

Public Political Theory Project

I. I Can Hear the Bells Parody Lyrics

I can hear the bells *notification sounds*
 Well, don'tcha hear them chime?
 That's the sound of "experts" competing for
 your time
 But which ones should you
 Trust, oh
 Vaccine's a scary thing
 What can they know?
 Of the dangers it may bring
 Although
 When you analyze their points
 You'll find for one side there's no
 counterpoint

'Cause hoaxes soared high
 When Wakefield made a stir
 Yes, he went awry
 Using "science" terms to blur
 The lines
 But there were so many signs
 Small sample size and money ties and big
 headlines and
 I can hear the bells
 Something is off here
 I can hear the bells
 We're at a standoff here

Those who follow him
 Pose a risk to you and me
 But they don't care
 'Cause their risk's too scary

I can hear the bells
 Alarm bells are ringing
 I can hear the bells
 The public is spinning

What methods can we use
 So we fin'ly find the truth
 If it's out there

Listen, you can hear the bells
 Step one
 Do the rest support them too? And then
 Step two
 Have their guesses all come true?

Step three
 Can they debate their points with ease?
 Not just rhetoric
 Don't miss the forest for the trees

Step four
 Does everyone get a say? And then
 Step five
 Who's paying their way? Lastly

Step six
 What's the risk if true?
 If it's riskier to not act then why
 Not just try and

We can hear the bells
 We can't always trust when
 We can hear the bells
 Leave what's wrong in the dust then

Everybody says that
 The news needs to be "fair"
 But fair can't be fair
 If one side's not really there and

We can hear the bells
 There's no "value-neutral"
 We can hear the bells
 But some still can be useful

There'll always be some doubt
 But we believe 'cause
 It's better than nothing

Just listen for the bells

We can hear the bells
 We know that it's scary, but
 We can hear the bells
 Little reason to be wary

Scientists agree
 There's no reason to fear
 Though quacks with no proof
 Will always appear but

We can hear the bells
 We all want to be safe
 We can hear the bells
 But our views shouldn't change

From people that want dough
 Or who don't come in good faith
 Who rely only on fear
 Or whose points they can't debate

If we keep attention close
 And we follow the steps that we've given
 Listen! We can hear the bells

You can hear the bells
 We can hear the bells

II. Appendix

For this assignment, I wanted to explore music as an option to communicate about the relationship between ordinary citizens and experts as I both feel creatively motivated to explore it and I think that compared to some of the other possible mediums it is more engaging and attention-grabbing. I decided to center the song loosely around vaccines, as this is the subject of science denial I have heard about the most through parents of friends. I have written songs in the past and spend much of my time outside of classes involved in music and musical theater, so I was excited to use music as my medium. While my initial plan was to

create an original song, this proved to be too much to accomplish in a short amount of time, so I decided to re-write lyrics to an existing song. “I Can Hear the Bells” has a section in which Tracy lists out the rounds she and Link will go through, and I thought that was perfect to repurpose for steps for citizens to follow when deciding whether they should trust experts. Additionally, I know that personally I am far more likely to listen to a fun parody song than I am to read an op-ed column or listen to a podcast/interview that a friend sends me. For this reason, I think this medium it would hold people’s attention more, would engage them more, and would be more memorable (case in point: I have had this song stuck in my head for the past two weeks) than some other mediums. Due to this, I decided to rewrite the lyrics to “I Can Hear the Bells.” In addition to writing the lyrics, I decided to create a lead sheet for my version since I changed some of the rhythms while changing the lyrics.

In the lyrics, I kept the title and hook (“I can hear the bells”) mostly the same, although in this case “bells” refers not to wedding bells, but to the warning bells that we can all perceive in “expertise” if we are vigilant (and would be accompanied musically by notification sounds from social media, as this is where a lot of misinformation spreads). In the section based around the six steps citizens can take to screen experts, I made reference to some of the authors we have read in class. For example, steps one through five are references to the different “sources of evidence” that novices can use in the Goldman text (Goldman, 2001, p. 93). Step one, “Do the rest support them too?” is a reference to Goldman’s “agreement from other experts” (Goldman, 2001, p. 97). Naomi Oreskes also writes on how we can use the standard of “consensus” to validate expert claims (Oreskes, 2019, p. 32). Step two, “Have their guesses all come true?” is a reference to Goldman’s discussion of using experts’ “past track records[...]to assess the likelihoods of their having correct answers to the current

question” (Goldman, 2001, 106). Step three, “Can they debate their points with ease?” is a reference to Goldman’s indirect justification of “dialectical superiority” (Goldman, 2001, p. 95). In initially reading the text and reconstructing his arguments in class, I found that it was incredibly important to stress that citizens must not judge based on “greater debating skill,” but counterpoints to a contrary side’s arguments (Goldman, 2001, p. 95). For this reason, I clarified that it is “Not just rhetoric,” and in the beginning of the song I also allude to this with “When you analyze their points / You’ll find for one side there’s no counterpoint.”

