Qualitative Transparency Deliberations

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SETTING THE STAGE

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SETTING THE STAGE

Posted: **Wed Sep 07, 2016 9:06 pm**
by **Marcus Kreuzer**

I. Points of Departure

Academic disciplines, like Political Science, are evolving and conflicted institutions and discourses. With the discursive domains and institutional pressures of such academic operations, individuals and groups struggle to make the world knowable by mobilizing certain techniques for framing research questions, organizing and analyzing data, accrediting forms of explanation, and valorizing modes of argument in contention with each for recognition and valorization of their knowledge production. Training within a discipline involves acquiring specific capacities to perceive the world usually through accredited disciplinary categories and then working to study phenomena perceived in this manner through routinized research procedures. Although specific research paradigms change over time, many particular fundamental research heuristics persist. Providing concepts, definitions, and hypotheses to orient the practices of each researcher, a fundamental research "heuristic" involves a shared set of assumptions so central to a mode of analysis that they cannot be jettisoned. Since 2009, collective discussions as well as institutional directives, surrounding Data Access and Research Transparency (DA-RT) in political science, have sought to establish "transparency" as a central heuristic for all research in political science. As articulated in the 2012 APSA Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science, "Researchers have an ethical obligation to facilitate the evaluation of their evidence-based knowledge claims through data access, production transparency and analytic transparency so that their work can be tested and replicated."

In the first stage of the Qualitative Transparency Deliberations (QTD) launched by the Qualitative Research and Multi-Methods Section of the APSA, diverse scholars raised a range of concerns about the epistemological and ontological assumptions embedded in the conception of transparency, because the idea strikes many as biased, incomplete, and superficial in too many ways. These included:
[1] Concern that the discourse on transparency seems to imply a popular, albeit problematic, positivistic conception of objectively-similar knowers seeking truth. As a metaphor, transparency suggests there is a discernable fixed world that can be known, if all the knowers can perceive the world accurately, and that all knowers will perceive the world in the same way. Careful research thus expunges distortion.
[2] Concern that automatic assumptions about idealized and undifferentiated knowers mask the many complex ways that particular research methods construct rather than discover their objects of research.
[3] Concern that emphasis on replication as the purpose of enforcing transparency privileges the analysis of particular routinized or institutionalized aspects in political life, and thereby undervalues the study of contested, disruptive or unique political events.

II. Second Stage of Deliberation

In this second stage of QTD, the Working Group on Epistemological and Ontological Presuppositions (Marcus Kreuzer, Villanova, Timothy Luke, Virginia Tech, Craig Parsons, University of Oregon, and Antonio Vazquez-Arroyo, Rutgers University) elaborated these concerns into three groups of questions that serve as multiple entry points into the discussion. They overlap substantially, but allow participants to intervene at several different levels as they so choose. Interventions that take the discussion in other directions are also welcome.

The questions come under these headings:

- Comparative merits of competing epistemological assumptions.
- Placing DA-RT criteria in a broader context of knowledge production
- Elaborating multiple/alternative criteria for journals to apply

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