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Epistemic Challenges in a Modern World

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From "fake news" and "post truth"
to underlying epistemic challenges
in science-based risk-societies

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Contents

Preface

The questions discussed in this text are urgent and important. To cope with these challenges, many voices are needed. My contribution is that of a professor in the philosophy of the sciences and the humanities.

As a philosopher of the sciences and the humanities, as a *Wissenschaftsphilosoph*, I have also written on modernity and modernization, as in *Rationality and Modernity* (Scandinavian University Press/Oxford University Press, Oslo/Oxford 1993), *A History of Western Thought*, together with Nils Gilje (Routledge, London 2001), *Multiple Modernities. A Tale of Scandinavian Experiences* (The Chinese University Press, Hong Kong 2011), and *Philosophie der Moderne* (Velbrück Wissenschaft, Weilerswist 2017). For further information, see my home pages, which are available on the Internet.

This text itself is rather short, with numerous footnotes. This is a conscious choice, on my part. I intended to write a text that is relatively easy to read, also for non-professionals with little time for extensive reading. At the same time, there are plenty of footnotes for those who want to check references and look for further explanations and clarifications. The references and clarifications presented in these footnotes are essential for the professional credibility of the text as a whole; however, if they had been incorporated into the current text, I fear that it would have been less easy to read for those with little time for extensive reading.

I thank all those who have commented on earlier versions of this text. Their responses and proposals have been very useful.

G.S.

Bergen, September 15 2019

Introductory remarks

The modern world is in crisis, a double crisis, as it were: at the *factual* level, with various challenging factors that in many cases tend to interact and mutually reinforce each other; and at the *epistemic* level,[1] where no single science or expertise alone can grasp the complexity of what is going on.[2] Hence there is a need to address these epistemic challenges, both critically and constructively: critically, for instance, against one-sidedness and short-sightedness, and constructively in defense of more adequate epistemic constellations.

The debate on "fake news" and "post truth" could be seen in this perspective, i.e., as an indication of deeper epistemic challenges in modern societies. In this paper, after a few comments on these terms, I shall look at underlying epistemic challenges (in Part I). Then, by looking at some current cases, such as the United Nations' Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, I shall indicate what I see as representative examples of major epistemic challenges in a modern world in crisis (in Part II). Finally, I shall point at some steps that in my view could be taken in order to deal with these epistemic challenges; in so doing I shall refer to academic communities, to the educational system, and to the public sphere (for communication and public reasoning), but also to some general political issues[3] (in Part III).

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[1] "Epistemic": pertaining to knowledge. (Greek, *episteme*; knowledge, understanding.)

[2] Or, at *three* levels, if we were to add an (interrelated) *institutional* level. I will say more about this in Parts II and III.

[3] In so doing, I argue for the urgency of self-critical epistemic practices of the kinds alluded to by the Norwegian term "*vitskapsteori*" (German: "*Wissenschaftstheorie*"). For the definition of this special term, cp. the home page for The Center for the Study of the Sciences and the Humanities ("*Senter for vitskapsteori*") at the University of Bergen, available on the internet, cp. the home page: https://www.uib.no/svt – under "About the Center", and "Research". As a first hint, as to the meaning of this term, I may say this much: "*vitskapsteori*" ("*Wissenschaftstheorie*") is here conceived of as a self-critical epistemic practice based on (some degree of) "double competence" and a reflective awareness of different disciplinary presuppositions (and their limitations). The meaning of this term will be further clarified in Part II, where I shall discuss and assess four selected texts by referring to seven epistemic questions.

Part I – Epistemic Challenges

The first section (Part I) has these subdivisions, cast in catchwords: Short remarks on the terms "fake news" and "post truth", followed by some comments on challenges due to intentionally false utterances, on challenges due to technological and economic factors, and on underlying epistemic challenges due to the inherent complexity in modern scientifically and institutionally differentiated societies. Hence, there is a need for an enlightened and critical assessment of these inherent epistemic challenges in science-based risk-societies.[4]

Terminological remarks

The term "fake *news*", taken literarily, refers to news. If so, it excludes fake narratives, fake stories and biased descriptions that are intentionally repeated, again and again. That kind of communicative repetitiveness is well known, both in commercial advertising and in political propaganda.[5] Hence, the term "news" is too restrictive for grasping the complexity of truth-related communication in modern societies. A wider term, like "fake truth-claims", would be better.

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[4] In referring to this kind of enlightened and self-critical assessment, I allow myself to use the Norwegian term "*vitskapsteori*" (German, "*Wissenschaftstheorie*") as alluded to in the previous note. – The term "risk-society" was launched by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck, cp. *Risk Society. Toward a New Modernity*. Sage, New Delhi 1992; German original, 1986.

[5] Cp. the cynical advice: "when a lie is uttered repeatedly (without objections), it will sooner or later be seen as a truth!" (A view attributed to Joseph Goebbels, among others.)

Moreover, the term "*fake* news" seems to indicate not only that some claims are false (in some sense), but also that these false truth-claims are made *deliberately* and *intentionally*. This is done in politics, in order to gain power, or on the market in order to gain money – by politicians (like Trump) or anonymous "Net-Trolls" trying to increase their *political influence*, on the one hand, and in cases like the Macedonian "news makers", who simply wanted to make *money*, on the other. Insofar, there is a difference between false truth-claims uttered and communicated in *politics* and false truth-claims uttered and communicated on the *market*. Two different institutions.[6] Bluntly stated, *institutions* matter.

Likewise, new *technologies* matter; in our case, especially modern communication technology: New technologies reshape the material conditions for intentional speech-acts trying to influence other people.[7] At the same time, these technologies have an impact of their own ("The Medium is the Message").[8]

In short, modern institutions and new technologies may have an impact on the epistemic nature and quality of communication and public reasoning. In this sense, there are *new structural conditions* for public reasoning and communication.

Moreover, due to increasing complexities and specialization within scientific and scholarly disciplines, there are also new *inherently epistemic challenges* in modern societies. Bluntly stated, there is a danger of epistemic bias and one-sidedness due to epistemic specialization and differentiation, and thereby a contentious relationship between different kinds of expertise (more later).

Furthermore, in modern democracies, this increasing epistemic complexity has an impact on how we may live up to the ideal of being enlightened and co-responsible citizens (*mündige Staatsbürger*). Thus, for one thing, there is a need for high-quality educational systems and for a

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[6] Certainly, there are often interconnections between these two institutions, and thus between political and economic power. Cp. the blurring of the two, in the election and presidency of Donald Trump.

[7] For instance, cp. Tarjei Skirbekk, *Hvordan vinne valg*, Spartacus forlag, Oslo 2015; with international references.

[8] Book title, by Marshall McLuhan, 1967.

strengthening of the infrastructure for enlightened public reasoning and will-formation (more later).

At this point, I shall just add a few remarks on the current expression "*post truth*":

Surely, "post" and "truth", these are ambiguous and contentious terms. However, the term "*post*",[9] whatever it means, seems to indicate something *new*. For instance, that we now live within a new setting, somehow, where questions of "truth" do not matter anymore (whatever "truth" might mean). If so, such a claim raises *empirical* and *hermeneutic* questions as to what has happened and how it should be understood. However, taken as a *general claim*, without reservations, it also raises some *self-referential questions*, as to whether or not the claim of "post truth" is itself supposed to be true.

Even so, there are various interpretations of the term "*post*": For instance, does it mean that what's new is *irreversibly* new, or could it be *reversed?* In that respect, consider the ambiguity of the term "post" in "post-modernism": is "post-modernism" supposed to be something that is reversible or something that is irreversible?[10]

To conclude, whatever is meant by the term "post" in "post truth", I assume that it is meant to indicate that here is something *new*, something we did not have before.

What about the term "*truth*" in this context? Hard to say. "What is truth?" Pilatus asked, and he let it be with that. Philosophers, by contrast, have struggled with this question all along (and so have I[11]). However, in this context, I assume, the question of truth primarily refers to the realm of political communication and public reasoning, as predicaments of modern societies, and not to the philosophical discussions.

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[9]   In Latin: "after", "later", "subsequent to", "posterior to", "behind".

[10] Accordingly, there are different usages of the term "post", as when we talk about "post-traumatic syndromes", that, as a matter of fact, can be cured and overcome in various ways, or when we talk about "the post-WWII period", which for conceptual reasons cannot be anything but the period after the Second World War.

[11] For instance, from *Wahrheitstheorien* (red. Gunnar Skirbekk, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1977) to *Philosophie der Moderne* (Velbrück Wissenschaft, Weilerswist 2017).

In short, when we ask to what extent "post truth" is *something new*, it might be useful to distinguish between what we may call an *intentional* and a *structural* approach to the question as to how "post truth" should be conceived and situated. Accordingly, I shall now take my point of departure in some central aspects of the current debate, as I see it, referring to *intentional* and to *structural* approaches, before I conclude as a "philosopher of the sciences and the humanities", with an emphasis on inherently epistemic challenges in modern science-based societies.

Intentionally false claims

Telling lies, intentionally and publicly – that's *not new*. It is fair to assume that false and fake utterances of this kind, i.e., utterances motivated by a search for power, wealth, or honor, and not motivated by the intention of telling the truth, are as old as the existence of a public space. For instance, recall the prudent advice for political rulers given by Niccolo Machiavelli at the first half of the 16th century: "[ ] a prudent ruler ought not to keep faith when by so doing it would be against his interest, and when the reasons which made him bind himself no longer exist."[12]

Throughout history there are countless cases of public utterances that intentionally contain various kinds of untruths. Consequently, if "post truth" is supposed to indicate *something new*, we should not, merely or primarily, look for *intentionally* false truth-claims uttered in public space.

Moreover, liars and truth-tellers both rely on the existence and social acceptance of truth and truth claims. Lying is only possible when the liar may assume that the others take his or her lies to be true.

However, as we know, there are also those who simply *do not care* as to whether their utterances are true or false, or epistemically meaningful or meaningless, as long as they, with their utterances, obtain what they want.

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[12] From *The Prince* (*Il Principe*), Random House/The Modern Library, New York 1950, Chapter XVII, "In what way Princes must keep Faith", by Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527).

Those are the "*bullshitters*" (as discussed by Harry Frankfurt[13]). Hence, once again, we may talk about "post truth" (and "new speech").[14]

Structural challenges

If "post truth" is supposed to be something *new*, we may look for features that are typical for contemporary societies. We may start by looking at three interrelated factors: (i) new technologies, (ii) globalized capitalism, and (iii) new class constellations.

The status of *new communication technology* is ambiguous in this respect. On the one hand, it is positive: it is now far easier than before to send and receive information of various kinds, and due to "social media" it is much easier for many people to express themselves and to respond to what other people are saying or showing. On the other hand, the immense quantity of information, and the sheer speed of constantly new information, may easily lead to overload and confusion and hence make it difficult to distinguish between information that is credible and trustworthy and that which is not.

Moreover, due to the extensive usage of "social media" many people end up in "echo chambers", where their own opinions and perspectives are reinforced without being challenged by other persons and exposed to other perspectives and other kinds of facts and values.

Even worse, through companies like Google and Facebook, huge amounts of data about us are obtained through our internet usage, where this is financed, not by us, the users, but by the advertisers who pay for influencing us. These companies pay to spy on us in order to use this information either commercially (e.g., to influence us to buy something) or politically (e.g., to influence us to vote for somebody). It's worth noting that these data-searching algorithms tend to focus on negative emotional reactions (that supposedly turn out to be stronger than emotionally positive

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[13] Harry G. Frankfurt, *On Bullshit*, 2005.

[14] "Bullshitters" are those who simply *do not care* about truth, as to what they themselves are saying. (In contrast, there are those who *do not trust* what scientific and scholarly elites are saying, but are convinced that they themselves *know better*, as in the case of radical climate skeptics.)

reactions), and thus tend to promote a more polarized and less reasonable public sphere.[15]

Accordingly, *new technologies* change the material and institutional conditions for a credible and trustworthy flow of information and for open and enlightened discussion and exchange of opinion. In other words, when talking about "post truth", under new structural conditions, "*technology matters*".

However, so does ownership:[16] *ownership* matters. For instance, in our countries, newspapers were traditionally owned or run by political parties.[17] In such cases, there is a tension between a strategic struggle to gain political power (typically, obtaining support from the electorate), and a concern for truth and reason.

In our system, at least in North-Western Europe, a normal political party will also strive to be seen as credible and trustworthy in open election debates, at least for its potential electorate;[18] and once in position, in government, they will, to some extent at least, try to rule the country on the basis of relevant scientific and praxis-based expertise.

However, now, in our countries most newspapers, as well as many television and radio companies, are commercialized, to the extent that news, commentaries and other forms of communication are commodities on the

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[15] Cp. Jaron Lanier, *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Account Right Now*, Vintage Publishing, London 2018.

[16] Jaron Lanier refers to an economic system of "free access" to internet for the public, as by Facebook and Google, a system that is financed by mighty agents who are interested in using the great amount of person-related data (available by our usage of these "free" digital services) in order to influence our behavior, commercially or otherwise. Cp. the *Cambridge Analytica* affair (during the Trump election campaign). As to an attempt to counteract such trends, cp. the proposal of a new bill, summer 2019, by the US Senator Josh Hawley: *Social Media Addiction Reduction Technology Act* ("To prohibit social media companies from using practices that exploit human psychology or brain physiology to substantially impede freedom of choice, … .").

[17] Not merely *two* political parties. There were newspapers supporting *Venstre, Høgre, Arbeidarpartiet, Norges kommunistiske parti, Bondepartiet, Kristeleg folkeparti, Sosialistisk folkeparti*, etc. In short, a plurality of political positions.

[18] As to the changes in political communication (in a constitutional democracy), due to modern technology, cp. Tarjei Skirbekk, *Hvordan vinne valg,* Spartacus forlag, Oslo 2015.

market. Accordingly, there is a tension between truth-requirements and the logic of the market.[19]

Nevertheless, there is still some difference between family-run firms, influenced also by their social image in their local communities, and companies on the global stock-market, run by distant shareholders, with the sole intention of maximizing profit from their investments.[20]

Hence, there is a tension between a strategic struggle for profit (often an extensive and short-term profit; if not, money could be invested elsewhere), and the liberal-democratic ideal of journalism as a profession that is committed by a social contract calling for them to be credible and trustworthy, to act critically toward those in power ("speak truth to power"), and to give a voice to the voiceless.

In the debate on "post truth" and "fake news", *distrust* of "mainstream" media and journalism is a hot issue. Evidently, there is a widespread distrust of experts and journalists, with negative reactions like these: "Climate change? I don't believe it. Fake news, in mainstream media!" – However, whereas a self-critical skepticism towards dominant experts and media is valuable and important, a general rejection and a withdrawal from the public sphere are not. Liberal democracies presuppose that citizens, the electorate, are reasonably well informed and capable of enlightened public reasoning, and even more so in modern risk-societies.

In this setting there is a difference between "fake news" that is produced and distributed in order to confuse and dis-inform a certain audience,[21] and "fake news" ("shaky news") that is simply due to lousy journalistic work. The latter may be due to deteriorating working conditions for journalists and reporters, or due to a personal search for money by producing and sell-

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[19] Cp. the distinction between "system" and "lifeworld" in Jürgen Habermas (*The Theory of Communicative Action,* Beacon Press, Boston 1987). The "lifeworld" is organized by communicative rationality and values, while the "system", i.e., markets and politics, is organized by instrumental (strategic) rationality and values in terms of money or political power.

[20] A local case: the newspaper *Bergens Tidende*, originally owned and run by the Eide family, in Bergen Norway, in contrast to *Bergens Tidende* today, owned and run by distant shareholders on the global stock-market.

[21] Say, with Trump on Twitter as one case and Russian internet-trolls as another.

ing stories or pictures that are fake and catchy, though not with an intention of thereby confusing and dis-informing other people.[22]

When new technologies and globalized capitalism merge, with a loss of traditional jobs and a free flow of capital and personnel,[23] many people tend to feel lost and left behind, and understandably so. Moreover, there is often an anxiety that things get out of control, and hence a growing distrust of traditional politicians and experts.