Step four and five, “Does everyone get a say?” and “Who’s paying their way?” references the potential biases experts may have (for example, in the case of Andrew Wakefield who published a paper theorizing about a potential link between the MMR vaccine and autism, he was motivated to prove a link because he could make money from testing kits) (Deer, 2011). Step four is also a reference to Naomi Oreskes’ advocacy for diversity in science, as “A community with diverse values is more likely to identify and challenge prejudicial beliefs embedded in, or masquerading as, scientific theory (Oreskes, 2019, p. 38).

Step five, questioning where people are getting their financial support, is also a reference to Turner’s typology of experts, based on the different support systems that each relies upon (although this support is more than financial). Following where people receive their monetary support can often lead to identification of Type 3 and Type 4 experts, as Type 3 experts such as self-help authors get their financial support from their “following” that they create (Turner, 2001, p. 131). Type 4 experts are also identifiable through money ties since they are “subsidized to speak as experts” in order to convince a wider public and “thus impel them into some sort of political action or choice” (Turner, 2001, p. 133). Since Wakefield was advocating for individual parents (not for the citizenry as a whole to change regulations)

to get separate vaccines instead of the full MMR vaccine, in this case he would seem to be more of a Type 3 expert, although one could argue his goal was to have the full population change over to separate vaccines. However, since he ultimately ended up discredited and giving talks to anti-vaccine groups, receiving his funds from followers, I would argue he is more of a Type 3 expert.

The final step, step six “What’s the risk if true? / If it’s riskier to not act then why / Not just try” summarizes Naomi Oreskes’ question that she believes people should ask themselves: “What are the relative risks of ignoring scientific claims that turn out to be true versus acting on claims that later turn out to have been incorrect?” (Oreskes, 2019, p. 46). This is also referenced in the stanza discussing how unvaccinated people pose a risk to all of us but “they don’t care / ‘Cause their risk’s too scary.” Oreskes suggests that the way we should reach people is “through their values,” and so I hoped that emphasizing that we all want to be safe but people are prioritizing their risk over others may help get through to people who are too focused on their individual risk and not on the collective risk of not being vaccinated, especially in light of the general lack of evidence for the autism/vaccine link (Oreskes, 2019, p. 47).

The lines “There’s no ‘value-neutral’[...]But some still can be useful” references Naomi Oreskes’ point in *Why Trust Science?* that “incomplete and even inaccurate knowledge may still be useful and reliable,” even in the face of some biases or lack of consensus (Oreskes, 2019, p. 7). The beginning of that line, that there is no value-neutral science, draws on many of the readings throughout the quarter, for example, Pamuk’s point that “there is no neutral way of aggregating, summarizing, and simplifying information” (Pamuk, 2021, p. 72). One of the points that I found most hopeful and inspiring from Oreskes was her point that in all

her examples of false prior beliefs, “each of them [included] red flags that were evident at the time” (Oreskes, 2019, p. 7). By seeing the red flags (or hearing the bells), we can see the false beliefs now. This is referenced by the “But there were so many signs” line.

The last line that has a clear single influence is the stanza “Everybody says that / The news needs to be ‘fair’ / But fair can’t be fair / If one side’s not really there.” This references how the news will commonly present two sides of a scientific debate as equal, even if there is a general scientific consensus and a small fringe group on the other side. Pamuk discusses the media’s false claim to neutrality, saying “efforts to maintain neutrality through a balanced presentation of ‘both sides’ of an issue[...]can end up misleading readers as well as obscuring the truth” (Pamuk, 2021, p. 88). This issue with media representation of scientific claims particularly irks me, and so I wanted to include it in the song, to remind people that a “two-sides” issue may not actually be two equal sides.

For the parody song, I primarily drew on Oreskes and Goldman, as I found Oreskes’ discussion and Goldman’s five ways a public could evaluate experts to be compelling. I also drew on Pamuk and Turner, although to a lesser extent.

III. References

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