiding images (Dierkes et al 1996, Grin and Grunwald 2000) are shared by different actors and “guide” their action and interactions
- Need to "uncover and critically examine visions, expectations and perspectives underlying the development and use of the technology" (p. 62).

VISION ASSESSMENT

- interactive approach that consists of broad consultations with the expected users of the technology and compare them with the visions of the technology developers (Grin and Grunwald 2000)
- stakeholders are asked to debate standards and criteria of merit of the technology, to discuss problem definitions and possible solutions, to envision the contexts of use of the technology, and describe the "desirable final state”
- making the values that guide the assessment of emerging technologies explicit and discuss them (opening up metaphors and vague concepts of desirability)



IN CONCLUSION

two trends have been dominant in modern Western societies:

- a democratization of the process of assessing technologies,
- an inclusion of “broader” ethical concerns in such assessments.

An assessment of the desirability of emerging technologies has a normative significance that deserves to be explicitly addressed.

Our paper encourages TA practitioners and scholars to engage with normativity rather than avoiding normative questions.

We suggest that pragmatist ethics (Keulartz et al. 2004) and Vision Assessment (Grin & Grunwald, 2000) can provide conceptual and methodological tools to address substantial and procedural aspects.

Thank you for your attention!

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