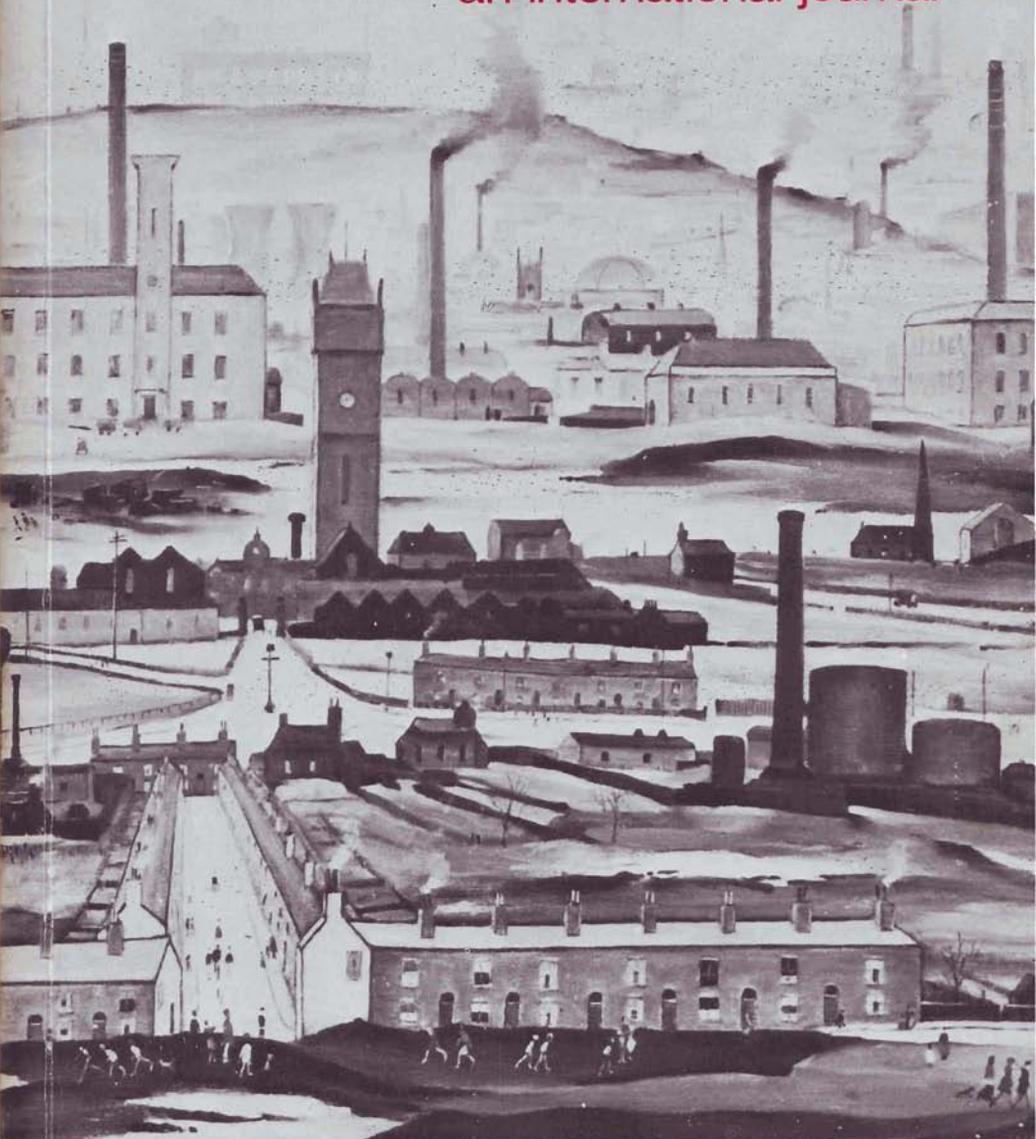


economic
and industrial
democracy
an international journal



Special Issue on Technology of Production and the
Division of Labour

Volume 1 Number 4
November 1980

Evert Vedung, *Det rationella politiska samtalet* (The Rational Political Dialogue). Stockholm: Aldus Bonniers, 1977, 191 pp.

The irrational side of politics has been heavily stressed in recent times. Think, e.g. of the logical empiricists' doctrine that the central value judgements in politics and elsewhere have no real meaning and validity, or of Marxist attempts to wipe all problems of validity under the carpet, or of the tenet that our most basic commitments must be the result of irrational decisions (Weber, Popper, Sartre). In Sweden, the so-called value nihilism of Axel Hägerström (1868-1939) has contributed further to cementing the belief that the normative and evaluative aspects of life belong to the irrational sphere which falls outside the scope of the sciences. Axel Hägerström's inaugural lecture from 1911, 'On the Truth of Moral Conceptions', summed up the mood: 'Since science only has to tell what is true and since it is a misconception to regard a conception of an ought as true, no science can have the task of telling how we ought to act. . . moral science cannot be a theory *within* morals but only a theory *about* morals.'

Evert Vedung, a political scientist from Uppsala, belongs to those who think that it is time to revise the ideology of science and politics associated with Weber, Hägerström, Myrdal and many others. His basic idea is that politics may be regarded as a rational dialogue. The contributions of the dialogue partners may be scrutinized from the point of view of their meaning as well as from the point of view of their validity. In addition to functional, explanatory analyses of political ideas, political science may legitimately devote itself to the description, clarification and testing of political views and arguments.

Rational dialogues, like all other human activities, are governed by rules. The rules involved in rational dialogues include rules of systematization, rules of interpretation, rules of relevance, rules of consistency and formal validity, rules for testing empirical truth and falsity, and rules for testing the validity of value judgements. After an introductory chapter, in which the distinction between functional analyses of political messages and analyses of political messages from the point of view of their contents (meaning and validity) is presented, these six types of rules are described and illustrated in the following six chapters.

