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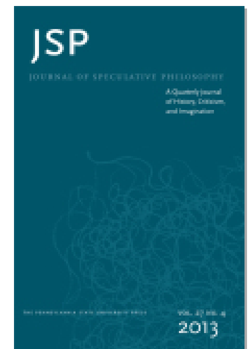

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The Stakeholder Game: Pleadings and Reasons in Environmental Policy

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ABSTRACT: A commitment to receive input from stakeholders is often obligatory in the crafting of environmental policies. This requirement is presumed to satisfy certain conditions of democracy. In this article, by drawing from pragmatism, we examine the logic of participation and prerequisites of the meaningful game of asking for and giving reasons. We elaborate the nature and significance of three components—the game, the pleadings, and the reasons. We conclude by offering the conditions under which the stakeholder game might be considered legitimate.

KEYWORDS: pragmatism, policy, stakeholders, participation, reasons

The Matter of Stakeholders

A commitment to receive input from stakeholders is often obligatory in the crafting of environmental policies. This requirement is presumed to satisfy certain conditions of democracy. The need for stakeholder input is quite intuitive; public decision makers want to know what their constituents—or at least a limited number of them—think about certain issues. At the same time, individuals, groups, communities, and various interest groups want to learn about the plans that authoritative agencies have concerning those things that affect their daily lives. In light of this widespread commitment to stakeholder input, it is surprising that little attention has been paid to

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the necessary conditions under which participation from stakeholders represents a logically valid game of reason giving. We argue here that these necessary conditions can be quite severe.

Research concerning the deliberative and discursive aspects of democracy is pertinent to environmental policy as an alternative to rationalist expert-driven approaches (Dryzek 1990). First, complexity, pluralism, and the importance of local knowledge (Berkes 2007; Connolly 2005) suggest that stakeholders can contribute essential and creative ideas to the design and evaluation of specific projects (Bäckstrand 2006a). Second, the evolution of democratic ideals requires collective input to establish the legitimacy of certain policy actions (Bäckstrand 2006b; Dryzek 2004). Third, when those who are inclined to oppose particular actions can be persuaded to reconsider their position, chances for more orderly and predictable social change improve (Innes and Booher 2010; Young 2001). Finally, corporate governance protocols, in which shareholders play an important role, have also been adopted in public policy considerations: stakeholders and shareholders can be analogical (Matten and Crane 2005; Thomas and Poister 2009).

Of course, this final point highlights one of the contradictions in the stakeholder game. Shareholders in a corporation are the essence of stakeholders. Obviously, they have a financial stake in how their investment performs, and there is a direct—though often contested—connection between the actions of corporate leaders and the financial return to stakeholders in those corporations. However, this essential nexus is not present in many public projects in which the alleged benefits and costs are diffused, not well identified, and often speculative. In these more complex choice situations, the known connections that are necessary for *informed* argumentation are largely missing.

Surprisingly, not much research exists on the *logic* of stakeholder involvement and participation comparing these two arenas—the public and the private. Without clear evidence of the logical imperative for stakeholder input across these two domains, public-sphere stakeholder input may well violate the very goals it is intended to achieve. That is, stakeholder input can easily lack legitimacy. Here, we explore the conditions under which "hearing from stakeholders" can be considered justified. And, by implication, we discuss the conditions under which stakeholder input is impertinent.

We will address the problem of stakeholder input from three perspectives. First, we will discuss the nature of the stakeholder game itself.

We will then turn to a discussion of the stakeholder as pleader and as reason giver. We will close with an elaboration of the necessary attributes of the reasons offered up by stakeholders. All three components—the game, the pleadings, and the reasons—must satisfy certain conditions if the input from stakeholders is to be considered valid and edifying for those officials required to conduct public hearings.

Investment in a Game

When official bodies, authoritative agents, engage in a dialogue with stakeholders, the process represents an affirmation of a specific routine that comprises both the strategic and the substantive aspects of democracy. Participants are invested in a game of asking for and giving reasons. The concept of investment implies that all participants consider the commitment to be worth the effort.

