WHEN EVIDENCE CONFRONTS POLITICS: COMPETING RATIONALITIES IN THE 'SMART STATE'

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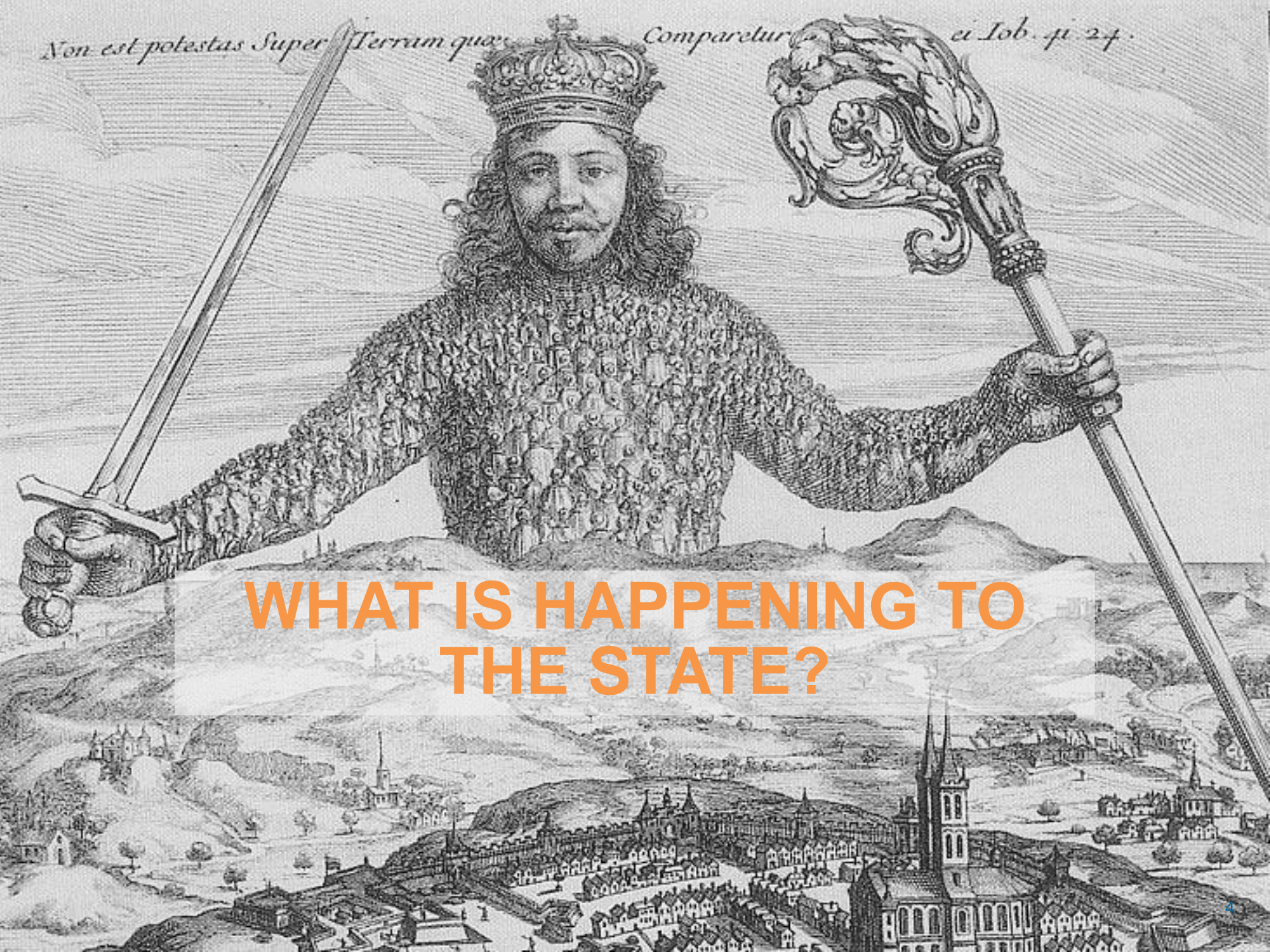Head of the Innovation and Measuring Progress division – OECD/EDU

Outline

- What's happening to the state?

- The 'smart state'

- Knowledge competing with politics

- Some conclusions on smart state and reflexive governance

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE STATE?

What is happening to the state?

- **The disempowered state**
  - The traditional Enlightenment concept of the state (Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*) as the regulatory centre bringing rational order into chaotic societies is waning because of complexity, the changing nature of communication, new forms of social action and the dispersion of feedback mechanisms
  - The notion of 'public good' is eroding as a consequence of increasing complexity, diversity, and fragmentation of life-worlds; it is not always clear what the common good exactly is

What is happening to the state?

- **The disempowered state**
  - Representative democracy faces many problems and democratic institutions are losing public trust; various new forms of political action and movements are emerging on the local-global axis with unclear links to the national democracies
  - Traditional institutions and regulatory tools of democratic nation-states increasingly fall short before the regulatory needs engendered by contemporary challenges; yet, international organisations don't have the legitimacy to take strong action

What is happening to the state?