In this way, the discourse on "fake news" is related to protest reactions of various kinds, and hence to uncertainty and political instability – even in countries that used to be the avant-garde of western democracy, like the United States of America, Great Britain, and France.[24]

This *distrust* of politics and traditional media, often found in underprivileged segments of our societies, should be taken seriously. One problem is the quality of information given in public media and the quality of public discussions. Here we have various challenges, some concerning the education and working conditions of journalists, and others concerning the ideal role of a self-critical academic personnel (more later). At the same time, as to the citizens who receive this information and may take part in public discussions and political elections, a common, high-quality school system is required (more later).

However, to the extent that this kind of disbelief and distrust is rooted in difficult socio-economic situations and the feeling of being lost and left behind, there is also a need for basic political reforms concerning work and working conditions and social security, along with well organized labor, socially responsible employers, and an egalitarian political culture where people can and do talk to each other on an equal level.

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[22] Again, cp. the "Macedonian" producers of fake news (during the US election).

[23] Without well-organized trade unions and a legal protection of decent working conditions, as it used to be in traditional Scandinavian social-democracies. Cp. e.g. the "three parts' collaboration" (*trepartssamarbeidet*) in Norway. Further comments, cp. e.g. Gunnar Skirbekk, "Processes of Modernisation: Scandinavian Experiences", *Transcultural Studies* 14/2018.

[24] In catchwords: Trump, *Brexit*, *Gilets Jaunes*.

In short, *class* matters! Socio-economic inequality matters! Though, in this paper I shall primarily stick to *underlying epistemic challenges* in science-based risk-societies.

Epistemic challenges in science-based risk-societies

Modern risk-societies are "*science-based*" in a double sense: due to a need for a wide scale of scientific and scholarly *expertise*, and due to a need for *enlightened citizens*, especially in modern democratic societies.

Moreover, as alluded to above, in the modern world there are numerous risks and challenges, and in many cases, they are interwoven, often in a mutually reinforcing manner. As a reminder, just a few catchwords: climate change and other ecological challenges;[25] socio-economic inequalities between States and within States; trends toward political instability, institutional shortcomings, and a lack of trust; demographtic changes; migration; and, in many cases, a lack of socio-cultural modernization combined with modern weaponry and other means of mass destruction.

These are global challenges, with regional and local particularities, as in cases like South Sudan, Somalia and Niger, or Honduras and El Salvador, and many more. These are in many ways pseudo-states lacking the institutions that can ensure the kind of safety and predictability that is necessary for a functioning economy, and for financial assistance from abroad (like the Marshall Plan). Additionally, there are, in these countries, ecological and demographtic problems, and challenges related to a lack of education and cultural modernization. At the other end, among those who are more

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[25] Later, in Part II, I shall refer to texts related to *climate* challenges, like the UN climate report IPCC AR5. However, there are also *other* severe ecological challenges, such as the ones referred to by the *Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (IPBES), with their latest report presented in Paris April 29 – May 4 2019: https://www.ipbes.net/global-assessment-report-biodiversity-ecosystem-services – also, more specifically, on the decline of the fauna of *insects*, e.g. pollinators, cp. "Worldwide decline of the entomofauna: A review of its drivers" (*Biological Conservation*, April 2019): https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2019.01.020 – and on *microorganisms*, cp. "Scientists' warning to humanity: microorganisms and climate change" (*Nature Reviews Microbiology*, June 2019): https://www.nature.com/articles/s41579-019-0222-5

or less well off, for the time being, there are tensions and uncertainties, as between the US and China, and US and Europe.

All in all, it is a complex and precarious situation worldwide. Moreover, our attempt to understand and handle these complexities, largely mediated by various sciences, is equally complex: *Different* scientific and scholarly disciplines are needed; *one single type of expertise won't do!* For instance, in order to understand climate change and other ecological challenges, such as safe and sufficient food production, water supply, and fight against pollution and environmental degradation, there is primarily a need for various *natural sciences*. However, in order to cope with these problems there is also a need for various *social sciences* that address what might be economically and politically possible and advisable, and for *humanities* that address cultural preconditions and implications – but also a need to include those concerned and to take their experiences and insights into account.

Since various sciences and scholarly disciplines are needed, there is at the same time a need for an awareness of the various presuppositions, and limitations, of the different disciplines and kinds of expertise – not only the conceptual and methodological preconditions, that is, the epistemic (internal) presuppositions, but also socio-cultural presuppositions. That kind of reflective awareness, both of one's own presuppositions and limitations, and of those of the others, is precisely the kind of self-critical epistemic competence that is promoted by "*vitskapsteori*" ("*Wissenschaftstheorie*") as an enlightened discursive practice (if I may allow myself to use this Norwegian term[26]). In this sense, "*vitskapsteori*" is conceived as a practice and a competence, not as a doctrine.

In this connection, three points should be emphasized to indicate what researchers in "*vitskapsteori*" usually are looking for in this respect: *Power*, *Certainty,* and *Perspectivity*.[27]

Power (often in disguise). There are certainly political and economic agents who are interested in influencing what scientific and scholarly researchers are doing and saying, from issues like tobacco and health to climate change

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[26]   Cp. ftn 3 above.

[27]   In doing "*vitskapsteori*" ("*Wissenschaftstheorie*") in this sense, all three points should be considered, critically and self-critically.

and oil production, not to forget historiography (not least in authoritarian regimes). However, there are also more subtle interrelations between power and scientific-scholarly research, since some disciplines, or sub-disciplines, may conceptually conceive a politically or economically (or religiously) contentious subject in a way that is *more beneficial* for some political or economic stakeholders (or religious leaders) than the way other disciplines might conceptualize the same phenomena. For instance, neoliberalist concepts could be more beneficial to certain economic groups than other types of concepts, and similarly when it comes to the relationship between economics and sociology, and economics and ecology. In short, different disciplines and sub-disciplines conceptualize the same phenomena differently; different conceptualizations let us see or perceive *different aspects of the same phenomenon*, as when, for instance, an economist, a psychologist and a sociologist, each from their own perspective, do research on modern marriages. However, they do not merely see different *facts* with different concepts;[28] different concepts allow for *different values*. An economist sees economic values; a sociologist sees social values; and so on. Thus, there is a spillover from *conceptual* presuppositions to *value* questions – a spillover that might be contentious, and thus be seen as power in disguise. Moreover, human beings are self-interpreting creatures influencing each other in mutually socializing interaction; hence, living humans may be influenced by the way they are conceptualized and described by various disciplines, especially by disciplines and kinds of expertise that are dominant or hegemonic in certain settings. In short, these are cases of "power to define" (*Definitionsmacht*).[29] Thus, there is a need for reflective awareness of various perspectives and different epistemic presuppositions and limitations (see below!).

Certainty: to what extent are scientific and scholarly research and results certain, or uncertain, in some sense? Can they be trusted? Surely, not always. It depends! There are cases when researchers "oversell" their results

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[28] In such cases, it makes sense to talk about "alternative facts"!

[29] In this sense, social sciences are "critical", according to Hans Skjervheim. Cp. "Sociology as Science: A Positive or a Critical Discipline?", in *Hans Skjervheim, Selected Essays*, Department of Philosophy, University of Bergen 1996: 115–126.

for money or for fame. In this sense, there are cases of "corrupted science". To uncover such "fake news" is one of the main tasks of "*vitskapsteori*" as a self-critical epistemic activity. At the same time, laypeople may have too high expectations of the certainty that can be obtained by scientific research (for instance in medicine or in climate research). Consequently, they may easily be disappointed, and they may simply lose confidence in science and science-based expertise. In such cases, they may overlook the gradual, but crucial, difference between good and less good reasons – for instance, by accepting invalid arguments of the following kind: "Darwinism isn't fully proven, 100% proven, nor is Creationism; so then we may equally well believe in Creationism as in Darwinism!" In practice, this is a case of "post truth".

Perspectivity. As we know, or should know: there are two things a student should learn: learn a model and learn that the model is not reality![30] In short, each discipline has its own perspective, with its presuppositions and limitations. Unfortunately, this point is not always taken into account – neither in academia, nor in the public sphere. In the latter case, when presenting their views and results for a broader audience, researchers may refer to themselves merely by a general and unspecified title, like "Professor", without saying anything about their specialty[31] – that is, without informing their audience about their own perspective and thus without indicating that there

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[30] Quoted freely from Gudmund Hernes, Norwegian sociologist and former minister for education and research.

[31] As a case of this kind of carelessness (and lack of self-awareness?), cp. the chronical written by Henrik Thune in the major Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* on December 29 2016, in a time of confusion and uncertainty after the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States of America, with the title (translated into English), "The New Disorder" "The New Darkness, from where does it come?" Henrik Thune is a renowned political scientist and an experienced writer in the press who has worked for a long time at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with key politicians. Nevertheless, in this chronicle, at this crucial moment, he mentions three cases of "new disorder": reactions against globalization, reactions against western world order, and the end of US world hegemony. There is hardly a word about all the rest, for instance, about ecological challenges. Nor is there anything about US military interventions, from Vietnam and Afghanistan to Iraq and Libya, which have often had disastrous and destabilizing consequences. Above all, there is not a word about his own discipline-based perspective.

might be other epistemic perspectives regarding the same phenomena; in short, without telling what they can and what they can *not*. Normally, there is no reason to assume that this is done *intentionally*. Insofar as this is the case, this should not be seen as "*fake* news" or "*fake* claims". In most cases, I assume, this is done due to a lack of epistemic self-awareness, a lack of awareness of one's own discipline-based conceptual perspective and what it allows us to see and not to see. Moreover, this should not be seen as a case of "*false* claims" provided that "false" is supposed to mean "*empirically* false". What these people are saying may often be empirically in order and empirically fair enough. In these cases, the epistemic challenge is rooted in the discipline-based narrowness of his or her *conceptual perspective*, and in the fact that this restricted conceptual perspective is not made explicit. When this kind of perspectivity is not made explicit, what one is doing is conceptually one-sided and in that sense conceptually inadequate. In short, in such cases there is a lack of reflection on one's own discipline-based presuppositions (and limitations). Hence, there is a certain "*conceptual poverty*". Basically, this kind of epistemic challenge is due to the inherent differentiation and specialization of scientific and scholarly disciplines.

To sum up, in addition to intentional and structural challenges, there are also *inherently epistemic challenges* due to the development of different disciplines and sub-disciplines that adopt different presuppositions and perspectives, and more so with *increasing specialization* (and hyperspecialization) within various disciplines and related types of expertise. Moreover, there is also an *increasing quantity* of research-based information for the public, which may lead to epistemic *confusion and overload*. Hence, there is a need to "sort it out" both in academic and public spheres. Consequently, there is a need for "*vitskapsteori*" ("*Wissenschaftstheorie*") as a self-critical epistemic practice and competence, primarily in academia, at the universities, but also in public life.

Modernity

Complexity in the world and complexity in our way of understanding it, this is the point of departure in our attempt to cope with epistemic challenges in the modern world. At this stage, I shall add some comments on the interplay between epistemic and institutional characteristics of modern societies.[32] In so doing, I shall first make a few remarks on *various forms of rationality*, then on *institutions*, and finally on the *interconnectedness* of *modern institutions* and *modern culture and identity.*

Forms of rationality. At a modern full-scale university there are all kinds of academic disciplines, from mathematics and natural sciences, to psychology and social sciences, and all kinds of humanities, in addition to law, medicine and theology – in short, all *Wissenschaften* (*vitskapar*), as conceived in Germanic languages.[33] They are different, and all of them are needed to cope with the various challenges in a modern risk-society. Hence, it is a serious anomaly – indeed a fatal constellation – when people in the contemporary world favor instrumental rationality in terms of natural science and modern technology, but neglect or dislike humanities and social sciences – be it in significant groups in the Mid-West (with Star Wars[34] and a literal reading of holy scriptures) or in the Middle East (among Jihadists, with modern weaponry and pre-modern beliefs and attitudes). These people are dangerously *half-modern*, in a precarious modern world.

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[32] Cp. the notion of modernity in the tradition from Max Weber (and Jürgen Habermas), which conceives of modernity (and modernization) as ongoing *differentiation and rationalization* of *institutions*, such as the state, the market, and the lifeworld, and also science, law, and art, along with their related "*value spheres*", i.e., truth, justice, and beauty. (Roughly speaking, in early Habermas, *state and market* are run by power in terms of strategic rationality, and the "*lifeworld*" is ruled by communicative rationality.)

[33] Moreover, scientific and scholarly research, teaching and dissemination are *activities*, practices.

[34] However, the question to what extent *modern technology*, used in all kinds of *miraculous (and violent) movies and digital games*, is *detrimental for our sense of reality*, especially for young spectators and players, that is a pertinent empirical question. Hence, there might be a link between modern technology and various kinds of unrealistic beliefs.

We may ask: what is *common* to all scientific and scholarly disciplines at a modern full-scale and high-quality university? What do they have in common, despite all the differences between the various disciplines? My answer: the doctoral dissertation, i.e., an *open and enlightened discussion*, where counter-arguments are taken seriously in a common search for better arguments. This is what all academic disciplines have in common.

Moreover, also in civil society, no one is equipped with a "God's eye view"; no one is able to see the world from all points of view at the same time. However, being socialized, as mature persons, we learn how to share experiences and perspectives with other persons, and thus to be open for improvements.

In other words, in a modern world, as fallible human beings, we need to listen to counter-arguments and be aware of the possibility of alternative perspectives, and necessarily so: how could I think I am right if I neglect to listen to counter-arguments? Nevertheless, in the contemporary world, there are people and regimes who do not appreciate enlightened discussions that are actively open for counter-arguments and looking for better reasons. Accordingly, these people are *"argumentophobic"*[35] – a serious anomaly in modern risk-societies.

In short, in modern societies there are *different* forms of reason and rationality. There are different *disciplines*, as at a full-scale university. In addition, there are various forms of *practice-related insights* and *socio-cultural experiences* based on practical life, social life, and socio-political self-organization. Not everything can be learnt by books or by the internet. Consequently, in a modern society, all kinds of reason and rationality are needed: *instrumental, interpretive, argumentative,* and *self-reflective* as well as *practice-based* experiences and insights.[36]

Moreover, due to this plurality of different forms of reason and rationality, with different perspectives and presuppositions, there is a need for critical and self-critical reflection on the various forms of rationality and their various presuppositions – their epistemic and conceptual ones as well as their normative and socio-cultural ones. Hence, all in all, such self-critical

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[35] The term "argumentophobic" is borrowed from my colleague Lars Johan Materstvedt.
[36] Cp. the debate on "tacit knowledge", related to Michael Polanyi, and also to early Heidegger, and late Wittgenstein, for instance in Kjell S. Johannessen and Yu Zhenhua.

epistemic activities and competences are required in modern science-based risk-societies.

Institutions. Max Weber conceives of modernity (and modernization) as a differentiation of *institutions*, like the state, the market, and the lifeworld, each with their inherent norms and values, and furthermore by the institutions of science, law, and art, correlated with the "*value spheres*" of truth, justice, and beauty.[37]

In recent times, the former American neo-conservative Francis Fukuyama (in *Political Order and Political Decay*, 2014) argues extensively for an ideal of three interrelated institutions in modern societies: (i) a State administration run by meritocratically selected and competent State-Officials who are at the same time loyal and uncorrupt, (ii) rule of law, not merely by the law, and (iii) enlightened and transparent checks-and-balances.[38] "Getting to Denmark" is his slogan and ideal – an interesting input into the current debate on capitalistic-technological globalization versus sovereign States, and also into the debate on transatlantic relations, not least due to the difference with respect to the role and status of the State

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[37] Differentiation of institutions and values, as basic characteristics of modernity, can be found already among medieval thinkers. For instance, in St. Augustin's distinction between the worldly world and the divine city, there is a separation of power, later institutionalized by the division between emperor and pope – distinctions that apparently have played a major role in the development of freedom in the western world. Later, in the 13th century, we find St. Thomas' distinctions between different kinds of law: the law of nature, the moral law (that can be recognized by all rational and reasonable persons, independently of divine revelation), laws made by human beings to regulate their earthy activities, and finally, the divine law given by revelation (Jesus Christ and the Bible), the aim of which is salvation for each person who believes. Note, by this conception of multiple laws, persons with different beliefs and convictions can live peacefully together – in contrast to a constellation where all normative laws come directly from God, or Jahve, or Allah – in which case democracy and religion cannot co-exist peacefully. As we know, Thomas learnt from Islamic philosophers, such as Averroes and Avicenna. Very good – but then, what have Islamic intellectuals learnt from Thomas?