In northern Europe and in the United States this activity is routine—perhaps even ceremonial—because it is conducted according to strict legal requirements, even though meaningful input is often lacking (Cornwall 2004). The routine dimension is found in the elaborate protocols of public noticing, registration, and solicitations addressed to all plausibly pertinent individuals to appear in person or to submit testimony. The purpose in such exercises is to inform the alleged "public" about what we shall call authoritative intentions. Obviously, if all affected individuals were to appear at a public hearing, the system would choke on the chaos. However, in terms of written comments, the more actually received, the more "successful" the stakeholder input. Often, substantive issues are overwhelmed by cascades of standardized claims of support for or opposition to proposed actions on the part of the authoritative agents.

For stakeholders, participation is hardly routine or ceremonial. Unlike authoritative agents, for whom public input has an obligatory aspect, stakeholders often welcome the opportunity to engage in the realm of "rational" public policy making—they are invested in the game. For them, participation in the game has a clear and noble purpose—to express an opinion and to participate in the formation of the collective will. At the strategic level, information is indeed conveyed from stakeholders to authoritative agents and in the opposite direction. That is, authoritative agents will indicate what information is pertinent to their current deliberations, and stakeholders

will submit that information—often in quite detailed form. Stakeholders will also offer information and opinions on aspects that might not have been solicited. This information may help to fine-tune the details of alternative courses of action. At a substantive level, the information from stakeholders often responds to specific requests concerning proposed actions, and committed stakeholders generally seek to provide complete and honest information explaining their views on those actions. This presumes that the conjoint action to define and design the ends-in-view would not exist without the collaborative input of stakeholders (Dewey 1927, 320–50). Often, this collaboration can define and even shape the ends-in-view (Forester 1999, 115–53). The authoritative agents often acknowledge that the particular nature of the problems in question entails that the public—or a specific subset—may have important insights concerning a particular problem and the best solutions to it.

Recognizing that authoritative agents hold the trump card in terms of official status, stakeholders generally frame their presentations as *requests* rather than demands. However, it is necessary to understand that the claims being advanced are competitive in nature. Stakeholders are not playing a game against the authoritative agent per se. Rather, they are playing a game against other stakeholders, their interests, and their deontic powers. The purpose is always to affect—to alter—the assumptions of authoritative agents concerning the future. The purpose is also to affect the intentions, relative powers, and opportunities of other players of the game of reason giving. Depending on how stakeholder involvement and participation are arranged, hearings and collaboration redefine the space of opportunity and the conditions of organized and unorganized collective actions. To a certain extent, the voices of the public and of the authoritative agents are constructed and redefined in the course of this formal collaboration.

Stakeholders are intentional agents (Anscombe 1963). The act of intending carries with it conditions that resemble those required for any credible speech act. This leads to the following proposition about the nature of the stakeholder game:

P1: Investment
A stakeholder is an individual or collective agent that is invested in the game of reason giving.

Imperative Pleadings

In the stakeholder game, reason giving is the act of making a truth claim to an authoritative agent who possesses the legal capacity to recommend (or to undertake) specific actions. A truth claim cannot be just an assertion—it is an assertion backed up by justification for that assertion. A truth claim is a declarative sentence with the presumption of truthfulness. Truth claims take the following general form: *I want Q because R*.

Drawing on Davidson (2001, 5), we say that *R* can serve as a primary reason for advocating action *Q* under the description *d* only if *R* consists of a "pro attitude" of the stakeholder toward actions with a certain property and a belief of the stakeholder that *Q*, under the description *d*, has that property. A pro attitude may be an intentional state such as desire or an intentional entity such as an obligation. A pro attitude motivates the action, whether internally or externally. In addition, when we explain our action by giving reasons for it, we are redescribing the action. And when we explain an intended action by giving reasons to do it, we are both rehearsing and prospectively imagining that action. Reasons are actually or potentially effective. Explaining past or future actions places those actions in a pattern, and thus the actions become explicable—understandable to others. But of course this does not answer the question of *how*, exactly, reasons explain actions, since the pertinent context or pattern contains both reasons and actions (Davidson 2001, 10). Reasons are beliefs and attitudes.