- **The disempowered state**
  - The state looses its sovereign monopoly in regulatory functions – distributed power mechanisms are becoming very powerful
    - Markets
    - Self-regulatory practices (professions, communities)
    - Civil society
    - Old and new social movements
    - Partnerships, networks

What is happening to the state?

- **The disempowered state**
  - Conclusion: The modern, democratic nation-state has to compete with other rationalities than the one defined as regulation for the sake of the public good on the basis of democratic legitimacy
    - Technocracy
    - Para-political power of interest groups
    - Local autonomy
    - Supra-national regulation

The disempowered state in education

- Decentralisation and local autonomy
- Choice and competition
- Multiplication of governance levels: multilevel governance
- Multiplication of actors and stakeholders: multi-stakeholder governance
- Professionalisation
- Civil society, popular conservatism
- Authoritarianism: states fighting back?

THE 'SMART STATE'

The 'smart' state

- The financial crisis, turning into a public debt crisis, has revived the debate on the role of the state
  - Difficult choices and trade-offs, putting neo-Keynesian welfare state equilibrium against neo-liberal minimal state concepts
  - 'Inclusive growth': inequality on the agenda as a necessary corollary to growth
- Shift in the debate from size towards quality of state intervention and regulation
  - Move towards the 'strategic' or 'smart state' (Philip Aghion, OECD's NAEC project): reduce number and size of public interventions, but improve governance

The 'smart' state

- Concept of the 'smart state' tries to strengthen governance by drawing on multiple sources of regulation (coming from various ideological origins)
  - Self-regulation of individuals and families (neo-conservatism of for example Theodore Dalrymple)
  - Self-regulating markets (neo-liberalism of for example James Tooley)
  - Multiple levels of public policy regulation (for example cities)
  - Self-organised civil society, networking, crowd-sourcing
  - Expert knowledge and innovation generated by scientific research

The 'smart' state

- Conditions for 'smart state' developments
  - Investments in knowledge, R&D, big data, 'smart' infrastructure
  - Trust, transparency and inclusiveness
  - Policies that depart from simple command-and-control and move to sophisticated forms of governance, capable of pulling together various policy resources
    - Leadership and public debate
    - Innovations, scaling up and transferred from one regulatory level to another

KNOWLEDGE COMPETING WITH POLITICS

Knowledge competing with politics

- Modern policies become increasingly knowledge-intensive
- Yet, knowledge doesn't seem to find its way easily into policy development
  - Evidence-informed policy is growing, but at a slower pace than expected or needed
  - Many examples of researchers feeling frustrated about the knowledge demands of policy-makers and the use of research evidence

Knowledge competing with politics

- The "Two communities" theory (Caplan)
  - Values, language, value systems, reward systems and, hence, behaviour of scientists and policy makers are too different; they live in different worlds
  - Conflicting concepts and theories of knowledge
  - Hence, increasing or improving communication will not help a lot

Research(ers) as seen by policy makers

- Rarely willing to step out of their comfort zone and to take responsibility

- Use different concepts of 'useful' or 'useable' knowledge than policy makers

- Issues about research quality in education

- Ideology in educational research

- Research leads only to very partial answers

- More interested with their own interests than with the impact of research on the public interest

- Are science and research generating autonomous sources of legitimacy, capable of challenging democratic legitimacy?

Competing sources of knowledge

- Expert knowledge and research evidence finds itself in a more competitive relationship to other sources of knowledge:
  - Personal anecdotes, "everyone is an expert in education"
  - "teachers know best"
  - Common sense, "parents know best"
  - Community wisdom
  - Political ideologies and well-established, unquestioned ideas about education

Merging two worlds?

- Integrating experts directly in policy development processes: 'expertocracy'

- Not very successful: conflicting role definitions, illusion of neutrality, political alliances

- Legitimacy problems
  - Who has more legitimacy: experts making a case of educational innovation or a pressure group of parents and teachers opposing any educational reform

- *Acknowledging the reality of conflicting rationalities, understanding the different rationalities, while seeking to improve communication seems to offer better prospects*

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Smart state – reflexive governance

- Distributed power and risk of fragmentation ask for new forms of public governance

- At the same time demands for smarter (smaller, more flexible,…), not bigger, forms of regulation

- Knowledge can be the cement linking various forms and levels of governance

- But a narrow concept of research knowledge falls short in feeding reflexive governance

- Multiple forms and sources of knowledge will have to 'talk' to each other

Smart state – reflexive governance

- Concept of 'Reflexive governance':
  - High-quality and well-communicated research evidence
  - Teachers as knowledge professionals
  - Schools as learning organisations
  - Informed communication among stakeholders
  - New knowledge ecologies
  - A high systemic capacity for learning

Thank you !

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