[38] Francis Fukuyama is a social scientist, and (*de facto*) an historian. However, he has relatively little to say about the development and role of various scientific and scholarly disciplines, and of different forms of reason and rationality. Nor are ecological challenges central topics in his grand view of human history.

administration, as in the USA (UK), on the one hand, and in North-Western Europe (Germany and Scandinavia), on the other.[39]

Institution-constitutive norms, competences, and cultural identities. Knut Erik Tranøy argued that there are some norms for basic speech-acts in scientific and scholarly research that are unavoidable, in the sense that these norms are constitutive for these activities.[40] This is similar to *Bedingung der Möglichkeit* (conditions for the possibility), as the Germans say, and to Jürgen Habermas' argument that some normative principles are constitutive for the legal institution[41] (whereas Karl-Otto Apel focused on self-reflective arguments for the unavoidability of some basic normative principles inherent in standard speech-acts).

Furthermore, according to Habermas, a modern world with modern institutions presupposes (as normative requirements) a three-fold "*modernization of consciousness*"[42] (*Modernisierung des Bewusstseins*): (i) a reflective awareness of the fact that other people, as reasonable persons, may have different convictions and beliefs,[43] (ii) an acceptance of scientific and scholarly claims as reasonable to the extent that they are undogmatic and tested self-critically, and (iii) a cultural and personal identity that differentiates between different social roles in different modern institutions, such as the distinction between private and professional, and between legal institutions and religious convictions and traditions.

Political scientists tend to talk in terms of institutional concepts (often power-related, seemingly realistic and value-neutral). In cultural studies, scholars tend to focus more on values and cultural meaning than on institutions. However, in our modern societies, it is important to realize that now and then there is interplay between institutions and values, between institutions and culture, for instance because some norms or values are *consti-*

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[39] Cp. Gunnar Skirbekk, "Processes of Modernisation: Scandinavian Experiences", *Transcultural Studies* 14/2018.

[40] Knut Erik Tranøy, "Norms of Inquiry. Methodologies as Normative Systems", in Gilbert Ryle (ed.), *Contemporary Aspects of Philosophy*, Oriel Press, London 1976: 1–13.

[41] As in *Faktizität und Geltung*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1992.

[42] Jürgen Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2005: 146 (and 251).

[43] Cp. similar points in John Rawls.

tutive for a certain institution. Hence, there are not only moral obligations and legal obligations (and various transitions between the two), but also what we may call institutional or *institution-constitutive obligations*. For instance, a modern state, and especially a functioning modern democracy, presupposes that citizens are reasonably well educated; hence, in all functioning modern democracies there is compulsory school attendance for all citizens.

These citizens have rights, but also obligations, not only general moral obligations, not only legal obligation (to act in accordance with legal regulations, e.g., to pay tax and stop at the stop sign, etc.), but also what we could call *institution-constitutive* or *political obligations*, basically because they, as personally autonomous citizens (as *mündige Staatsbürger*), have *co-responsibility* for the kind of policy that is pursued.

In short, *institutions* matter, also for values and cultural identity. Consequently, not all kinds of values and cultural identity are compatible with all kinds of institutions. For instance, a reasonable cultural identity and way of behaving in a clan society does not work well in a constitutional (*rechtsstaatlichen*) State and in a general and generous Welfare State (as in Scandinavia).

In short, modern institutions require, and presuppose, cultural modernization, a "modernization of consciousness": As indicated above, referring to Jürgen Habermas, this kind of cultural modernization includes (i) some degree of critical self-awareness, (ii) openness to critical versions of all kinds of scientific and scholarly disciplines and forms of rationality, and (iii) a cultural identity that is compatible with the different institutions and the different roles and forms of behavior in a modern society.

"Keep quiet" – avoidance of the future?

Surely, in all societies, there are cases of fake news, i.e., false claims that are made deliberately and intentionally in order to influence other people. Manipulation and indoctrination are well known all through human history. However, due to new technologies and new institutions, "fake news" is produced and disseminated in new ways and on a greater scale. At the same

time, new technologies and institutions have an impact of their own, for instance on the way politics functions in an election-based modern democracy. Moreover, in modern science-based societies, with a wide scale of different disciplines and sub-disciplines, there are epistemic challenges due to the fact that some special scientific or scholarly perspectives may get a *dominant* position, in politics and practical life, in addition to media, and thus displace other scientific and scholarly perspectives that are also relevant and important for some practical problems. In such cases, there are often special political and economic interests at stake, thus also questions of power. For instance, consider the dominant position of economics compared with the status of expertise concerning vital ecological and sociological problems. However, in such cases we may also have one-dimensional and biased validity-claims, unintentionally and independently of power interests, simply due to lack of reflection on the particularity and narrowness of one's own perspective and presuppositions (and limitations).

Moreover, when it comes to *future* challenges, there are some special ones. First of all, main institutions in modern societies have a *short-term* perspective. In election-based democracies, for instance, political parties tend to focus on the next election, while distant shareholders on the global stock-market tend to focus on short-term profit.[44] Secondly, present challenges are often overwhelming[45] and leave little time and energy for future challenges. Thirdly, in many cases it is hard to predict what will come up in the future.[46]

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[44] Family-based capitalism may function differently by having a more long-term perspective. Among main political institutions, the Communist Party of China is the one with a long-term perspective. But what about the Pentagon and similar strategic military agencies? And if so, if they think in long-term perspectives, do they also include all relevant scientific and scholarly expertise?

[45] *Homo sapiens* may tend to act in a relatively short-term perspective. Modern media, partly for economic reasons, tend to focus on current (and sensational) events, not on intricate future challenges.

[46] Cp. Nassim Taleb on "black swans" (*The Black Swan: the Impact of the Highly Improbable*, 2007). This point is extended by referring to "black elephants" (cp. Centre for Strategic Futures, Singapore Government; *Foresight 2017*, ISBN 978–981–11–3934–5, "Society at Risk. Hunting Black Swans and Taming Black Elephants", p. 8–9): "The black elephant is a problem that is actually visible to everyone, but no one wants to deal with it, and so they pretend it is not there." "When it blows up as a problem, they all

However, as to the latter point: exactly for that reason, it is highly advisable to stick to the precautionary principle, whenever it is possible and reasonable.[47]

Not to raise these kinds of questions about possible future challenges, but to simply keep quiet – what should we call that kind of behavior? When nothing is said, there is no "fake news", in terms of "fake claims", since there are no claims.

Is this kind of *avoidance* of urgent future challenges intended? It's hard to say. Surely, in a democracy with frequent elections, and a public sphere and political communication changed by new technologies, it is hard to address and seriously discuss urgent future questions. Short-term problems, here and now, are overwhelming. This may lead to avoidance of future challenges, and hence to "keep quiet".

These days, the United Nations promote plans for the future, with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. It may be worthwhile looking at these plans from the point of view outlined above. That will be done in the next section, where we shall look at some current cases.

Summing up, so far

Starting with "fake news" and "post truth", we have pointed at four main categories: (i) intentionally false statements, (ii) inadequate communication and failing exchange of views due to new technologies and economic interests, (iii) epistemic challenges due to increasing complexity in the world

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feign surprise and shock, behaving as if it were a black swan."

[47] A concrete case, bluntly stated: In the long run, how can global capitalism, with its four liberties, and a general and generous Nordic Welfare State, co-exist? That is: co-exist, not merely for the time being, not only for a near future, but in the long run? Cp. the work done by professor in economy, Karl O. Moene, director of *ESOP*, *The Center of Equality, Social Organization, and Performance*, at the University of Oslo, who convincingly argue for the advantage of the so-called Norwegian Model within international capitalism – that is, for the time being. But again, what about the future? If laws and regulations are globalized, if the workforce and leadership are globalized, what could then be the realistic arguments for a future existence of the "Norwegian Model"?

and in our science-based understanding, and (iv) avoidance of painful future challenges.

It makes sense to spell it out in this way, since the question as to what could possibly be done, by whom and how, will probably require different answers depending on which one of these four categories we have in mind.

At this stage, I shall just point out a few suggestions regarding urgent tasks that could and should be addressed in a realistic and melioristic way: (i) the possible role of "*vitskapsteori*" ("*Wissenschaftstheorie*") in a complex and precarious modern world, with a special focus on the possible role of high-quality full-scale universities, (ii) a need for an adequate education for all citizens (*Staatsbürger*), (iii) a concern for media and the public sphere, (iv) a need for basic socio-economic security and for a strengthening of institutionally inherent norms and ways of living in modern risk-societies, and (v) an emphasis on long-term sustainability.

However, as mentioned in the introductory remarks, in the next section (Part II), by referring to seven (interrelated) epistemic questions I shall comment on a selection of current plans and reports, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the UN initiated declaration on migration, the Davos report "Global Risks Landscape 2019", and "Climate Risk and Norwegian Economy" ("Klimarisiko og norsk økonomi", NOU 17/2018), a report for the Norwegian Ministry of Finance. Then, in a final section (Part III), I shall allow myself to suggest some supposedly realistic and constructive responses to the challenges delineated above and exemplified in the next section (Part II).

Part II – Four Texts

In this section (Part II) I shall, on this background, address and assess some current cases, namely two UN declarations, one on sustainable development and the other on migration, and the Risk Report 2019 from the World Economic Forum, followed by a report for the Norwegian government (NOU 17/2018) on climate risks and Norwegian economy.

These declarations and reports are chosen because of their relevance for the discussion about crises and epistemic challenges in modern societies. That is certainly the case for the two UN declarations. The report from the World Economic Forum is chosen as a contrast because of its background in another socio-political setting. The text on climate risks and (Norwegian) economy is chosen because of its specific contribution in the interplay between scientific-scholarly analyses and politics, related to risk and uncertainty in modern societies. All four texts are available on the Internet. In this section, I shall make a few comments on their epistemic status, on the basis of seven epistemic questions, and by referring to some typical formulations in each of these texts. The reader is free to check and assess my statements by looking at the texts.

The United Nations platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

*"Transforming our World: **the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**"*
Adapted at the *United Nations Sustainable Development Summit* on 25 September 2015.

This is primarily a political text, a plan for joint action, not a scientific or scholarly text. Nevertheless, to be a credible political text for joint action in a complex modern world, there ought to be reasonable and realistic claims about main challenges and how we could and should deal with these challenges in order to reach the goals that are set. In short, one has to make, or assume, quite a few validity-claims that presuppose various kinds of scientific and scholarly justification.

First, I shall recall the contents and refer to the 17 "sustainable development goals"; thereafter I shall comment on the following questions: (i) whether there is a reasonable degree of conceptual clarity, (ii) whether there are inherent tensions between the various goals, factors or concepts, (iii) whether there is a lack of important concepts for the case in question, (iv) whether there is an awareness of inherently epistemic challenges in modern science-based societies, (v) whether there is an awareness of the mutual interconnection of main challenges in a modern world in crisis, (vi) whether there is an awareness of the interplay between modern institutions and modern culture and identity, and hence (vii) whether the text can be seen as realistic and credible.

   These questions are partly interdependent, since (for instance) the question of possible inherent tensions (point *(ii)*) depends of the clarity (and thus the interpretation) of the concepts in use (point *(i)*). Similarly for the question whether there is a lack of certain concepts that could be seen as important for the case in question (point *(iii)*); here too a reasonable degree of conceptual clarity is required.[48] In short, these seven questions are not an

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[48]   Moreover, the question whether a relevant *concept* is missing (point *(iii)*), isn't restricted to the question whether certain *words* are used; in responding to this question we should in some cases also consider whether certain issues are addressed, thus intervening with

external check-list, but a set of interrelated questions that require a careful and case-oriented discussion.

However, very first I shall refer to the 17 sustainable development goals:

Preamble

Declaration (§ 1–59)

Sustainable Development Goals

- *Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere*
- *Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*
- *Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*
- *Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*
- *Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*
- *Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*
- *Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all*
- *Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*
- *Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation*
- *Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries*
- *Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*
- *Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*
- *Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts**
- *Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*

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the fifth question (point *(v)*). (Furthermore, also point *(iv)* and point *(v)* are interrelated.)

- *Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss*
- *Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*
- *Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development*

* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

Means of implementation and the Global Partnership (§ 60–91)

My comments

(i) Conceptual clarity?

Terms like "sustainable", "development", and "economic growth" are ambiguous, and contentious. According to a current understanding of these terms, "development" and "economic growth" are conceived as the main causes of a lack of "sustainability", ecological and otherwise. To talk in terms of "sustainable development" and "sustainable economic growth" is therefore somewhat confusing. Hence, there is an urgent need for a conceptual clarification. But, astonishingly, these terms are not clarified or defined, merely used, as if they were neither ambiguous nor contentious.[49] "Sustainable", "development", "sustainable economic growth" – none of these terms are clarified.[50]

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[49] The ambiguity of the term "sustainable development" goes back to the Brundtland-Report (*Our Common Future*) from 1987.

[50] The same goes for basic *normative* terms like "*human rights*" (as a contrast, cp., for instance, the clarifying discussions by Onora O'Neill in *Justice Across Boundaries*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2016), or *social-scientific* and *legal* terms like "*State*" (for this term, cp., for instance, Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, N.Y. 2014, or Øyvind Østerud, *Det globale statssystemet*, Dreyer, Oslo 2018).

This lack of conceptual clarity, for main terms and formulations, may have been helpful in order to reach a *political* consensus; but it has negative *epistemic* implications for the text as a whole. Moreover, this lack of clarity for key concepts may turn out to be *problematic* when we attempt to *cope with* these urgent issues.

(ii) Tensions between the various goals?

Prosperity and economic growth, and at the same time an ecologically sustainable future – isn't there a tension here? Briefly stated, between human needs and nature? A tension that is obscured due to a lack of conceptual clarity? For instance, the third sentence in the Preamble states: "We recognize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development". Isn't there a tension here, potentially at least – all dependent on how the various terms are clarified? Isn't there a tension between economic growth and prosperity, on the one hand, and Nature with its limitations on the other?[51] Similarly (also in the Preamble): "we .... support the needs of the present and future generations". That is good, but again, isn't there a tension here, at least potentially, between "economic growth" and "prosperity" for the present generation, and the livelihood for future generations?[52]

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[51] Moreover, what does it mean, and how do we know? "Indispensable requirement", in what sense? "Greatest global challenge", what about the survival of humankind, or of future life on Earth? Similarly, point 29 under the Declaration: "We recognize the positive contributions of migrants for inclusive growth and sustainable development." Is it only positive, for a sustainable future, if numerous people from low-consumption societies move to high-consumption societies? Is there no tension here, not even potentially?

[52] The first 12 SDGs are primarily referring to human needs and challenges. Then there is a short one on "climate change and its impacts" (goal number 13), followed by one goal (number 14) on sustainable use of oceans and marine resources and one (number 15) on sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. Finally, there is one goal on the need for reliable institutions (number 16), and one on "means of implementation" (number 17), first on "Finance", focusing on financial "support to developing countries", then on "Technology", focusing on "science, technology and innovation", followed by short notes on "Capacity-building", "Trade", and "Systemic issues".

(iii) A lack of important concepts?

A lack of relevant concepts can be tracked when some standard words are missing; but a lack of concepts may also take the form of a disregard of certain issues. Whatever – in this text there is, for example, no mentioning of *demographtic challenges* due to regional overpopulation. This is not accidental: Under Goal 5 (*Achieve gender equality and empower women and girls*, § 5.6) "reproductive health and reproductive rights" are mentioned with reference to the *UN Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development* (1994). In the report from this conference (in the foreword) it is explicitly stated that one has now moved away *from* a focus on human numbers *to* a focus on human lives.[53] In short, the challenges related to *regional overpopulation* is deliberately overlooked.[54]

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[53] This UN plan on population was chaired by Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, a literary scholar with a professional interest in cultural studies of religion and local traditions. Her agenda: reproductive rights and reproductive health, and at the same time emphasizing that each family has the right to decide the number of their children. Cp. UNFPA (United Nations Fund for Population Activities), *Programme of Action. Adopted at the International Conference of Population and Development*, Cairo, 5–13 September 1994 (20th Anniversary Edition 2014), § 7.3 (p. 60) and § 7.12 (p. 64).