But reasons are peculiar beliefs and attitudes: "Reasons are both propositional and relational. In order to be a reason an entity must have a propositional structure and it must be related to something else that also has a propositional structure and for which it is a reason" (Searle 2001, 114). Reasons provide "because" answers to "why" questions. Notice that there are three types of because answers. First, facts give reasons (I carry an umbrella because it is raining). Second, reasons can be intentional speech acts revealing desires (I want to remain dry in case it rains—therefore I am carrying an umbrella). Third, reasons can be speech acts indicating obligations, commitments, needs, and requirements (I must remain dry, which is the reason I am carrying an umbrella [Searle 2001]).

Here *Q* can be a desired end, or it can be an instrument ("effector") to achieve some end desired by the speaker. If *Q* is an end, then *R* takes six possible forms: (1) *Q* is desired by me; (2) *Q* is desired by us; (3) *Q* is socially

desired; (4) to me, *Q* is better than ~*Q*; (5) *Q* is better than ~*Q* from our perspective; or (6) *Q* is better than ~*Q* from a social perspective. Notice that only #1 and #4 qualify as legitimate truth claims. That is, the speaker can assert #1 and #4 as the truthful expression of his or her mind. Items #2 and #5 are shared desires based on collective intentions. They can be truthful but need not be so. Items #3 and #6 are public reasons or wishes that the speaker hopes will be thought true by authoritative agents. Items #2 and #5 presume cooperation among agents.

On the other hand, if *Q* is an instrument to some desired end, then *R* describes that end. Here, *R* can be a desired end held by the speaker or by the collective of which the speaker is a part, or it can be a desired end that the speaker attributes to the broader public. As above, if *R* is a desired end of the speaker or of the collective, then it qualifies as a truth claim. If, however, it is an attributive claim, then its provenance is merely personal, and its credibility in the current setting is necessarily defective.

But there is yet a more serious problem with *Q* and *R* as ends. In either case, the assertion wishes for authoritative agents to accept the speaker's presumptive account of a future state of the world (*Q*) and the proffered reasons why this will be so (*R*). Here, reason giving will consist in stakeholders offering descriptions of future states of the world if only *Q* or *R* could be realized. Recall that such descriptions of future states are, when expressed by stakeholders, willful predictions, or they are the results of the exercise of practical wisdom. More completely, assertions by stakeholders to authoritative agents comprise not just descriptions; those assertions are also prescriptions and predictions. Stakeholders are saying, "Do X, and Y will happen. I want Y to happen, and you should too. Therefore, do X."

The canonical truth claim from above (*I want Q because R*) becomes: *I want Q because R—therefore you should too*. Embedded in such claims is a description of *Q* or *R*, a prediction about future states of the world, a prescription that the authoritative agent should act so as to bring about *Q* or *R*, and an initial attempt to construct the collective commitment to engage in *Q* and *R*.

Unfortunately for stakeholders who issue descriptions, predictions, and prescriptions, their public assertions are deeply problematic. As Shackle points out: "Outcomes of available actions are not ascertained but created. We are not speaking . . . of the objective recorded outcomes of actions which have been performed. Those actions are not 'available.' An action which can still be chosen or rejected has no objective outcome. The only kind of outcome which it can have exists in the imagination of the decision-maker" (1961, 143).

In practical terms, this means that all assertions from stakeholders are mere conjectures. This does not negate the above point that reason giving entails "truth claims." The speaker (the stakeholder) is addressing authoritative agents truthfully—meaning that the speaker is not lying or distorting things as the speaker understands the world now or in the desired future. But truth claims being issued by the speaker are different from the descriptions, predictions, and prescriptions on offer being true—matching the world now or in the future. True beliefs fit the world. In the strict sense of the word, desires, intentions, and prescriptions cannot be true. They are not intended to represent the world as it is now but, rather, how we would like the world to be—or how we intend for it to be. Following Searle (2010), intentions and desires have a world-to-mind direction of fit. They require the world to change to match them. True belief has a mind-to-world direction of fit. And true truth claims about desires, intentions, and prescriptions are of course possible.

