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# A pragmatist perspective on the politicisation of science and technology

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## Abstract

In the last decade, a number of Science and Technology Studies (STS) have claimed to contribute to, or at least be inspired by, a pragmatist perspective (Brown 2009, Keulartz et al. 2004, Latour 2007, Marres 2007). On the one hand, they rightly emphasized the relation that John Dewey established between an issue and a political public. Rather than a stable character of the democratic play, the public is "sparked into being" by a particular issue. On the other hand, these scholars neglected the relationship between Dewey's take on the political public and the rest of his thought, most notably his pragmatist philosophy of experience and learning, summed up in *Logic: the Theory of Inquiry*. For Dewey, the political public is the correlate of a social inquiry, which should be free (based on the model of scientific inquiry) and the results of which should be widely communicated (Zask 1999, Quéré 2002, Bovet 2006).

Dewey's theory of inquiry may offer an alternative to both sides of the debate opposing the "third wave of STS" (Collins and Evans 2002, 2007) and the "upstream engagement" tenors (Jasanoff 2003, Wynne 2003). Dewey's approach focuses on experience as a transaction between an organism and an environment which results in a modification of both. As such, it opposes both the objectivist trend of the former and the relativist inclination of the latter (Durant 2011). From this discussion, the conclusion will sketch the main lines of a tempered pragmatism for STS, grounded on the process of politicisation through the conduct of social inquiries.

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