[54] At this point, a reminder: In Niger the average reproduction rate per women is around seven children, according to UN statistics. In 1950 the population was around 2,5 million, today around 20 million. According to UN estimates, if this trend continues the population in 2095 would be around 180 million. Hardly sustainable. In addition, Niger is primarily an agrarian country, severely hit by climate changes, and with a very weak State administration. https://un.fn.no/Land/Niger?indicator=Befolkningstall&id= 494 (cp. *FN-Sambandet*; United Nations Association of Norway). – At this point we should also consider counter-arguments, as in *Empty Planet. The Shock of Global Population Decline*, by the two Canadian journalists Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson (2019), arguing for a future *decline* in the average world population (for instance due to an increasing urbanization, whereby big families become dysfunctional). There are certainly also other (more dramatic) scenarios of population decline, such as extensive warfare, possibly with ABC weaponry (atomic, biological, and chemical means of mass destruction), possibly reducing the world population drastically, or extensive pandemics, with similar results, or drastic geological or cosmological events (like asteroids), detrimental for human survival. – However, as a counter-counter-argument: even with a significant reduction of the world population there may still be problems of "overpopulation", if, at the same time, the state of the Earth has deteriorated significantly, either as to places where human beings can survive, or as to the availability of vital resources for (human) life on Earth, or both. That is, if the Earth itself is "shrink-

Technology is mentioned several times, positively and optimistically. The development and dissemination of modern *military technologies* are not mentioned, nor is the threat of *military confrontations* and the use of various means of mass destruction in a world with increasing geo-political tensions and disorder. Aren't these factors relevant for the goal of a sustainable future?[55]

A mentioning of *modernity* and *modernization* is missing. That goes for institutional modernization as well as for a related epistemic and cultural modernization.[56] Cp. comments under point (iv) and point (vi) below. Nor is there any mentioning of the interplay between climate change and migration.[57]

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ing" in this sense (e.g., cp. the IPBES report of April/May 2019), there may still be "overpopulation" even with a global population decline.

[55] In this UN agenda for sustainable development, there is, as far as I can see, no reference to the military and its possible impact on climate change, neither to the impact due to military infrastructure and activities in peacetime, nor to the impact of military operations due to regional or global warfare. However, among military strategists, this is an issue. For instance, the Center for Climate and Security (CCS) exploring the security risks of climate change presents (on the internet, May 3 2019) an Update (Chronology of U.S. Military Statements and Actions on Climate Change and Security: Jan 2017 – April 2019) beginning with the following statement: "Since January 2017, twenty-eight senior officials at the U.S. Defense Department (DoD) have publicly raised concerns about, and recommended actions to address, the security implications of climate change, both due to its effect on military infrastructure, readiness and operations, and its broader geostrategic implications for the United States. This includes then-Secretary of Defense, James Mattis; ... [et al.]" In this statement, there is a double concern: the impact of climate change on the military installations and capabilities, and possible (military) conflicts due to climate change. However, there is no mentioning of the impact of the military (in peace or during warfare) on the climate. As far as I can see (surfing on internet), this infelicitous one-sidedness is typical of this kind of semi-official statements on climate change and the military (including the industrial-military-complex).

[56] The term "modern" occurs six times. Four times as "... modern energy ... ", once as "... modern and sustainable energy ... ", and once as "... modern slavery ... ".

[57] E.g., cp. Snorre Kverndokk in "Climate Policies, Distributional Effects and Transfers Between Rich and Poor Countries", *International Review of Environmental and Resource Economics*, 2018, 12: 129–176. P. 165 (4.4 Climate Migration), referring to a hypothesis of a vicious circle, of migration and increasing emissions: "The North may lose from migration owing to decreasing returns in production, whereas the South will gain. Migration from South to North will increase global emissions, as it is assumed that emissions from the South are negligible. Again, this [increased global emission, in-

Economic growth is mentioned several times, related to "private business activity, investment and innovation" (Means of implementation § 66/67) and open trading under WTO (Goal 17), but not modern globalized *capitalism.* At the same time, the protection of "labor rights" and of "decent work for all" (Goal 8) are strongly emphasized. But how? – given modern capitalism, together with new technologies that tend to dramatically change the job market, and regional overpopulation, often in countries practically without a functioning State administration?

Along the same line, the *words* "State" and "country" are used now and then, but without clarifying the various *notions* that are covered (and concealed) by these words. For instance, under Goal 17 mobilizing "financial resources for developing countries" is mentioned. What then about cases like South Sudan? Formally a "State", but without the institutions and infrastructure required for being a "State" in a qualified sense, able to receive constructive financial assistance like the Marshall Plan after WWII, rather than merely receive spontaneous help in special emergency situations.

(iv) An awareness of inherently epistemic challenges in modern science-based societies?

In referring to inherently epistemic challenges in science-based modern societies I mentioned three main questions: How certain or uncertain are our various knowledge claims? To what extent are they interest and power-infected? What about the various disciplinary presuppositions and limitations? In this UN text there is hardly anything of the sort: No discussion of the certainty or uncertainty of the various statements. There is in general an affirmative rhetoric: "we recognize … " (e.g., § 29, 33, 36, 41 etc.), "we acknowledge … " (e.g., § 31, 44 etc.), "we reaffirm … " (e.g., § 11).[58] There is no discussion of possible power-related aspects inherent in one's

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creased global climate crisis] reduces production and welfare in the South and reinforces the incentive to migrate."

[58] In some cases, in a slightly self-gratulatory mood: "We reaffirm the outcomes of all major UN conferences and summits which *have laid a solid foundation* for sustainable development … ." (§ 11, my italics). Moreover, it is unclear whether this statement primarily refers to a solid *political* foundation (a consensus) or to a solid *epistemic* foundation (scientifically and scholarly justified knowledge claims). Possibly, both interpretations are intended.

own statements (in what one is saying and not saying). In this sense, the text is seemingly uncontroversial. Nor is there any discussion of various scientific or scholarly presuppositions and limitations. Cp. Goal 9,5 on "scientific research" and on "substantially increasing the number of research and development workers", and Goal 17,6 on "science, technology and innovation" and "knowledge sharing", and § 70 extensively (nearly one page) on "Science, Technology and Innovation" ("STI"). But there is neither a word on the need, in modern science-based risk-societies, for various scientific and scholarly disciplines, nor a word on different epistemic presuppositions and limitations.

(v) A focus on the mutual interconnectedness of various factors in a modern world in crisis?

Referring to various challenges in the modern world, I emphasized the mutual interconnectedness of factors like climate change, weak States, global capitalism, overpopulation in vulnerable regions, geopolitical tensions, and military conflicts. Interestingly, this is also a main point in the Davos report "Global Risks Landscape 2019" (as we shall see below). But not so, explicitly and critically, in the UN declaration on Sustainable Development Goals. Apparently, the various agents may choose among the various goals; in one sense, this is reasonable enough, since no one can afford to do all at once. On the other hand, this may lead to an illusionary one-dimensional optimism, as if one type of expertise can do the job, on its own.[59]

(vi) A focus on the interplay between modern institutions and modern culture and identity?

In referring to the discussion on modernity and modernization, I emphasized the differentiation of institutions and "value spheres", including the plurality of different scientific and scholarly disciplines and of different forms of reason and rationality, along with the interplay between modern institutions and modern culture, especially modern cultural identity. In short, not all kinds of cultural identity are compatible with modern insti-

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[59] Or, as if a restricted selection of expertise, e.g. of a technological and economical nature, is sufficient in modern risk-societies.

tutions. For instance, basic aspects of a reasonable and rational cultural identity for persons in a certain *clan* society[60] may not be compatible with a life as a citizen in a *modern constitutional welfare State* (of a Nordic type), based on the rule of law, mutual and general trust, and a distinction between professional and personal roles. Hence, it is amazing to read statements like this one (§ 36): "We … recognize that all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development." No, not in modern science-based and institutionally differentiated societies! We recall Habermas' notion of "cultural modernization": (i) a reflective awareness of the fact that other people, as reasonable persons, may have different convictions and beliefs, (ii) an acceptance of scientific and scholarly claims as reasonable to the extent that they are undogmatic and tested self-critically, and (iii) a cultural and personal identity that differentiates between different social roles in different modern institutions, such as the distinction between private and professional, and between legal institutions and religious convictions and traditions.

Moreover, we recall the fatal anomalies in cases where only instrumental rationality is recognized, as in the practical use of natural sciences and technology, and not interpretive and argumentative rationality, as in social sciences and humanities. In this sense, as mentioned above, these persons are *half-modern*. Equally, there are those who detest and dislike open and enlightened discussion in the search for better reasons and open counter-arguments, which is basic for all serious research,[61] in the natural as well as the social and humanistic disciplines, and also for modern democratic societies. As mentioned above, this anomaly may rightly be called *"argumentophobia"*[62].

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[60] "Clan society", this term may refer to a wide range of different societies. In this setting, I just want to point at the general difference between the kind of cultural identity and societal roles that are appropriate and reasonable in modern science-based societies with well-functioning public institutions and the kinds of cultural identity and societal roles that are appropriate and reasonable in countries that more or less lack the kind of public institutions that are characteristic of modern States.

[61] In all disciplines there are doctoral dissertations.

[62] For this term, see earlier ftn.

(vii) Realism and credibility?

With these remarks on the UN declaration of sustainable development, where do we end up? Good intentions, I assume, and certainly a difficult genre, trying to obtain global consensus on urgent and difficult issues. Realistically, the best we could expect? I doubt it – due to my belief that things could have been done both more carefully and more convincingly. In other words, due to a melioristic attitude: the ambition is not perfectionism, which easily leads to disappointment and pessimism, but a belief that things could often be done better. To my mind, generalized pessimism is due to a spectator attitude; but as long as we are participants and active agents we could and should go for possible improvements. Anyhow, in assessing this UN declaration, how to sum it up? On this background, I would say: Ideally, there is definitely a potential for improvement – in short, for being more epistemically updated, more realistic, and thereby more credible.

Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

United Nations; final draft, 11 July 2018; affirmed (not legally binding) by "Heads of State and Government and High Representatives" in Morocco, 10–11 December 2018.[63]

Preamble (§ 1–7)

Our Vision and Guiding Principles (§ 8–15)

Our Cooperative Framework (§ 16)

Objectives and Commitments (§ 17–39)

Implementation (§ 40–47)

Follow-Up and Review (§ 48–54)

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[63] At the meeting in Morocco in December 2018, this Global Compact for Migration was *not* agreed upon by the following States: Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Chile, the Czech Republic, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Switzerland, and the USA.

Objectives for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

(1) Collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies

(2) Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin

(3) Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration

(4) Ensure that all migrants have proof of legal identity and adequate documentation

(5) Enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration

(6) Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work

(7) Address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration

(8) Save lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants

(9) Strengthen the transnational response to smuggling of migrants

(10) Prevent, combat and eradicate trafficking in persons in the context of international migration

(11) Manage borders in an integrated, secure and coordinated manner

(12) Strengthen certainty and predictability in migration procedures for appropriate screening, assessment and referral

(13) Use migration detention only as a measure of last resort and work towards alternatives

(14) Enhance consular protection, assistance and cooperation throughout the migration cycle

(15) Provide access to basic services for migrants

(16) Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion

(17) Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration

(18) Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences

(19) Create conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries

(20) Promote faster, safer and cheaper transfer of remittances and foster financial inclusion of migrants
(21) Cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration
(22) Establish mechanisms for the portability of social security entitlements and earned benefits
(23) Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration

My comments

First, some general points:

This is a political text, on how to achieve "safe, orderly and regular migration" for migrants, not for 'refugees' (§ 4).[64] Tragedies and challenges due to irregular migration are the background. (i) One objective (§ 17) is to get reliable *information* (preferably digitalized data) *about* migrants,[65] and *for*

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[64] § 4: "... , migrants and refugees are distinct groups governed by separate legal frameworks. Only refugees are entitled to the specific international protection as defined by international refugee law." Refugees are persons who are "persecuted" in their country of origin (UN Refugee Convention 1951). They have a right to apply for asylum in the country to which they have fled. However, it is up to each State to decide whether a person who has received asylum shall also have the right to a permanent stay, cp. Hanne Sophie Greve (former judge at the International Court of Justice in The Hague and at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg), in a chronicle in *Aftenposten,* January 16 2016, "Alle flykninger har ikke rett til å bli værende" ('Not all refugees have the right to stay'): "En flyktning har krav på asyl som nødhjelp, men kan ikke kreve permanent besetting i et nytt land" ('A refugee is entitled to asylum as emergency aid, but cannot claim permanent residence in another country' – my translations). Consequently, if the situation in the country of origin improves significantly, the right to asylum may be withdrawn. Cp. for instance, *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, July 3 2016 (here in German original): "Fast 200 Flüchtlinge verlieren Asylstatus. Das Staatssekretariat für Migration (SEM) hat letztes Jahr 189 Flüchtlingen den Asylstatus aberkannt, weil sie in ihr Heimatland gereist waren oder mit deren Behörden Kontakt gehabt haben." "Anerkannte Flüchtlinge, die das Gastland verlassen, um das Land zu besuchen, aus dem sie zuvor vor Verfolgung geflohen waren, können ihren Status als Flüchtling wieder verlieren."

[65] Reliable documentation of identity, e.g., for return to country of origin, or for surveillance of potential terrorists.

migrants (e.g., about safe migration routes, and their rights and obligations,
§ 4, 5), and about how to compare skills and competences that are relevant
for work and education in countries of destination (§ 6). (ii) One objective
(§ 22) is to "ensure decent work" and counteract exploitation (especially of
female migrants[66]), in addition to measures against trafficking and smuggling
(§ 25, 26). (iii) Another objective (§ 36, 37) is related to money and
resources: easier remittances for migrants who have gained money by work
in countries of destination, easier return for migrants who want to return,
and portability of social benefits obtained in countries of destination (§ 38),
and financial and other kinds of aid for countries of origin[67] (§ 39, d).

This is not a legally binding document (§ 7). Its status is that of a commitment
by the UN Member States that agree upon this *Global Compact
for Migration*. Its consensual status is emphasized[68] (§ 9); moreover it is
emphasized that it is based on previous UN agreements, especially on *the
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (§ 2).

However, this emphasis on consensus and common concern is combined
with a characterization of migration as *positive*, as "a source of prosperity,
innovation and sustainable development in our globalized world"
(§ 8).[69] Only positive?[70] This evaluative one-sidedness is taken a step further
in Objective 17 (§ 33 f), where member States are asked to "promote
awareness-raising campaigns … in order to inform public perceptions regarding
the positive contributions of safe, orderly and regular migration".
What about problematic and negative impacts?[71]

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[66] African and East-Asian women doing housework in Arab countries seem to be one of
the groups in question.

[67] Ibid., "… by mobilizing technical, financial and human resources … in order to assist
all States in fulfilling the commitments outlined in this Global Compact."

[68] Cp. § 9, "This Global Compact sets out our common understanding, shared responsibility
and unity of purpose regarding migration, making it work for all." § 15, "Its [The
Global Compact's] authority rests on its consensual nature, … "

[69] "… and that these positive impacts can be optimized by improving migration governance"
(ibid.).

[70] Moreover, migration "is a source of prosperity… and sustainable development": No
questions here? No tensions? See point (ii) below.

[71] E.g., negative impact on the labor market for members of the underclass (in countries
of destination), due to labor migration. See point (ii) below. – Moreover, in the discussion
before the meeting in Morocco in December 2018, this objective (17), "to reshape

Now, some specific remarks, with reference to the same 7 points that I used as the basis for my comments on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:[72]

(i) Conceptual clarity?

Also here, the main term "sustainable" is unclear. This is true for the frequently used expression "sustainable development", and for formulations like "sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth" (§ 18, d),[73] or in talking about "sustainable reintegration" (§ 37, g), which definitely seems to refer to socio-economic factors, not to nature, with its dramatic limitations and vulnerability.[74]

(ii) Tensions between the various factors?

"Sustainable development" – once again: there are discussions going on about the problematic relationship between economic development and a sustainable future, between economic growth and increasing consumption on the one hand and climate change and other environmental challenges that are largely man-made, on the other. But not here, not in this text. There is no discussion of possible tensions of this kind.

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perceptions of migration", was conceived as a political instruction of public media and thus as a violation of freedom of expression.

[72] Moreover, since the Global Compact for Migration explicitly refers the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development, our former comments and criticism of this agenda are directly relevant for this Global Compact.