It is also possible to move beyond the case in which the assertions of stakeholders are mere conjectures. Stakeholders may have a better "touch and feel" for the particular conditions and potentials than any authoritative agent. In these situations, the beliefs of the speaker may actually match the world better than any official description or prediction. Hence, the assumptions of the authoritative agent concerning the state of the world and the workability of the plan may be merely conjectural. That is, individuals from local communities may be aware of underlying habits and customs and therefore are able to execute warranted claims about the local environment. That is why we see scholars praising "local knowledge." However, caution is still in demand. The world on offer by locals in their pleadings to authoritative agents is still nothing but their world—the world as seen through their habits and customs. It is not the "real" world, nor can it be. The best thing to be said about it is that they "know" that world far better than can any authoritative agent. But of course this follows by definition. It is that idiosyncratic world that informs and frames their pleadings in formal settings before authoritative agents. We see, therefore, that the reasons for particular actions or outcomes earnestly conveyed to public officials must be understood as a willful attempt to persuade public officials to become instruments of the desires held by stakeholders.

While reason giving in the stakeholder game is always pleading and respectful rather than demanding and commanding, the speech act must be understood as an imperative (Fish 1999). The conditions of the game demand that the stakeholder must always appear deferential before

authoritative agents. But from the perspective of the reason giver (the stakeholder), the speaker is rarely asking to have his or her assertions followed. The purpose of the reason giving is to alter the discursive space in such a way that the reasons persuade the audience and the convener in such way that the assertions make sense. Good reasons empower the speaker, and good reasons have more deontic powers than bad ones. Reasons are good when they help the speaker to score in the deontic game of reason giving—when they commit other stakeholders or authoritative agents to some will formation or action and when those reasons endow the speaker with new entitlements. Those entitlements then represent "capital" in future games.

The assertions in the game of reason giving are imperative because their purpose is to make a necessary change in how situations are understood and acted upon, that is, to use assertions as signs. Thinking from the point of view of Peircean semiosis, the stakeholder pursues more appropriate ways to interpret the situation. In other words, a given reason is a sign, and the real-life conditions are an object of the sign; and they *must* be brought together in a new way, that is, to be interpreted in a particular new way (Bergman 2009). The imperative assertions may be emotional or energetic (reaction, resistance, adaptation), but the purpose is to affect the convener and the stakeholders to interpret the situation in wanted ways (Hiedanpää and Bromley 2012). The imperative nature of the game comes from the need to change the whole semiotic situation. To convince the others that because *I want Q because R*, you should too.

> P2: Imperative Statements
> *An imperative statement is a description of some future action, addressed to the convener of the stakeholder game—the authoritative agent—with the sole purpose of convincing the convener to do what is described by the stakeholder.*

The Role of Reasons

We now come to the pressing matter of reasons. The stakeholder game is one of asking for and giving reasons, and so it cannot be a surprise that all other things being equal, it is the nature of the reasons offered that will qualify the stakeholder game as a valid undertaking worthy of political

support. Reasons must satisfy the necessary conditions of *coherence, causality, pertinence, honesty, and credibility.*

Coherence

The game of asking for and giving reasons must be understood as an activity in which clear bounds exist on the pertinent behavior of the various participants. Following Bernstein (1983, 130), we hold that all reason giving functions within a specific tradition. This has several implications. The bounds of the game are necessarily defined by the historical setting in which the game is conducted. First, reasons that may be pertinent in one historical setting will not necessarily be pertinent in another. Goals and associated reasons advanced by a stakeholder who invokes the spirit of his or her ancestors in advocating the management of a coastal ecosystem would be considered pertinent in parts of Australia, New Zealand, and North America. However, in France, a stakeholder offering similar reasons would not be understood and would, therefore, be considered out of bounds. The issue here is that aboriginal peoples in the so-called New World have been able to preserve their specific cosmology as a central aspect of their ontology such that the now-dominant descendants of European settlers are compelled to acknowledge that cosmology and act accordingly. Second, reasons function within the habitual realm of the assumptions and routines of ruling administrative structures. The rationale (explanation) for actions within, say, an environmental agency will rarely make sense to the practicing forester. Third, reasons function within the lifeworlds that constitute communities and civic societies. Therein, particular habits and customs set the rationale for what makes sense.