By far the longest chapter is the one on meaning and interpretation. As in the other chapters, Vedung relies heavily on the em-

pirical semantics worked out by Arne Næss and his research associates ('the Oslo school'), but he goes beyond Næss in two ways. In the first place, he makes good use of contemporary analytical philosophy and legal doctrines of interpretation to supplement the logical skeleton provided by Næss. In the second place, he illustrates all the main theoretical points with examples drawn from contemporary political science.

The chapter on 'rules of systematization' presents some ways of arranging complex discussions into principal and subordinate arguments. The source of inspiration is Næss's 'pro et contra analysis', i.e. a systematization of the arguments adduced in a debate into pro-arguments and contra-arguments with supporting arguments of higher levels. It may sometimes be useful to arrange such argumentation surveys according to the groups which have propounded them, writes Vedung, and illustrates his point with works by Robert A. Levine and Olof Ruin. There is also a clarifying discussion of the role of the analyst's theoretical apparatus in the systematization of ideological writings, nicely illustrated with Robert Heeger's analysis of Gramsci.

The main point of the chapter on relevance testing is the need for a clear distinction between questions of meaning and validity and questions of function. Questions of meaning and validity cannot be answered with reference to the functions of the messages, for Vedung this is the fundamental rule of relevance. To attempt to answer validity questions with reference to functions is to commit a genetical mistake. Vedung finds that e.g. Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge and the emotive theory of meaning rest squarely on genetical mistakes. The chapters on logic (rules of consistency and validity) and empirical testing are more elementary, but like the rest of the book very clear and instructive.

The last chapter of the book brings us to more controversial ground: what kind of meaning and validity, if any, do value judgements have? After surveying what recent analytic philosophy has to say on the matter, Vedung concludes that 'metaethics gives no clear answer to the questions about the meaning of value judgements and how value judgements should be validated'. Yet he does not endorse the value nihilistic rejection of evaluative validity. Political science need not restrict itself to being a theory *about* morals. It can also contribute to the theoretical work *within* morals. Vedung bases his argument on the distinction between categorical and instrumental value judgements. Instrumental value

judgements are statements about the likely consequences of various actions, according to Vedung, and therefore they are ordinary empirical statements which can be tested in the same way as other empirical statements. The instrumental value judgement that the restriction of the freedom of the press is a good way of preventing the activities of the intelligence service being revealed to outsiders can be rephrased as an empirical statement saying that curbing the freedom of the press is likely to lead to a diminishment of the risk that the intelligence activities are revealed to outsiders.

From this Vedung draws the conclusion that empirical science can contribute to the solution of problems of validity of value judgements. 'Good empirical theory helps us to assess the validity of the value judgements. This means that applied science, normative theory or that which is called "policy-science" in the States, becomes a fully respectable enterprise.'

Science, *in casu* political science, can also help to clarify some aspects of categorical value judgements: it can help to clarify their meaning and inform us about the relevant facts which are necessary to know in order to be able to choose the best alternative. It can also clarify such issues as the physical possibility of realizing a certain alternative, the likelihood that different alternatives will lead to the desired goals, the likelihood of undesirable side-effects, the consistency of a programme containing several categorical value judgements.

These observations should go a long way to dispel the prevalent norm hypochondria. At the same time I fear that Vedung's treatment of instrumental value judgements will contribute to the maintenance of false consciousness amongst social scientists as to what they are really doing. In practice, it is not possible to draw such a neat distinction between categorical and instrumental value judgements as Vedung suggests. A scientist or any other expert who is given the task of undertaking a consequence analysis, say, of some alternatives will normally do more than a disengaged mapping of likely consequences. His selection of consequences to be considered in more detail will be guided by his preconceptions, including his valuations and norms, and his preconceptions are likely to influence also on his assessments of risks and probabilities. In so far as the scientist can influence the selection of alternatives, and he often can to a considerable extent, his evaluations and norms are again bound to play a role which goes beyond the mere fact-

finding, consistency-testing and consequence-finding activities alluded to by Vedung.

In other words, the evaluative aspects of the scientific enterprise tend to be underplayed in Vedung's presentation. I have no quarrel with the proposal that social scientists should contribute to the clarification and solution of normative issues; on the contrary, I believe that those tasks are eminently worthwhile. But it is misleading to present these tasks as mere questions of logic and fact-finding. (Cf. e.g. Knut Erik Tranøy's recent contributions to the ethics of science for a clarification of some of the issues involved here.)

In conclusion, I should like to draw attention to a parallel between Vedung's conception of politics as a rational dialogue and some work going on in a tradition which is no doubt at some distance from his style of work. In a number of recent works by Jürgen Habermas, Karl-Otto Apel and others, the conditions for the possibility of conducting rational arguments in the political sphere and elsewhere have been analysed. (See e.g. the volume edited by Apel, *Sprachpragmatik und Philosophie*, Suhrkamp 1976; and the comments by Gunnar Shirbekk, myself and others in *Kommunikasjon og moral*, University of Bergen, 1979.) Vedung's unusually lucid exposition seems to me a welcome addition to the analyses provided by Habermas, etc. At the same time, there are aspects of the problem cluster which are not dealt with by Vedung or which are treated in an inconclusive way and which do get some illumination in the more recent contributions to pragmatics. Habermas's suggestion that the validity of basic (categorical) value judgements depends upon the consensus of all those who are concerned under conditions of rationality seems to me to be essentially right. Some version or other of the consensus criterion of validity suggested by Habermas and Apel seems to be the only way out of the impasse in which (as Vedung correctly notes), analytical metaethics has ended.

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