[73] Ibid. "Invest in sustainable development at local and national levels in all regions allowing all people to improve their lives and meet their aspirations, by fostering sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, including private and foreign direct investment and trade preferences, to create conducive conditions that allow communities and individuals to take advantage of opportunities in their own countries and drive sustainable development."

[74] § 37, h: "Facilitate the sustainable reintegration of returning migrants into community life by providing them equal access to social protection and services, justice, psycho-social assistance, vocational training, employment opportunities and decent work, recognition of skills acquired abroad, and financial services, in order to fully build upon their entrepreneurship, skills and human capital as active members of society and contributors to sustainable development in the country of origin upon return."

Similarly, when an increasing number of people adapt to a lifestyle with a high consumption of fossil energy and increasing CO_2 emission, why should not that be seen as environmentally challenging, not only in China,[75] with increasing consumption and CO_2 emission, but also if a large number of migrants do the same? If so, then migration is itself a problem.

How many? *Numbers* matter. (*Anzahl zählt*.) Demographty matters. In referring to "drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin" (Objective 2), there is a long list of such factors (§ 18, b),[76] but no word about these demographtic challenges.[77] Amazing. However, in UN commissions, on this issue, there is a tradition of avoidance, from the UN population report by Thoraya Ahmed Obaid of 1994,[78] the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of 2015, and now, the Global Compact for Migration of 2018. Apparently, this omission[79] is not accidental.

Questions of this kind, when migration itself appears as a problem, are hardly raised in this Global Compact for Migration. This holds true also for the claim (§ 21) that "regular migration" may at the same time "facilitate[.] labor mobility and decent work". Isn't there a tension here, between

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[75] With a successful one-child-policy, and where hundreds of millions have obtained a high standard of living in economic terms.

[76] § 18, b: "Invest in programmes that accelerate States' fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals with the aim of eliminating the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin, including through poverty eradication, food security, health and sanitation, education, inclusive economic growth, infrastructure, urban and rural development, employment creation, decent work, gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, resilience and disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation and adaption, addressing the socioeconomic effects of all forms of violence, non-discrimination, rule of law and good governance, access to justice and protection of human rights, as well as creating and maintaining peaceful and inclusive societies with effective, accountable and transparent institutions." (Similar list, § 39 b.)

[77] As in countries, such as Niger, with an average reproduction of around 7 children per woman. Cp. United Nations, Population Division, World Population Prospects 2017, Graphs for the period 1950–2015. https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/DemographicProfiles/

[78] Mentioned earlier.

[79] In contrast to UN information about population statistics and forecasts, available on internet, cp. https://population.un.org/wpp/

"labor mobility", promoted by migration, and "decent work" according to "labor law"?[80] This is a class question, in a Marxian sense:[81] when numerous workers go for the same jobs, then salaries and working conditions tend to deteriorate. For these lower-class workers, immigration was not "a source of prosperity" (§ 8); on the contrary, it may have led to lower salaries and unemployment. Moreover, due to new technologies, the number of traditional unskilled jobs may tend to decrease, which may add to problems that lead to socio-economic polarization and political instability.[82] In short, there are more tensions, including those affiliated with migration, than what is mentioned in the Global Compact for Migration.

(iii) A lack of important concepts?

As indicated in point *(ii)* above, there is a surprising lack of important concepts for the case in question, like *demographty* (unsustainable population growth) and *class* (a socio-economic class perspective). The same applies to *capitalism* and to *modern technologies*; together they change the job market radically. These notions are crucial for a realistic description of modern migration and its challenges; but in this text, they are lacking. Moreover, there is a lack of concepts concerning *military threats* (due to geo-political tensions and cold-war constellations, and based on advanced technologies and means of mass destruction). The same applies to the plurality of *different concepts* (and realities) behind the *word "State"*: (a) some so-called States

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[80] According to a report from October 2018 at the Ragnar Frisch Centre for Economic Research in Oslo, *Immigration and Social Mobility*, written by Knut Røed, Simen Markussen, and Maria F. Hoen, the major immigration up to 2016 had a negative influence on job possibilities and working conditions for working-class people in the country of destination. Quote (from the Abstract): "Given the large inflow of immigrants from low-income countries to Norway since the early 1990s, this can explain a considerable part of the relative decline in economic performance among natives with lower class background, and also rationalize the apparent polarization of sentiments toward immigration."

[81] To quote the economist Ebba Boye, chairperson of Rethinking Economics (Norway): "the left must be honest with people about the challenges that immigration can bring with it" (my translation from Norwegian), in the leftist journal *Klassekampen*, February 27 2019.

[82] As seen in several European States.

can hardly be seen as States at all,[83] (b) others are military-based authoritarian regimes,[84] (c) and relatively few have uncorrupted, meritocratic and loyal officials and administrators, together with a rule of law and enlightened checks and balances.[85] This is a critical point for this Global Compact for Migration, since "States" are supposed to be the subjects (those who shall act) as well as the objects (those acted upon). Finally, there is a lack of notions about *modernity* and *modernization* (as in the Weberian-Habermasian tradition) that highlight the interplay between differentiation of institutions and "value spheres", including epistemic differentiations of various scientific and scholarly disciplines. Consequently, the Global Compact for Migration is *conceptually blind* for the difference between pre-modern and modern societies and identities, which is a difference of vital importance for the *integration* of migrants from pre-modern societies into institutionally and culturally modern societies (see point iv below). In short, *conceptual poverty* is a fatal form of poverty since it limits our scope of reasonable action.

(iv) An awareness of epistemic challenges in modern science-based societies?

As referred to in Part I, modern science-based societies require an awareness of epistemic challenges concerning *uncertainty* (also for one's own statements), concerning *power* (also for one's own claims and beliefs), and concerning *perspectivity* (also for one's own perspective and its limitations).[86] In the Global Compact for Migration, there is hardly any indication of this kind of self-critical epistemic awareness.[87]

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[83] From a prime example, such as South Sudan, to cases such as Somalia and Niger, and gang-ruled countries like Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, and shaky States such as Libya and D.R Congo. For the plurality of "States", cp. Øyvind Østerud, *Det globale statssystemet*, Dreyer, Oslo 2018.

[84] As before, and after, the "Arab Spring", and also elsewhere, as in Pakistan and Iran.

[85] As emphasized by Francis Fukuyama in his opus, *Political Order and Political Decay* (2014), with the motto: "getting to Denmark!" – not to the United States of North America.

[86] In short, an awareness that I referred to by the term "*vitskapsteori*".

[87] Surely, this is a political text, not a scientific or scholarly one. Nevertheless, there are (and necessarily so) numerous epistemic claims and presuppositions as to what is going

(v) A focus on the mutual interconnectedness of various factors in a modern world in crisis?

In this text, there is a focus on migration as a "multidimensional reality" (§ 15). So far, so good. However, this focus is conceptually restricted, cp. point (iii) above. This is a major weakness. Moreover, this multidimensionality is not addressed as an epistemic challenge, but immediately conceived as an institutional and political challenge "that cannot be addressed by one government policy sector alone", but requires a "whole-of-government" and a "whole-of-society-approach" (§ 15). Cp. our earlier emphasis of modern crises as a two-level-constellation: both in reality and as to our epistemic approach (in addition to the institutional and governmental level).

(vi) A focus on the interplay between modern institutions and modern culture and identity?

We recall: for citizens in a society with weak public institutions (e.g. Somalia) it is reasonable to have a life-style and cultural identity suitable for this kind of society. For citizens living in a modern well-functioning democracy (as in Scandinavia) with rule-of-law (*Rechtsstaat*), a general and generous welfare state, and extensive self-organization and a high degree of mutual trust (trust in institutions and trust in other persons),[88] it is reasonable to have another lifestyle and cultural identity. Consequently, for a person moving from some kind of a clan society to such a modern society, there is a need for a change in lifestyle and cultural identity. In such cases, institutions and culture are *intertwined*: Modern institutions require cultural modernization.[89] Accordingly, there are "institution-constitutive" obligations in

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on in the world and what could possibly be done.

[88] Also with a decent educational system for everybody and "people's enlightenment" (*folkeopplysning*). By contrast, in some countries with a lack of enlightenment and cultural modernization, there is the death penalty for blasphemy, i.e., in Afghanistan, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Somalia. "In August [2018], Pakistan's new prime minister Imran Khan pledged to revive a campaign to impose global blasphemy laws at the UN. A previous attempt, spearheaded by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, ended in failure in 2011." https://www.theweek.co.uk/84420/blasphemy-laws-around-the-world

[89] Cp. the three points (alluded to above): (a) awareness of different personal and cultural perspectives and presuppositions, (b) acceptance of critical versions of different

addition to moral obligations and legal obligations. Moreover, in modern science-based societies (and in modern democracies), reasonable and responsible citizens are supposed to be open for counter-arguments and for enlightened and free discussions, and *not* to be "*argumentophobic*". Furthermore, they need to be aware of the plurality of epistemic perspectives and presuppositions, and not merely stick to instrumental rationality and natural science together with pre-modern beliefs and attitudes,[90] and hence, *not* to be "*half-modern*". These points about institutional and cultural modernization seem to be disregarded by those who are responsible for this UN text on migration (cp. § 32).[91]

(vii) Realism and credibility?

This text, despite its good intentions and its many useful proposals and suggestions (e.g., in § 17, 20, 25, 26), is epistemically weak and weak with respect to the complexity of the main challenges in modern societies. Insofar as this is the case, this text is not part of the solution, but rather part of the problem. Hence, there is a lesson to be learned for persons and agents involved in similar UN projects: they should and could do a better job epistemically,[92] and also with respect to modernization studies, paying attention to universal aspects as well as regional differences.[93]

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scientific and scholarly achievements, not only in the natural sciences but also in social sciences and humanities, inclusive enlightened criticism of religion, and (c) a differentiation between professional and private roles, and between religion and the legal system.

[90]   As alluded to above: be it in significant groups in the Mid-West, with Star Wars and a literal reading of holy scriptures, or in the Middle East, with modern weaponry and pre-modern beliefs (for instance about a pleasant afterlife in Paradise, for those who have successfully done away with some disbelievers).

[91]   Cp. Gunnar Skirbekk, "Religion und Gesellschaft. Multikulturalismus – eine Herausforderung des Wohlfahrtsstaats?", in Hans Bringeland and Arve Brunvoll, *Die Religion und das Wertefundament der Gesellschaft*, LIT Verlag, Zürich 2015: 135–162. Cp. also Gilles Kepel, *Banlieue de la République*, Gallimard, Paris 2012.

[92]   Cp. what has been said above, about the need for "*vitskapsteori*" in complex modern societies.

[93]   Cp. Gunnar Skirbekk, "Processes of Modernization: Scandinavian Experiences", *Transcultural Studies* 14/2018.

The Global Risks Report 2019

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World Economic Forum

Committed to Improving the State of the World
In partnership with Marsh & McLennan Companies and Zurich Insurance Group[94]

This Global Risks Report is not presented as an academic text.[95] It is a political text, but not in the sense that it is written by and for a clearly

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[95] "The information in this report, or on which this report is based, has been obtained from sources that the authors believe to be reliable and accurate. However, it has not been independently verified and no representation or warranty, express or implied, is made as to the accuracy or completeness of any information obtained from third parties."

defined political organization or agent. However, it definitely has a political agenda: that of "improving the State of the World".

Here we have a set of yearly reports related to high-profile meetings in Davos that are attended by VIPs from all over the world – heads of State, economic leaders, and central persons in media (many arriving with their private airplanes). It is unclear to me to what extent these people really know about or care about this report addressing major risks and challenges in our contemporary world. Nevertheless, the same heads of State who show up at these meetings in Davos are also the ones who ultimately stay behind the UN declarations and decisions, and the same media are commenting on both events. Consequently, it may be worthwhile to read this report as it stands, and to look for similarities and differences with the two UN texts we commented upon earlier.

The text falls into two parts: chapter 1, "Global Risks Perception Survey",[96] and the main text, chapters 2–8.[97] The survey operates with five interrelated areas of global risks: economic, environmental, geopolitical, societal, and technological, each referring to a number of specific risks and a short description of each risk.[98] The selected respondents are asked about what they see as the estimated likelihood and impact for the various risks and trends. Finally, there is a mention of the methodology used.[99]

My comments

The title of the first chapter is "Global Risks", with the subtitle "Out of Control". It starts with a question: "Is the world sleepwalking into a crisis?"[100] The answer given by this survey is apparently an affirmative one. Moreover, in my view, there are particularly two points in this survey that should be emphasized: (a) Over the years, from 2009 to 2019, there is a

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[96] "Global Risks 2019. Out of Control", p. 8–19.

[97] P. 20–103.

[98] Appendix A, "Descriptions of Global Risks and Trends 2019".

[99] Appendix B, e.g. with overview of gender, expertise, organization type, age, and region for the various selected respondents (ranging from 916 to 635 persons).

[100] Quote p. 15: "Of all risks, it is in relation to the environment that the world is most clearly sleepwalking into catastrophe".

significant shift in the respondents' perception of global risks[101] away from economic and financial worries to environmental and military ones.[102] (b) The various global risks are seen as widely *interconnected*.[103]

The main text is complex.[104] I restrict myself to some catchwords and brief references to what I perceive as crucial points in this Report:

– *Environmental risks* should *not* be treated as "*externalities*" (p. 16); economy and environmental risks are *intertwined*.

– Environmental risks are *multifaceted*; they include loss of biodiversity, food insecurity, reduced pollination, water shortage, floods (p. 15), sea-level rise (p. 56 f), and more.

– *Global trends*, from *climate change* to *demographtic projections*, lead to further crises[105] and trigger inter-regional *migration* for decades to come.[106]

– *New technologies* entail serious risks: "echo chambers" and fake news in the media (p. 17, 75), misuse of private data (p. 7), manipulation of human emotions (p. 17, 73), misuse of Artificial Intelligence (p. 17),

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[101] In terms of likelihood as well as in terms of impact.

[102] For the last 3 years, the top concern for negative *impact* is "weapons of mass destruction", while for *likelihood* it was "extreme weather events". The highest score for likelihood and impact in *combination* are "extreme weather events" and "failure of climate-change mitigation and adaption". "Weapons of mass destruction" has the highest score on impact but lowest on likelihood, while "Interstate conflict" has a high score both for impact and for likelihood. (Notice the contrast: in the UN texts, there is hardly any reference to mass destruction or military conflicts.)

[103] Cp. figure II and III, also p. 102 f. As a contrast, in the UN text there are apparently tensions (that are not mentioned) between some of the Sustainable Development Goals, e.g. between economic growth and a sustainable natural environment.

[104] With 305 footnotes.

[105] Quote (p. 14): "Global trends – from demographic projections to climate change – practically guarantee further crises, … ".

[106] Quote (p. 23): "Demographtic trends – such as those illustrated in Figure 2.1, which projects changes in the relative populations in Africa and Europe – will drive inter-regional migration in the decades ahead." Figure 2.1: "Wave of Change. Relative shares of combined Europe/Africa population" Source: UN World Population Prospects 2017, https://population.un.org/wpp/ (According to this graph, the numeric relation between the European and African population was around 70 to 30 in 1950; in 2017, it is around 40 to 60; and for 2090 it is estimated to be around 15 to 85.)

creation of new pathogens (p. 17), and weapons of mass destruction
(p. 13).[107]
– There are *geopolitical instabilities* (p. 12/13) due to a weakening of mul-
  tilateral institutions (p. 24) and an erosion of cross-border trust (p. 25).
– There are *anger and anxiety* among those who are the losers in the pro-
  cess of globalization (p. 13) due to increasing *inequalities and polariza-
  tion*[108] (p. 11, 13), notably in the "middle class" (p. 99), and this leads to
  "eroding trust" and *"diminishing social cohesion"* (p. 11, 13).
– *Institutions* "no longer match the challenges facing the world" (p. 33);
  there is "a vicious circle" between weak institutions and diminishing so-
  cial cohesion (s. 13).[109]
– *States* are seen as ambiguous: too weak[110] in a sense (a feeling of "lost
  control", p. 22), yet in another sense too strong[111] (making it harder to
  "sustain multilateralism", p. 23).[112]
– *"To rethink global capitalism"*[113] is seen as "the new challenge" (p. 11).[114]

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[107] For Big Data and Algorithms used to automatically target and "neutralize" potential
enemies, cp. the *Human Socio-Cultural Behavior Modeling Program* (HSCB). For
references, cp. e.g., https://ndiastorage.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/ndia/2007/disrupt/
Biggerstaff.pdf – also *Crisis Early Warning System* (ICEWS), and https://www.
lockheedmartin.com/en-us/products.hmtl

[108] Cp. Figure 1.1, p. 11.