With these sets of tradition-bound reasons, we refer to the same general semiotic feature that Searle (2010) calls the *background*, Charles Sanders Peirce (1934, 551–59) calls *a ground*, and Joel Mokyr (2002) calls an *episteme*. The traditional realm affects what kinds of structures and functions of meaning are present, and they inform how the game of asking for and giving reasons can be played.

This leads to a proposition on coherence:

P3: Coherence
Reasons are coherent if and only if offered in accord with the tradition of reason giving in the society in which the stakeholder game is embedded.

Causality

Stakeholders must necessarily embed their assertions in a causal structure that appears plausible to the authoritative agent who is being asked to accept their truth claims. Reasons must fulfill the intelligibility conditions of the background and the ground—they must have causal validity, what Dewey called warranted assertability (Bromley 2006). We see three aspects in this condition.

The stakeholder game is an illustration of *pure intending* (Davidson 2001). Davidson describes pure intending as intending that is not necessarily attended by action (2001, 88). In the normal case, stakeholders offer reasons, yet they lack the ability to carry out the specific actions they press on others. Their words speak louder than their actions because they are unable to act on their intendings. Stakeholders transfer their ineffectual intendings to the authoritative agents before whom they appear. Stakeholders are invested in a game, and yet they lack agency in that game. More important, while stakeholders suffer incapacity, they also benefit from the complete absence of responsibility. That is, stakeholders have the comprehensive luxury of offering intending speech acts yet remaining immunized from responsibility for the consequences they advocate. Public officials possess agency, *and* they bear responsibility. Stakeholders have neither. Pure intending is the ultimate escape.

The stakeholder game is not only an illustration of pure intending but also what we call *efficient intending*. Here we draw on Searle (2010, 126), who describes an "effector" as an entity that carries the intention to the conclusion. Carrying an umbrella is an effector to the end of staying dry. Even though stakeholders may lack the ability and capacity to carry out the actions they press on others, they may offer warranted assertions about the efficient causation concerning how to make them happen. In other cases, stakeholders have the ability but not the official capacity to carry out the action. And in this they require the capacity of authoritative agents and perhaps the help of other stakeholders.

The stakeholder game is also an illustration of *final intending*. The game is about purposes—reasons for the ends of action—that become visible and tangible when under perturbation and disturbance. Final intending confirms the relation among intentional entities (deontic positions) that already exists, for instance, how the prevailing deontic order was disturbed by some environmental change—and why it matters. The basic form of

final intending is a narrative or story (Tilly 2006). Stories spring from the past to the current time, and they stand for how the future should become. Stories are end-specific. They simplify and assess the course of events in a morally charged way. Stories attempt to induce thought according to the implicit moral of the story on offer. A narrative or story also pinpoints the causal sequence of events.

P4: Causality
Reasons must entail plausible if-then claims.

Pertinence

Execution conditions for commands correspond to truth conditions for propositions. The reasons on offer from a stakeholder necessarily entail conditions for the execution of commands. As above, assertions of commands must be couched as pleadings rather than imperatives. But they are nonetheless subtle orders concerning what ought to be done. Stakeholders are rarely reticent about their wants, and they rarely offer authoritative agents latitude in selecting future actions. The assertion *"I want Q because R"* does not suggest to the authoritative agent that there is much doubt about the preferred course of events.

The fundamental difference between propositions and commands is that the latter pertain only to the future. In the stakeholder game, desires run in only one direction. Reasons must pertain to future actions, not those in the past and not those in the present. The game of reason giving is an exercise in prospective volition—considering the future and offering assertions about how that future ought to unfold (Bromley 2006). The danger here for stakeholders who offer reasons is that they lose credibility if their descriptions and prescriptions and predictions about the future are too explicit. Reasons on offer must be instrumentally suggestive, and they must be offered with conditional certitude—by which we mean couched in cautious ceteris paribus conditions. The pertinent stakeholder must prescribe and must offer predictions about the future if those prescriptions were to be followed.

