“In Cipro we trust” - *Bacillus anthracis* in the Unites States

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In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001, an unknown source sent envelopes with the anthrax bacterium through the U.S. postal system. In a previous analysis of the BSE crisis in the United Kingdom, Sheila Jasanoff delivered an assertion that the UK reaction to BSE was "distinctively British" and that similar responses would not occur in the political culture of the United States. The acts of bioterrorism in the United States provide an opportunity for at least a limited comparison and a chance to analyze Jasanoff's assertion. To maintain social cohesion and prevent what Jasanoff called "civic dislocation," the BSE crisis in the UK and bioterrorism in the U.S. reveal - at least in times of crisis - that the simple act of witnessing is not sufficient. A sufficient number of witnesses have to agree in order to create legitimate public knowledge. Thus, the mechanism leading to what Jasanoff calls "civic dislocation" seems to be more in line with a tragedy of the commons scenario. A tragedy of the information commons, with public knowledge as a common pool resource, is an outcome when the aggregate of individual witnessing fails to reach sufficient levels of agreement. A take-away lesson, be it about "civic dislocation" or a "tragedy of the commons", is that relying on insulated knowledge that ignores on the ground reality is a shortsighted approach to public policy-making.