[109] In neutral terms, there is an interplay between institutions and values, cp. modernization
theory in Weber and Habermas.

[110] P. 22, "Many political leaders and communities feel they have lost control … , and, in
response, they look to strengthen the State".

[111] P. 24, "Political leaders have increasingly asserted the primacy of nation-state in in-
ternational systems and sought to weaken the constraints placed on national autonomy
by international agreements and multilateral institutions." P. 23, "Strong-state politics
makes it harder to sustain multilateralism." (On the US-China controversies, p. 25–29.)

[112] In this Report, there is hardly any discussion and clarification of the term "State". In
contrast, cp. e.g. the three-part distinction in Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Po-
litical Decay* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, N.Y. 2014): between state administration, the
legal system ("rule of law", *Rechtsstaat*), and democratic checks and balances. More-
over, there is no professional discussion of institutional and epistemic challenges for
democracy in modern societies, nor is there any comparative discussion of different
cases and notions of "States" in our global world, as in Øyvind Østerud, *Det globale
statssystemet* (Dreyer, Oslo 2018).

[113] Referring to Adam Smith as a moral philosopher (p. 11).

[114] Supposedly to be addressed at the Annual Meeting 2019 in Davos (p. 11).

– "*Encourage skepticism*" is an explicit piece of epistemic advice stated in the last chapter.[115]

Now, some remarks, referring to the same 7 points that I used as a basis for my comments on the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*.

(i) Conceptual clarity?

When it comes to the question of conceptual clarity, it is all right, for this kind of text. However, there is a certain drawback in this respect due to a somewhat abstract level of discourse: generally speaking, one does not go into the nitty-gritty of concrete cases, where a higher degree of conceptual preciseness is required (as for the term "State" alluded to above).

(i) Tensions?

In line with what we just said, there is a tension between the general abstractness of the textual discourse and the diversity of the various practical challenges. Moreover, and for the same reason, in this text there are still tensions between free trade and *economic growth* on the one side and *natural limitations* on the other, and between *present* needs and concerns and the needs and concerns of *future* generations.

(ii) A lack of important concepts?

Despite its variety of crucial concepts, this text lacks the conceptual differentiation needed for a more advanced understanding of *modern States* and *modern democracies*. Moreover, there is a general lack of *epistemic* concepts,[116] and a lack of concepts on modernization, both for the differentiation of *modern institutions* and for *cultural modernization* and "modernization of consciousness".

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[115] Chapter 8, *Risk Reassessment*, in the section written by András Tilcsik and Chris Clearfield, p. 91–93.

[116] With the exception of the emphasis on skepticism in the final chapter, p. 91–93.

(iii) An awareness of epistemic challenges in modern science-based societies?

As just pointed out, there is a lack of awareness for epistemic concepts, and thus there is a blindness for epistemic challenges in modern science-based societies. This applies in particular to the plurality of academic perspectives and forms of rationality, including different forms of expertise, such as the relationship between economics and other social sciences, and between social sciences and the various natural sciences.[117]

(iv) What about the mutual interconnectedness of various factors in a modern world in crisis?

The authors of this text are well aware of the complex interconnectedness of various risks in the modern world, as illustrated already by the design of the *Global Risks Perception Survey*.

(v) A focus on the interplay between modern institutions and modern culture and identity?

There is an awareness of the interconnection between political institutions and social virtues such as trust and social cohesion. However, there is no focus on the specific interplay between modern institutions and "modernization of consciousness" (cp. Habermas, alluded to earlier). Hence, there is no concern for "half-modern" agents with modern weaponry and means of communication combined with pre-modern beliefs and actions. Nor is there any concern for "argumentophobic" agents and regimes.

(vi) Realism and credibility?

Despite its shortcomings, as referred to above, this text demonstrates a willingness to address complex and urgent issues. Compared with the two UN declarations commented on earlier, this text from the World Economic Forum gives a favorable impression in terms of realism and credibility.

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[117] In short, a lack of "*vitskapsteori*".

Climate Risk and the Norwegian Economy (Klimarisiko og norsk økonomi)

NOU 17/2018 (NOU: Official Norwegian Reports)

Report from a Commission appointed by Royal Decree on 6 October 2017, delivered to the Ministry of Finance on 12 December 2018.

There is a strongly abbreviated and scientifically defused summary in English available on the internet: "Climate Risk and the Norwegian Economy" (57 pages). Here I shall refer to the original Norwegian version (257 pages):

Contents

Part I, Introduction, p. 7–27

1. Introduction
2. Summary

Part II, Climate Risk Analysis, p. 29–88

1. Climate Challenge
2. Risk, Risk Analysis, and Risk Management
3. Climate Risks and the Norwegian Economy

Part III, Climate Risk Management, p. 89–144

1. From Risk Analysis to Risk Management
2. Climate Risk Management in the Private Sector
3. Climate Risk Management in the Public Sector

Attachments,[118] p. 145–243

This is a professional text written by a commission of seven experts.[119] It emphasizes the distinction between two disciplinary approaches: *economics* and *risk research*.[120] In addition, this report draws on *climate re-*

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[118] Seven professional contributions with 132 ftn and extensive references, notably by professors Terje Aven and Klaus Mohn at the University of Stavanger. In addition, letters from the Ministry of Exterior on legal issues, p. 243–253.

[119] In economics (3 persons), risk research (2), climate and eco-systems (1), and law (1); and a secretariat of 9 persons (2 of them are members of "Rethinking Economics – Norge").

[120] Cp. p. 9, with a neat distinction between "*økonomifaget*" (the discipline of economics) and "*risikofaget*" (the discipline of risk research).

search presented in *the United Nations reports on Climate Change*[121] (IPCC AR5, and especially the latest one: IPCC 1.5C) and similar reports.[122]

Moreover, the report refers to *limitations* of a purely *economic* approach to climate challenges and points out some basic *ethical problems* such as the distribution of climate burdens between countries and over generations (criticism of discounting[123]), including the danger that present generations cause irreversible changes that could make parts of the Earth inhabitable for later generations.[124] Similarly, the report refers to climate challenges as examples of "*market failure*", similar to "*the tragedy of the commons*",[125] and

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[121] *IPCC*: *United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (United Nations Climate Panel): *IPCC AR5*, 5th Assessment Report, finalized in 2014; delivered in stages; The Synthesis Report, 2 November 2014. (*United Nations Climate Change Conference* in *Paris* during late 2015 (from 25 November to 12 December 2015). *IPCC 1.5C*, Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5C (SR15), 8 October 2018. (*IPCC 6th Report*, planned for 2022.)

[122] Also Norwegian and international reports, cp. p. 11, 31; and further sources in footnotes and references.

[123] Cp. p. 163.

[124] Cp. p. 9–10. "Such ethical perspectives are important, and they have their place in public debate and policy formation. These are problems that cannot be solved with a purely economic-disciplinary or risk-disciplinary perspective, and hence they are not included in the discussions and recommendations given by this commission. However, we point out how better understanding of how climate risks play out and influence economic contexts could be of great importance in the national and international discussion on managing the climate challenge." (My translation)

[125] Cp. p. 21. Interestingly, there is a professional critique of the "integrated assessment model" of William D. Nordhaus (who, in 2018, got the prize from the Swedish Riksbanken in memory of Alfred Nobel), a critique of epistemic shortcomings in his "Dynamic Integrated Climate Economy Model", for instance of not including societal structures and institutions, cp. Box 5.2, p. 66, e.g.: "En slik integrert modell vil gi en svært forenklet fremstilling av verden". Also referring to Attachment 2: "Klimarisiko i samfunnsøkonomiske analyser og integrerte evalueringsmodeller" (my translation: 'climate risk in socio-economic analyses and integrated evaluation models'), where Nordhaus is criticized, e.g., with reference to *discounting* in cases of possibly dramatic environmental damages in a far future (p. 163, § 3). Furthermore, on p. 71, Box 5.4, the Ministry of Finance is criticized for its use of the notion "national wealth" (*nasjonalformue*) related to the rate of discounting for natural resources. These cases of inherent disciplinary criticism are valuable contributions of "*vitskapsteori*" ("*Wissenschaftstheorie*") in practice.

also to the problem in economics of coping with *long-term perspectives*: "*the tragedy of the [time] horizon*".[126]

As to risk research, the report distinguishes clearly between *quantifiable risks* and *uncertainties in cases where it does not make sense to operate with numbers*.[127] For the latter, there are references to the current academic discussions on different notions of *uncertainty* (including epistemic uncertainty[128]) and *probability* (versus likelihood[129]). Quantifiable risks correlate with prognosis; uncertainty correlates with possible *scenarios*.[130] The report operates with three such scenarios:[131] A, successful climate policy.[132] B, late transition.[133] C, dramatic climate change.[134] – In short, "Consider-

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[126] Referring to Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England, "Breaking the tragedy of the horizon – climate change and financial stability", a speech from 29 Sept. 2015 (p. 95, Box 6.2). To quote the report (my translation, p. 95): "We simply lack institutions suitable for dealing with challenges with a time perspective of a century or more."

[127] E.g., p. 35, "Det er umulig å fullt ut tallfeste de økonomiske konsekvensene av global oppvarming" ('It is impossible to fully quantify the consequences of global warming').

[128] As in Nassim Taleb (*The Black Swan: the Impact of the Highly Improbable*, 2007), cp. p. 59, 61 (Box 4.4). Cp. Attachment 1, "Om risiko og usikkerhet" ('On risk and uncertainty'), p. 145–160, by professor Terje Aven.

[129] Cp. P. 32 (Box 3.2; "Begrepsbruk om usikkerhet og sannsynligheter", and p. 57–58, e.g. on 'epistemic uncertainty' ("epistemisk usikkerhet"). Cp. the English summary, p. 11: "It is impossible to survey all potential impacts of climate change. No existing model can fully describe the workings of the entire physical world and how all physical, chemical, geological and biological processes influence each other. … and it is impossible to predict how people and societies will respond when faced with rapid and large changes in their surroundings."

[130] E.g., p. 16–17.

[131] P. 51–52 (§ 3.6).

[132] P. 17 (p. 19 in the English summary): "This scenario involves a successful climate policy that delivers a swift transition to a low-emission society. No significant self-reinforcing mechanisms in the climate system are triggered, thus implying that the climate changes are moderate and the worldwide economic implications are relatively minor. However, the transition to a low-emission society may be challenging for various stakeholders."

[133] P. 17 (p. 19–20 in the English summary): "Scenario B involves late climate policy tightening – following a period of further warming. We are, at the same time, "lucky" – and no self-reinforcing mechanisms in the climate system are triggered. The climate changes and economic implications are considerably more pronounced than in scenario A. There is a higher risk that the Norwegian economy will be indirectly affected by climate changes in other countries as the result of conflict escalation, diminished international cooperation and changes in global migration patterns. In addition, belated and

able uncertainty at many levels means significant climate risk".[135] Hence, "Catastrophic climate change cannot be excluded".[136]

This report does not only operate with *economic* and *risk-theoretical* concepts in addition to *environmental* and *climate-related* concepts; it also operates with concepts for *socio-political institutions* and *social capital*[137] and thereby also for the problem of weak institutions, and a weakening of institutions, within States and between States, and hence for the problem of *conflicts* and political *instability*,[138] and of *increased climate-related migration*[139] influenced also by *population growth* and *economic development*.[140] In addition, there are discussions of *technologies* for carbon-dioxide removal and storage.[141] In other words, this report operates with a rich conceptual repertoire.

Moreover, this report addresses and discusses different conceptual and professional perspectives and presuppositions.[142] Surely, there is more that

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more severe policy tightening will increase the risk of financial instability."

[134]   P. 17 (p. 20 in the English summary): "This is a scenario involving political failure and/or the triggering of self-reinforcing mechanisms in the climate system. The economic implications of such catastrophic climate changes cannot meaningfully be quantified. Risk management advice would be of minor use, and the relevant measure is quite simply an effective climate policy that reduces the probability of ending up in scenario C."

[135]   P. 15 (p. 14 in the English summary).

[136]   P. 15 (p. 12 in the English summary).

[137]   E.g., p 68 and 70 (e.g., referring to trust, p. 70).

[138]   E.g., p. 68–69.

[139]   E.g., p. 68–69. Cp. p. 68, ftn. 11, referring to Snorre Kverndokk, "Climate Policies, Distributive Effects and Transfers Between Rich and Poor Countries", *International Review of Environmental and Resource Economics*, 2018, 12: 129–176. P. 164 (4.4 Climate Migration): "... , a growing number of empirical studies link migration to climate changes at both the national and international levels (Marchiori et al., 2017; Mulligan et al., 2014). Predictions for climate change-induced migration in 2050 are obviously uncertain, and estimates range from many thousands up to several hundred million people being effected (Gemenne, 2011; Marchiori and Schumacher, 2011; Oppenheimer, 2013)."

[140]   E.g., p. 14, 31.

[141]   Cp. p. 47–51 (§ 3.5), with discussions on Carbon-Dioxide Removal technologies; Carbon Catch and Storage (CCS).

[142]   Which *de facto* is the kind of activity performed in "*vitskapsteori*". E.g., in the introduction, p. 9 (§ 1.1), in the critical discussion of Nordhaus, p. 66 and p. 163, and of the

could have been said and done in that respect, such as more said concerning the inherent need for a "modernization of consciousness" in modern science-based societies in crisis. But that could not be expected for this kind of text, i.e., an official report to the Ministry of Finance.

My comments

At this point, I shall add some brief remarks, referring to the same seven points that I used as a basis for my comments on the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, and the *Global Risks Report 2019*.

(i) Conceptual clarity?

In this respect, this official report on climate risk scores high.

(ii) Tensions?

There are, as far as I can see, no tensions between various arguments and recommendations.

(iii) A lack of important concepts?

Being the kind of text it is, there is no lack of important concepts for the case in question. However, in following up these discussions in another setting, more concepts could have been used. That goes for concepts concerning successful State institutions, with their inherent roles and virtues (cp. Francis Fukuyama[143]), as well as for concepts for full-scale epistemic and cultural modernization.[144]

Ministry of Finance, p. 71 (Box 5.4).

[143] Cp. Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, N.Y. 2014.

[144] Cp. e.g. Gunnar Skirbekk, *Multiple Modernities*. The Chinese University Press, Hong Kong 2011.

(iv) An awareness of epistemic challenges in modern science-based societies?

Ideally, more could have been said about challenges related to epistemic plurality in modern science-based societies, and about power and sciences, but hardly in this kind of text. As to the discussion about epistemic certainty and uncertainty, this text is exceptionally strong.

(v) What about the mutual interconnectedness of various factors in a modern world in crisis?

Here, too, the text scores high, even though more could have been said about institutional and epistemic factors and their interconnectedness in modern societies.[145]

(vi) A focus on the interplay between modern institutions and modern culture and identity?

Again, more could have been said[146] – if it had been another text.

(vii) Realism and credibility?

As far as I can see this text is characterized by a high degree of realism, and thus, of credibility.

Comparing the four texts

In comparing these four texts, it is worthwhile looking at the chronology: the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* was presented in September 2015; the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* was reaffirmed in December 2018; the *Global Risks Report 2019* was launched in January 2019, and the report *Klimarisiko og norsk økonomi* (Climate Risk and the Norwegian Economy) was delivered in December 2018.

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[145] Again, cp. the discussions of institutional, cultural and epistemic modernities, from Max Weber and Jürgen Habermas to our present day.

[146] E.g., on Enlightenment and common education, and on the need (for citizens in modern constitutional democracies) to avoid clan-identity, and the need to overcome "argumentophobia" and "half-modernity" (alluded to earlier in this paper).

Concerning the debate on climate and environmental challenges, we recall that the United Nations climate panel, IPCC AR5, delivered a report in 2014; the Paris conference on climate, with a general agreement to keep the two-degree increase in global temperature, took place in December 2015; and the United Nations IPCC 1.5C, on the need not to extend 1.5 degrees, was published in October 2018.