P5: Pertinence
To be pertinent, reasons must relate to descriptions, prescriptions, and predictions about the future.

Honesty

The truth claim *I want Q because R* is an expression of interest, and stakeholders are necessarily interested parties to the policy under consideration. According to von Wright (1986, 140–43), in the concept of interest the concepts of need and hope intertwine. There are contingent and necessary needs. Contingent needs are wants—there is a choice. And necessary needs are more essential—they keep stakeholders going. Hope brings people into the game of giving reasons. Hope is, in fact, what constitutes stakeholders. They organize themselves and participate because they hope to maintain particular settings or have a change in outer circumstances.

Hope connects with democracy and truth (Koopman 2006). According to Dewey, "The adverb 'truly' is more fundamental than either the adjective true, or the noun, truth. An adverb expresses a way, a mode of acting" (1903, 189). To act truthfully requires that the speaker may not—must not—represent (speak for) others. It is the speaker's intending that matters. That is why we earlier limited valid truth claims to assertions #1 and #4. Stakeholders may, however, stand for everybody who connects with a particular collective intention of fulfilling particular contingent or necessary needs that constitutes the group or the collective. We may speak of collective intentionality when a common goal is pursued with the aid of cooperation. This is where we can identify the acts that are acted not because they are true but because the stakeholders are committed to the reasons given for the consequences of those actions—they act truly. These hopeful intentions may be prior intentions or intentions-in-action. The first takes the form "We intend that we perform action A," and the latter, "We are now intentionally performing A." The first form motivates others to take part and to get involved in deliberation, while the latter motivates actual cooperation in joint activity. It is not always clear whether stakeholder involvement takes the one form or the other.

Both intentions and intentions-in-action relate to the goals held by the speaker. In the first instance there is an expression of the will and motivation to go for a goal, while in the latter the collective will and capabilities are already in execution. In stakeholder involvement the first one is often the only available stage, and it may be that it already soothes the desire to participate, to participate in will formation concerning the goals of policy. The latter actualizes if the discursive game of reason giving reaches some consensus or compromise concerning which habits and customs are decided to be good in fulfilling the purpose of the designed policy.

Habits and customs are purposive potentials of action. The needs and goals are already embodied in these purposive actions. To partake in will formation, or in the creation of the collective will, takes political courage—there is only a difference of degree. It takes courageousness to tell the truth, to act truthfully, truly. As Foucault claims: "*Parrhesia* [the courageousness and the art of telling the truth] is a form of criticism, either towards another or towards oneself, but always in a situation where the speaker or the confessor is in a position of inferiority with respect to the interlocutor. The *parrhesiastes* is always less powerful than the one with whom he speaks. The *parrhesia* comes from 'below,' and as it were, and is directed towards 'above'" (2001, 17–18). The game of reason giving is the practice of criticism, the purpose of which is to break some habits and enable the public or authoritative agents to take on new ones for the better fulfillment of particular needs and goals.

> P6: Honesty
> *Reasons given must relate to needs and goals held by the speaker.*

Credibility

Reasons not only function within particular cultural traditions; they also function within the specific practices of particular epistemic communities. This means that facts and empirical claims—reasons—relevant to one disciplinary field may not make sense to another, even though the general concern is the same.

Reasons can possess Deweyan warranted assertability in the eyes of a particular epistemic community. Such warranted assertions carry the provenance of a community of legitimized claimants, and as such they appear—at first glance—to be unimpeachable. But of course it is obvious too that epistemic communities are incapable of producing unimpeachable, that is, infallible, truth claims. It is not in the nature of science to be so sure that all doubt and dissent disappear. Following Peirce, in the fullness of time, and with enough investigations having been completed, the received wisdom will arrive at some suite of settled beliefs. At that point, the best that can be said is that beliefs about particular matters have settled down and may as well be considered as "true."