In comparing the three latter texts, published approximately at the same time (December 2018 and January 2019), it is striking that the United Nations *Compact for Migration*[147] by and large ignores the kinds of challenges that are presented by the United Nations IPCC 1.5C, whereas these challenges are addressed and seriously discussed in the *Global Risks Report 2019* and in *Klimarisiko og norsk økonomi*.

Thus, there is an epistemic tension between the recent UN report on *climate* and the recent UN declaration on *migration* – apparently a tension within the UN system, between UN reports presented by *scientific experts* and UN declarations in terms of *consensus among political agents* from the various member states.[148]

Finally, in comparing the four texts, looking at *the seven points* that I have used for my comments, it is striking that the two texts delivered by the United Nations are epistemically weaker and less credible than the report from the World Economic Forum and the report written for the Norwegian Ministry of Finance. This goes for conceptual clarity, for tensions between various arguments and recommendations (and goals), and for an appropriate repertoire of concepts. In general, it also goes for the awareness

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[147] It should be added that the final version of the text on migration is dated July 2018.

[148] In this paper, I have not questioned the epistemic quality of the UN IPCC AR5 or the UN IPCC 1.5C. I do not have the scientific qualifications to do so. Climate research is not my field. However, I am aware of the fact that there were critical objections to some of the procedures of the UN Climate Panel IPCC AR5 and to some of their claims. Nevertheless, I assume that today the warnings about climate change and other environmental challenges are epistemically well established. Consequently, it is fair to expect that the updated versions of the United Nations reports on these issues ought to be taken seriously. If so, we have to conclude that there are infelicitous tensions between the epistemic quality of these UN reports on environmental challenges, not only for the UN Compact for Migration, but also for the UN Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development with its epistemic shortcomings and divergent and partly conflicting goals (as pointed out above).

of epistemic challenges in modern science-based societies, for the mutual interconnectedness of various factors in a modern world in crisis, and for the awareness of the interplay between modern institutions and modern culture and identity.[149]

Concluding remarks

These four texts are chosen because of their relevance for ongoing discussions of complex crises and epistemic challenges in modern science-based societies. In addition to the epistemic differences mentioned in comparing the various texts, there are, in my view, particularly two points that should be emphasized: (i) The need, when facing complex challenges in the modern world, for multiple scientific and scholarly perspectives – in short, the need to avoid being "half-modern". (ii) And equally, the need to be open to other relevant perspectives and for counter-arguments and for better reasons – in short, the need to avoid being "argumentophobic". In this respect, among the four, the text on climate risks is the better one, and the two UN texts are the weaker ones.

However, my general conclusion, looking back on these four texts, is a strengthened belief in the need for the kind of self-critical epistemic competence and practice that I have alluded to (in Part I) by the term "*vitskaps-teori*", seen in a modernity-theoretical perspective.

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[149] For a positive conception of the two UN declarations, cp. Rémy Rioux, *Réconciliations*, published by Édition Débats Publics, Paris 2019. Rémy Rioux is a French high-ranking civil servant and *directeur général de l'Agence Française de Développement* (*AFD*).

Part III – What To Do?

Apparently, the world is in bad shape at all levels: in reality, institutionally, epistemically. What to do? In this section (Part III), I shall make a few suggestions as to what could possibly be done in order to reduce or counteract the epistemic challenges referred to in the previous sections.

More precisely, in this section we shall look at possible improvements at the *epistemic* level; however, since epistemic challenges are institutionally embedded, I shall mainly focus on *institutional* rearrangements.

In so doing, I shall focus on three major institutions in modern societies: *universities*, *schools* (i.e., the educational system), and the *media* (i.e., the public sphere, *die Öffentlichkeit*) – three institutions, each with their particular characteristics (and inherent diversities), but also with mutual interplay. Hence, in this section, in the search for epistemic improvements, I shall focus both on what could possibly be done *within* each of these institutions, and what could possibly be done by rearranging their *relationships* and strengthening their *interactions*.

Universities

Today, when talking about "universities", we should keep in mind that there are great differences within countries and between countries.[150] Here, I shall refer to full-scale universities with high-quality and self-critical research, and with education in all scientific and scholarly disciplines, from mathe-

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[150] That goes for size, for differences in organization and governance, externally and internally, for financial resources and academic autonomy, for academic quality, and for whether there are just a few disciplines, in contrast to a full-scale university with the various scientific and scholarly disciplines.

matics and natural sciences to social sciences and humanities, as well as law, medicine and theology.

However, despite the various differences between universities, there are today some common trends, e.g. in Europe, where universities are increasingly reshaped as *mass institutions*, *market related* and *administratively controlled*.[151] Hence, there are plenty of common problems for universities in today's societies.

Some of these trends are deplorable, even when initiated by (more or less) good intentions, like many of the institutional changes of European universities due to the Bologna process.[152] Consequently, looking for what

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[151] Again, there are different cases: (i) those who have their own economic resources (such as Harvard) versus those who seek economic resources on the market competing for students (as "consumers" paying for their education), (ii) universities run according to political or religious principles, (iii) and universities that are funded by predictable and transparent public budgets and have little interference with their academic autonomy. – High tuition fees, as in the US and UK, are correlated with low social mobility and high socio-economic inequality. Moreover, recently there have been scandals in the US, where super-rich parents have paid a considerable amount of money as a bribe to some of the most prestigious universities in order to get a place to study for their own offspring.

[152] To coordinate higher education in Europe there is now at European universities a common system: (i) BA (bachelor degree), 3 years and generally just one main discipline, (ii) MA (master degree), 2 years, with supervision (and possibly co-authorship for the master theses), (iii) PhD, under supervision and possibly co-authorship. – Traditionally, at Norwegian universities, the lower degree, "cand.mag", took 4 years, with one major discipline (*mellomfag*, 1,5 years) and two minor disciplines (*grunnfag*, each 1 year), in addition to mandatory introductory courses (exams) in logics and history of philosophy, and in Latin for philologists (0.5 year). (E.g., for future lecturers in humanities at the Norwegian *gymnasium*, a choice of disciplines might be like this: *mellomfag* in Norwegian, and *grunnfag* in History and in German.) Moreover, the higher degree, *hovudfag*, was supposed to take another 3 years, and the candidate was supposed to find and formulate his or her own research topic and present their thesis as an independent piece of work. (In scholarly disciplines, where *formulations* are essential, there was no co-authorship.) Moreover, as a rule there were both written and oral exams, with external sensors and examiners, since in general there were no modules for less than half a semester (except for the introductory courses), whereas today there are short educational modules, e.g. for one sixth of a term. – Add to this that the traditional Norwegian *gymnasium* was evaluated as equivalent to two years at a North American college. (E.g., all students at the Norwegian *gymnasium* had English, French and German, in addition to our two Norwegian languages, and the two other Scandinavian languages, Danish

modern universities could and should be doing, I have no illusions about the actual situation at most universities in the world today.

This being said, I think it is worthwhile and even urgent to raise the following question: *what could and should full-scale universities do in response to the epistemic challenges in modern societies?* Bluntly stated: "what *can* full-scale universities *do*, which is *important* in this respect, and which these universities can do *better than anyone else?*" What could and should these universities do?

Here is a tentative answer:

– What do scientific and scholarly researchers actually do at full-scale and high-quality universities? Apparently, they are engaged in very different activities. Some researchers are working in labs, others in libraries, or in hospitals, or doing fieldwork of some kind, etc. However, there is one activity in common for all disciplines at such universities: the doctoral dissertation, ideally an open and enlightened discussion, as a *common search for better arguments.*[153] Hence, the participants in this kind of academic activity have to be *open* for (and interested in) relevant *counter-arguments* to one's own claims (and for critical remarks to one's own presuppositions): A common argumentative search for better reasons, away from less good reasons, being open for counter-arguments, also about one's own presuppositions – this is what researchers at academically high-quality universities have in common. Stated negatively, whatever the topic, whatever the discipline, "*argumentophobia*" is out of the question. – Surely, doctoral dissertations are special events on special occasions. However, since doctoral dissertations are common to all academic disciplines at these universities, the *capability* to take part in such discussions is common to all of them. They all are able to discuss and argue in this sense. Next point: in modern science-based societies,

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and Swedish, and some knowledge of the Norse language, the language of the Nordic Sagas.) – Now, with the Bologna process and universities as mass institutions, there is money to get by having many students, and especially by having many students passing the exams. No wonder that the academic quality is under pressure – despite more supervision and active educational practices.

[153] Generally, in a *melioristic* sense: a joint search for *better* arguments. Cp. different cases (notions) of fallibilism, and different cases of epistemic certainty, e.g. in Gunnar Skirbekk, *Philosophie der Moderne*, Velbrück Wissenschaft, Weilerswist 2017.

there is an urgent *need* (as delineated above) for such discussions and
mutual learning-processes within and between the various scientific and
scholarly perspectives. Therefore, for this reason, the various disciplines
ought to arrange and cultivate these kinds of discursive activities as part
of their ordinary work, at these high-quality and full-scale universities.[154]

– In a modern world and at high-quality, full-scale universities with a va-
riety of disciplines and perspectives, my advice for the university educa-
tion of students (as alluded to above), bluntly stated, is this: they should
learn two things: a model, and that the model is not reality. That is, they
should learn a discipline,[155] and learn that this discipline does not grasp
all there is.[156] Economists see something, and sociologists, or psycholo-
gists, see something else about the "same" issues – and so on. In short, to
know what you know, you need to know what you do not know.[157] Hence,
in an *epistemically pluralistic world*, scientists and scholars should be
aware of their own *presuppositions* and *limitations* – as well as those of
scientists and scholars in other (neighboring) disciplines. Furthermore, at
full-scale universities with "all" scientific and scholarly disciplines, this
kind of insight may come *more easily* than at universities with just a few
disciplines, or at separate research institutes based on one or just a few
disciplines, since colleagues from other disciplines are "all around", at
full-scale universities.[158] Moreover, this awareness of one's own presup-
positions (and limitations) is a vital epistemic insight, not only within

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[154] For instance, in terms of common seminars for staff and students, with strong expecta-
tions for everyone to attend and participate (as at some high-quality US universities).

[155] Ideally, more than one discipline, cp. the previous note about former university educa-
tion for high-school teachers in Norway (for *lektorar* at Norwegian *gymnasium*).

[156] In basic disciplinary research, it is all right to do one-disciplinary research, given that
these researchers are sufficiently aware of their own presuppositions, as a precondition
for knowing what they know and what they don't know. However, in a modern world in
crisis, where various factors tend to interact and mutually reinforce each other, there is
an additional reason to be aware of one's own presuppositions and limitations, and their
relationship to other relevant scientific or scholarly perspectives (as alluded to in Part I).

[157] Cp. the Confucian saying: true knowledge is to recognize that you know what you know
and that you do not know what you do not know. (From the *Analects*, cp. the publication
"om ei løve kunne tale", University of Bergen, Bergen 2012, eds. Gunnar Skirbekk and
Rasmus Slaattelid.)

[158] Depending on institutional and architectural arrangements.

academia, but for modern societies at large, which are societies that in various ways are dependent on the full scale of different (and often competing) disciplines and discipline-based expert groups. For instance, in many urgent cases (such as the ones discussed in Part II) there is a need not merely for technology and instrumental sciences, but also for hermeneutic and critically formative disciplines. In short, since there is, for human beings, no God's-eye-view, seeing everything from all perspectives at the same time, the awareness of this epistemic perspectivism and pluralism implies that "all" disciplines are needed in order for us to cope as best we can with the various epistemic challenges in complex modern societies. Consequently, being in favor of natural sciences and science-based technologies, and neglecting the various social sciences and humanities, should thus be seen as an epistemic "anomaly".[159] In short, being epistemically "*half modern*", in this sense, is out of question.

– To the extent that modern full-scale and high-quality universities have a potential both for furthering a common discursive search for better arguments, taking counter-arguments seriously, and for a reflexive and critical awareness of different epistemic perspectives and presuppositions (and limitations), one's own as well as those of the others, then these universities *could* play an *important* role in modern science-based risk-societies.

This is my affirmative answer to the question raised above: With its potential for argumentative reasoning and with its unique possibility for reflecting on different epistemic presuppositions and limitations, a full-scale and high-quality modern university has a capability, and probably more so than anyone else, to perform this kind of self-critical epistemic quality-assessment,[160] highly needed in complex modern societies. (At the same time, the deplorable status in this respect, at many contemporary university institutions, should not be overlooked.)

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[159] "Anomaly", in a Weberian sense, indicating a societal pathology.
[160] "Criticism" ("critique") in a Kantian sense, not as rejection, but as improvement. Cp. the titles: "Critique of pure reason", "Critique of practical reason".

However, for these potentials to be realized, there are *some requirements* that have to be fulfilled. I shall briefly address some such demands, as I see them:

In analytic terms there is a difference between institutions run by *strategic rationality* in search for power or for profit, and institutions run by *communicative and argumentative rationality* in search for better insight and understanding.[161] Surely, empirically there are often grey-zones and transitions between the two.[162] Nevertheless, this analytic distinction is often useful:[163] for instance, the search for better arguments and novel insights may easily be corrupted if it is mainly motivated by a search for money or political power.[164] Hence, in order to do what they could and should do, which is important, and which they can do better than anyone else, full-scale high-quality universities ought to preserve a certain *autonomy* in relation to economic markets and political forces run by strategic rationality.

To the extent that modernization is conceived as ongoing differentiations of institutions and "value spheres" (including epistemic values), as in Max Weber and Jürgen Habermas, a blurring of the differences between different institutions and their different forms of rationality may lead to (anti-modern) *anomalies*, as when the market institution (with its primarily strategic rationality) expands and intervenes into institutions primarily run by communicative and argumentative rationality, as in the case of scientific and scholarly search for better arguments.[165]

Accordingly, for high-quality modern universities, there is a need for a *transparent and predictable economic funding* different from the kind of economic funding obtained on the market – i.e., for such universities there is a need for a transparent and predictable economic funding delivered, for

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[161] For the discussion of these notions, see Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1981. English translation, *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

[162] E.g., unconscious wishes for honor and recognition.

[163] For instance, like the analytic distinction between being sick and being healthy. An important distinction, even though we mostly are somewhat in between.

[164] This is well known from the current debate on "fraud" and "corrupted science", and hence in the discussion on lack of trust in scientific and scholarly research.

[165] Hence, a pathological trend, in modern societies.

instance, by a modern and competent constitutional State[166] without undue ideological conditions and ambitions.

Equally, there is a need for *a transparent and competent administration* and for *academic self-governance,* at these universities.

Moreover, there is a need for *an architecture and a site planning* that facilitate organized and spontaneous meetings and collaboration between colleagues from different disciplines.

Finally, there is a need for *a collaborative culture,* which might be strengthened by appropriate *educational measures*.[167]

In short, in response to epistemic challenges in modern science-based risk-societies, modern high-quality full-scale universities could and should do their best to further open and enlightened reasoning as well as an awareness of epistemic presuppositions and limitations, and thus promote an enlightened, melioristic and self-critical trust in scientific and scholarly activities.

Finally, these universities should also take a responsibility for an epistemically improved education of high-school teachers and of people working in public media, as I shall argue in the two following sub-sections.

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[166] Again, as in Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay*.

[167] Such as (i) compulsory introductory courses like the ones we had at Norwegian universities, i.e., the *examen philosophicum*, with practical training in conceptual analysis and clarity along with a brief introduction to the history of philosophy and the philosophy of the sciences and the humanities; (ii) joint seminars, with university personnel from different disciplines, running (e.g.) for a whole semester (with the same scholars or scientists) so that the students may experience transdisciplinarity (and "*vitskapsteori*") *live*; (iii) at universities we have *research-based education*; however, when university education consists of enlightened discussions among equal partners, we may, at the same time, have *education-based research*; (iv) finally, at the doctoral level, there should be mandatory training in "*vitskapsteori*" ("*Wissenschaftstheorie*"), as it used to be at the University of Bergen, where the doctoral candidate, his or her supervisor, another colleague from the same department, and a professor from the Center for the Study of the Sciences and the Humanities (with relevant "double competence"), got together to discuss the candidate's thesis in a "*vitskapsteoretisk*" perspective.