Stakeholders engage epistemic communities from an opportunistic perspective. If the settled beliefs—the warranted assertions—of an

epistemic community are available to those giving reasons, then it is to be expected that those assertions will be embraced and offered up as compelling support for idiosyncratic want statements on offer from stakeholders. We may think of this as an affirmation of "any port in a storm." On the contrary, if the settled beliefs of an epistemic community do not fit the persuasive program of stakeholders, the reasons on offer must carefully discredit those specific claims while not appearing as dismissive of scientific evidence in general. For stakeholders, it is often easy to find, in the many voices of science, a way to navigate this challenge. It is a necessary challenge for the simple reason that authoritative agents require the political protection of science—almost any science—to proceed with their plans. They too are bound by the properties of the reasons they offer for the decisions they ultimately embrace. As for stakeholders, the reasons of authoritative agents must exhibit coherence, causality, pertinence, honesty, and credibility.

Ultimately, stakeholders can take refuge in what we call valuable beliefs (or assertions [Bromley 2006]). The point here is that while certain assertions may indeed have warranted assertability—GMOs are perfectly safe, BSE is no longer a threat—a large number of citizens quite plausibly choose to believe otherwise. *Homo sapiens* are under no obligation to turn their hard-won discernment over to scientists. And so stakeholders can invoke science when it is compatible with their claimed intendings, and they can disregard science when it does not accord with their programmatic commitments. The one thing that stakeholders may not do, however, is appear dismissive or disrespectful of the pertinent epistemic communities in any particular public policy debate. They must find their own plausible reasons to demur. If they can induce sufficient worry about prevailing scientific assertions to cause discomfort among the presiding authoritative agents, their participation in the stakeholder game has been successful from their perspective. In the end, reasons must reasonably comport with "what the science says," even when seeking to reject that science.

P7: Credibility
Reasons must be reasonable in the eyes of the relevant epistemic community.

Conclusions

As noted, a stakeholder is an individual or collective agent that is invested in the game of reason giving. The stakeholder delivers an imperative

statement, which is a description of some future action, addressed to the convener of the stakeholder game—the authoritative agent—with the sole purpose of convincing the convener to do what is described by the stakeholder. The stakeholder game builds on reasons. And reasons must satisfy the necessary conditions of coherence, causality, pertinence, honesty, and credibility. In other words, (i) reasons are coherent if and only if offered in accord with the tradition of reason giving in the society in which the game is embedded; (ii) reasons must entail plausible if-then claims; (iii) to be pertinent, reasons must relate to descriptions, prescriptions, and predictions about the future; (iv) reasons given must relate to needs and goals held by the speaker; and (v) reasons must be reasonable in the eyes of the relevant epistemic community. Keeping these prerequisites as working rules for stakeholder participation and collaboration, the process will satisfy the logical conditions of a good and valid process.

Legitimacy in the stakeholder game requires that the reasons on offer satisfy the above five conditions—coherence, causality, pertinence, honesty, and credibility. Notice that the judgment on these five conditions resides solely with the authoritative agent who has organized the required realm of asking for and offering reasons. Public hearings are not courts of law, and testimony is rarely under oath. Of course authoritative agents may, after the fact, depend on others to help judge the proffered reasons with respect to these five attributes. But truth is missing in action. By invoking Peircean settled belief—indeed Deweyan warranted assertability—we insist that there is no role for truth. After all, authoritative agents are not qualified to determine the truth content of most empirical claims. But the primary reason for the irrelevance of truth in the game of asking for and giving reasons is that authoritative agents are *not* asking for truth. They are asking for views, impressions, opinions, and "prejudices." The only thing that matters is whether or not the reasons on offer strike authoritative agents as honest, credible, pertinent, coherent, and possessing some causal properties.

Our concern here has been to explore the logical basis for these obligatory exercises in mutual learning. In the absence of clarity in this regard, stakeholder input may well violate the very goals it is intended to achieve.

NOTE

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