School system

All well-functioning modern democracies have compulsory school atten-
dance. The reason why is clear enough: as mature citizens[168] in modern
democracies we have the rights to vote and to be elected for the legisla-
tive national assembly, making coercive laws and legal regulations for one-
self and all other citizens. Hence, as citizens, i.e., as "*mündige Staats-
bürger*", we are supposed to be sufficiently enlightened and autonomous
to make these decisions. Therefore, a compulsory educational system with
adequate basic education for all citizens (*Staatsbürger*) is required in well-
functioning modern democracies.

However, since the early 19th century, when some countries gradually
became democratic,[169] the world has changed dramatically. It has become
much more complex.[170] Consequently, the need for an extensive and high-
quality educational system for all citizens has become even more urgent.
Surely, a modern school system is supposed to educate the young genera-
tion for a variety of jobs and for necessary social skills, but additionally,
there is an urgent need to prepare the young generation for basic challenges
confronting all mature citizens in institutionally and epistemically differen-
tiated modern risk-societies.[171] In short, in a modern democracy, in times of
crisis, a main purpose for the educational system is that of fostering reason-
able and responsible citizens.

To establish and to run such an educational system, essential for mature
and co-responsible citizens in modern risk-societies, is basically a *public*
responsibility, in well-functioning modern democracies, primarily a *State*
responsibility. Bluntly stated, the basic common school system should not
be organized and run by private agents with economic motives and interests,
nor by agents with an ideological agenda that may nourish "half-modern"

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[168] That is, as *Staatsbürger,* in a legal sense, not merely as *Bürger* or *Mitbürger*. At this
decisive point, the English language is amazingly imprecise by using the same word,
"citizen", for all these notions.

[169] As in Norway, after the Napoleonic war, in 1814.

[170] As alluded to above, in Part I.

[171] Moreover, as part of a mandatory school system with the aim of fostering basic social
trust and cohesion, there should also be free extracurricular activities, such as excursions
with the school class to other regions of the country, or out in nature.

and "argumentophobic" mentalities, but by enlightened and responsible State agencies.[172]

In a broader perspective, for the sake of a basic social equality (and for social cohesion and social mobility), the whole educational system, from kindergarten to university, should be a public responsibility, in well functioning modern democracies basically a State responsibility – free of charge, for all children, pupils and students alike.

However, a good educational system presupposes genuinely motivated and well-educated teachers, decently paid, with fair working conditions, being socially recognized for what they are doing and for the great importance of their work. In countries with a tradition of loyal and competent State Officials, meritocratic and well educated (as in Scandinavia),[173] there is a special and interesting option: in order to strengthen the social status and recognition of the teaching profession, all teachers and educators working in official educational institutions, from kindergartens to universities, could officially and publicly be named as "State Officials", *embetsfolk*,[174] by a formal and symbolic act of recognition.[175]

Media, the public sphere

Introductorily I made some brief remarks about epistemic challenges due to recent institutional and technological changes in media and public spaces. On the basis of what I just said about the importance of a good common educational system in modern risk-societies, and about the importance of a

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[172] Except for reasonable versions of (e.g.) Montessori or Steiner-inspired schools, not least for special children.

[173] Before 1989, professors at Norwegian state-run universities were formally appointed by the King, as State Officials. Also the university educated teachers at the *gymnasium* were State Officials.

[174] In a democratic and formal monarchy, this could be done by a ritual handover of a formal diploma or other visual items, in the name of the Monarch (King or Queen).

[175] In a globalized world, with an anomalous extension of the economic institution, there are reasons for a strengthening of State institutions ("State", as conceived by Fukuyama). Consequently, we might consider the possibility of extending the symbolic status of (royal) "State Officials", *embetsfolk*, to all personnel in main State institutions, such as the courts, the police, and the military.

revised version of high-quality full-scale universities, I shall add a few re-
marks on what could hopefully be done to improve the working conditions
for journalists and other people working in public media and to strengthen
the epistemic quality of what they are doing. At first, two general observa-
tions:

– What journalists are doing in traditional media, such as newspapers, ra-
  dio and television, has increasingly become *commodities on the market*
  (even on the *stock-market*). This institutional change implies a change in
  rationale and rationality, briefly stated: a strengthening of strategic and
  instrumental rationality in the search for (maximum) profit, and a weak-
  ening of the kind of rationality required for epistemic quality and solidity.
  Seen from the theory of modernity, this is an anomaly: it's an inadequate
  institutional setting and a biased kind of rationality.[176]

– Then there are changes due to *new technology* – roughly stated: more dig-
  ital, less paper, higher speed.[177] Combined with market-related require-
  ments, these technological changes may lead to less time for epistemi-
  cally demanding research (e.g., of the kind referred to in Part II above),
  and more uncertainty on the job market for journalists.

What to do? At least some institutional counter-measures could be consid-
ered:

– *Economic support*, i.e., predictable and transparent economic support,
  by the State,[178] for serious public media such as newspapers, radio and
  television.[179] Would this kind of public support guarantee epistemic qual-
  ity? Not necessarily. Hence, there should be some requirements, but not
  on the content of journalistic work – a decent modern State, aware of
  its legacy and limits, will not (and cannot, legally speaking) intervene
  with what journalists are doing. (If needed, the courts can.) However,
  as a condition for economic support, the State might ask for some ba-
  sic *awareness and competence* among the journalists and permanent com-

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[176] A kind of "category mistake", as a philosopher might say.

[177] Cp. comments and references in the introduction.

[178] Cp. my remarks below on the kind of "State" I have in mind.

[179] Surely, in modern societies there are huge varieties of "media" and public fora, orga-
nized in different ways, on paper and digital. Moreover, not only newspapers, radio and
TV, but also (e.g.) books and journals belong to the public sphere (*die Öffentlichkeit*).

mentators concerning *main challenges* in complex modern societies, and for a certain *transparency* in this regard (see remarks on transparent CVs, below).

– *Public media* outlets that are *formally and economically run by qualified State agencies* (as in the case of NRK, *Norsk rikskringkasting*, the national broadcasting company in Norway),[180] with full journalistic freedom and autonomy in their work (freedom also from market forces). This alone does not guarantee epistemic quality. Again, there should be some requirements, as the ones alluded to above.

In short, to get public support, *media and journalists* ought to assure us that their professional and practical background is sufficiently relevant and adequate when faced with multiple challenges in complex modern societies, not least with respect to the epistemic challenges alluded to above. For instance, within the team of journalists in a major newspaper or television station, there ought to be a group of people with some competence in the kind of epistemic challenges described above.

Moreover, for the public to evaluate what journalists and permanent commentators are saying or writing, the public should be informed about their different backgrounds and perspectives, and limitations – "what they know and what they don't know". In short, *an informative CV* for each journalist and commentator should be *publicly available*, e.g., on the Internet (as it is for scientists and scholars working at serious universities).[181]

A final, tentative suggestion is that we could have some kind of *joint job experiences* between journalists and people at high-quality and full-scale universities,[182] perhaps by some kind of job interchange,[183] either for set

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[180] In the case of Norway, with all its shortcomings, there are long cultural and institutional traditions for a relatively decent State ownership of public media. However, a high degree of caution is needed if a State, without such precautions, should take responsibility for public media.

[181] It is an amazing and disturbing fact that major newspapers do not publish this kind of information about their journalists and permanent commentators. In Norway, this is the case for some of the most influential newspapers. Why this secrecy? Should not public media be publicly transparent in this respect?

[182] Moreover, here again we refer to high-quality and full-scale universities that promote and foster a self-critical epistemic awareness and competence. A part-time or short-time stay at one-disciplinary institutions, with a weak self-critical epistemic competence,

periods of time now and then, or more permanently, in terms of some kind and some degree of double positions, not primarily for many, but at least for some on a voluntary basis in cases where all parties, including those on the institutional level, agree. Could there be something to learn for all parties by such mutual job arrangements? Something that could be useful for our joint effort to encounter epistemic challenges in modern societies?

> In modern and complex societies, there is a need not only for "fact-checking", but also for an open and self-critical assessment and evaluation of the *epistemic* competence of influential agents, such as PR-agents and consultants of various kinds, as well as other central spokespersons, commentators and politicians. This could be done publically and transparently, for instance, by streaming on the internet.

> By whom? A tentative suggestion: by a set of high-ranking scientists and scholars with a self-critical epistemic competence, who are outspoken and independent because they are legally protected[184] and economically independent.[185] Even so, there will be imperfections and a need for further self-critical and open discussions. Nevertheless, faced with the epistemic challenges in modern societies, this might be one of the arrangements that possibly could make the situation somewhat less deplorable.[186]

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might be counterproductive in this respect and should therefore be avoided. There are cases of academic stupidification (*Verdummung*)! Cp. e.g. Jon Elster, "Hard and soft obscurantism in the humanities and social sciences", *Diogenes* 1–2/2011: 159–170.

[183] Surely, for such an arrangement to function, there are certainly all kinds of practical problems, institutionally and economically as well as personally.

[184] Who can only be fired by law and legal judgment, as it used to be the case for Norwegian professors as State Officials, as royal *embetsmenn*.

[185] With an income and pension provided and guaranteed by a stable and decent *Rechtsstaat*, as it used to be the case for Norwegian professors as State Officials, as royal *embetsmenn.*

[186] Public assessments of this kind could have practical implications for the reputation and economic situation of those who have been publically evaluated in this way, both for them personally and for their agencies – and rightly so.

Socio-economic and socio-cultural presuppositions?

In this paper I have focused on inherent epistemic challenges in modern science-based risk-societies and pointed to the need for a strengthening of self-critical epistemic competence at some major institutions (universities, schools, media). However, faced with various kinds of anxiety and distrust, not least among those who feel lost and left behind, there is also a need to consider various socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions.

These are complex issues,[187] so here are just a few tentative suggestions:[188] Good education is good for everybody.[189] However, to put it bluntly: education is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for dealing with the challenges delineated above. There are also conditions of a socio-economic and socio-cultural nature. Recall Marx' critique of Feuerbach's belief in the emancipatory effect of a theoretical critique of religion for miserable working-class people. According to Marx, religion is "opium for the people", an illusory comfort for those living miserable lives. In order to liberate those people from this kind of false consciousness (as Marx saw it), their socio-economic situation had to be changed and improved. ("*Erst kommt das Fressen, und dann kommt die Moral*",[190] according to Brecht. "Soup, soap, and salvation", according to the Salvation Army.) Accordingly, in addition to receiving good education, the socio-economic situation of the lower classes has to be radically improved.[191]

At the same time, for ecological reasons the material consumption has to be sustainable, i.e. moderate for everybody, with moderate differences between the classes.

In addition, there is the question of socio-cultural recognition: whether one is seen and recognized, and not being overlooked and looked down upon. Hence, when the latter cases (of not being seen, not being recognized) are combined with socio-economic misery in a society with major socio-

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[187] Hence, I have added a question mark to the subtitle of this section.

[188] Being a v*itskapsfilosof*, a philosopher of the sciences and the humanities, not an empirically working social scientist, I do not have a professional competence in empirical questions of this sort. With this reservation, I shall just refer to a couple of hypotheses.

[189] Not least for the under-class, but also for social mobility and for social actions.

[190] "First, eating, then morality" (my translation).

[191] Today, this can be observed in many countries around the world; the US is one of them.

economic inequalities and with powerful elites who dominate and manipulate public media (and Internet[192]), then "fake news" and "post-truth" may flourish throughout society.

Since the modern world is complex and multifarious, our responses, too, have to be extensive and diverse: Good education for everybody combined with decent socio-economic living conditions and socio-cultural recognition in a reasonably egalitarian and transparent society are probably among the measures that should be promoted for general political reasons and also in order to improve the epistemic constellation in modern societies.[193]

"State"

Since, broadly speaking, market forces are run by *strategic rationality* in contrast to *argumentative rationality* with a joint search for better reasons as a basic characteristic and common core of scientific and scholarly activities, we ought to look for an institutional framework for such epistemic activities that is different from economic institutions. For similar reasons, in this respect we should avoid political institutions run primarily by strategic rationality. However, politics is a diverse affair; it is both power-related and discourse-related. Political institutions and decisions may be moderated and shaped by discursive processes. Moreover, the various existing

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[192] E.g., by the use of algorithms, as in the case of *Cambridge Analytica* and the Trump election campaign.

[193] Some of these factors were jointly taken care of during the modernization processes leading up to the Scandinavian Welfare States at an earlier and less complex stage with an emphasis on a common school system (free of charge), a high degree of self-organization, a promotion of various kinds of reason and rationality and an ability to argue publicly about contentious issues, combined with legal regulations of working conditions, and a national collaboration between the employers' organizations and strong coordinated trade unions (negotiating on wages and working conditions), combined with health insurance, social welfare and some degree of economic redistribution – hence we had a social and economic system with high productivity and high social mobility. Surely, in our time, this is a system that is challenged by increasing complexity and severely undermined by technology-based capitalist globalization. However, this may still be seen as an interesting case worth defending, at an ecologically sustainable level, for whatever that remains.

States, also formally democratic States, are widely different both institutionally and culturally, and thereby also in terms of epistemic quality and institutional modernization.[194]

In short, to the extent that "State" institutions are considered as the basis for the funding of epistemic institutions such as universities, schools, and media, we have to look for the better cases, and even so with a critical awareness. As a first step, I recall Fukuyama's notion of a "State" characterized by the rule of law,[195] democratic checks-and-balances,[196] and a meritocratic, competent and loyal State-administration.[197] Then I would make two additional points:

A democratic and enlightened State of this kind is probably (considering the alternative, and without illusions) a preferable institutional setting for a strengthening of the epistemic quality and autonomy of universities, public school systems, and public media, and thus for a strengthening of the self-critical epistemic practices in these societies.

However, for this to happen, self-critical epistemic competence ought to be implemented in the formation and practices of the State officials. – Surely, these are bold claims. They have to be taken melioristically and gradualistically rather than as a question of perfection.

> In modern societies in crisis in a globalized world, we ought to have ongoing discussions about the more appropriate (and less detrimental) relationships between State-rule and inter-State agreements.[198] However, in many urgent cases, there is hardly any realistic alternative to State-rule within State-borders:[199] without State-institutions, nothing works! As Fukuyama has it: without a State (as described above), you have nothing!

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[194] This was one of my critical comments on the UN declarations in Part II: a lack of conceptual differentiations when talking about "States".

[195] *Rechtsstaat.* Not merely "rule by the law", but "rule of law", for everyone, including the rulers.

[196] And thereby an enlightened and critical public debate on urgent issues.

[197] For Fukuyama: "getting to Denmark!".

[198] Just as there has to be an ongoing discussion of *present* concerns versus long-term solidarity with *future* generations.

[199] Which is clearly and tragically demonstrated in cases such as the formally declared "State" of South Sudan.

Summing up

I began this paper by delineating the complexity of epistemic challenges in modern science-based risk-societies, emphasizing the need for self-critical epistemic competence.[200] Then I looked at a selection of recent texts – two from the United Nations, one from the World Economic Forum, and an official report for the Norwegian Ministry of Finance – in order to see in what sense major epistemic challenges have been adequately addressed and discussed. Finally, I have raised the question: What to do? What could possibly be done to deal with these epistemic challenges?

Since this paper focuses on epistemic challenges, I have pointed to three main institutions – universities, the school system, and the public sphere – where efforts, in my view, could and should be undertaken in order to strengthen epistemic quality and autonomy. Then, for sure, there are all the other challenges in a modern world in crisis, institutionally and ecologically, and otherwise. However, in this paper I have argued that *the epistemic challenges* are important and urgent – that they, too, should be taken seriously. That is *my main claim*.

Then there is another claim: there are things we *can* do and *should* do in this respect. Hence, *passive pessimism* is not my conclusion. In fact, I conceive passive pessimism as a kind of a "category mistake" (as philosophers say) – since, as long as we live, we are participants, not merely spectators,[201] and hence we can and should do our best. Hence, I favor a *melioristic* and *gradualistic* approach rather than an ambition to reach perfection: we should try to improve whatever we are able to change into something better, or into something less bad than it would otherwise have been.

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[200] Alluded to by the term "*vitskapsteori*".

[201] Cp. Hans Skjervheim, "Deltakar og tilskodar", English translation, "Participant and Spectator", in *Hans Skjervheim, Selected Essays*, Department of Philosophy, University of Bergen 1996: 127–141.

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