MAKING POLICY DEBATE MATTER: THE HERMENEUTIC DIMENSION

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ABSTRACT: The present paper seeks to show how recourse to the hermeneutic dimension is needed to correct for problems that beset Bent Flyvbjerg's vindication of the "dialogical ideal" in *Making Social Science Matter*. It achieves this outcome both by elucidating the conditions needed to advance the dialogical ideal and by providing these with the requisite philosophical grounding. More theoretical benefits aside, this is intended to help further the praxically-oriented mission that Flyvbjerg assigns phronetic researchers, namely, to "contribute to establishing the conditions for dialogue where such conditions are not already present." Moreover, through thus vindicating the merits of the hermeneutic approach as a needed complement to the phronetic, this paper also helps clarify how Gadamerian hermeneutics can contribute to the deliberative democracy debate, with which the present topic has strong affinities, a theme that has so far remained relatively underdeveloped in the literature.

KEYWORDS: Policy Making, *Phronesis*, Flyvbjerg, Habermas, Gadamer, Hermeneutics**,** Deliberative Democracy.

While Bent Flyvbjerg's *Making Social Science Matter* has elicited considerable scholarly commentary in the social and political science literature,[1] it has not elicited much by way of philosophical response notwithstanding Flyvbjerg's conviction that reasoned reflection and inclusive debate are integral to making social and political science matter again. This comparative lack of philosophical engagement with Flyvbjerg's project is all the more surprising given that he systematically invokes Aristotle, Foucault and (to an extent) Habermas as the tutelary spirits for his phronetic project. Indeed, his central thesis is that the main reason why social science (purportedly) no

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[1] Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For a succinct overview, see Flyvbjerg, "A Perstroikan Straw Man Answers Back," in *Making Political Science Matter: Debating Knowledge, Research, and Method*, ed. Sanford Schram and Brian Caterino (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

longer matters much is due to its neglect of Aristotelian *phronesis* and its implications for political debate as well as social research. The other main reason for the putative devaluation of social science and policy debate is that the Enlightenment conception of rationality which still predominates--and of which Habermas is portrayed as the primary contemporary exponent--is out of touch with the realities of socio-political life and in particular with its power-riven character. Given these deficiencies, social research and therewith the conception of socio-political policy making it supports are doomed to continued irrelevance unless they undergo the prescribed phronetic transformation.

While the bulk of Flyvbjerg's study is devoted to making the case for reforming social science along phronetic lines, the present paper focusses on issues that come to the fore in the concluding chapters. For here it becomes apparent that it is primarily through its enhanced contribution to rendering policy debate more effective that phronetic social science can purportedly be made to matter again. In this connection, however, Flyvbjerg's argument takes an unexpected—and indeed seemingly anomalous—turn, in that while he earlier repudiated the Habermasian discourse conditions for being out-of-touch with socio-political reality, he here vigorously endorses the "dialogical ideal" (as for convenience I term it throughout). Notwithstanding his repudiation of Habermas, the dialogical ideal thus valorised by Flyvbjerg is manifestly intended to fulfil a very similar role in correcting for distorted power relations and thereby promoting judicious and equitable policy outcomes. But, as has been contended, Flyvbjerg's valorisation of a Foucauldian conception of policy debate to the exclusion of the Habermasian is ineffective and misguided; instead, there is much to be gained in this connection by reading these theorists in a more mutually complementarity way.[2] Nonetheless, further reflection renders it apparent that while Flyvbjerg may have been intemperate in dismissing the Habermasian discourse model, its reinstatement will not suffice to resolve the problem. For as Flyvbjerg contends, its highly abstract and decontextualised character renders it out of keeping with the phronetic template's commitment to situatedness and contextuality as integral to making social science and policy debate matter in the intended sense. Nor is the Habermasian discourse model sufficiently dialogical in the requisite sense.[3]

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[2] Paul Healy, "Making Policy Debate Matter: Practical Reason, Political Dialogue, and Transformative Learning," *History of the Human Sciences* 17, no. 1 (2004); cf. also "Phronetic Social Science: Prospects and Possibilities?," *History of the Human Sciences* 21, no. 1 (2008).

[3] Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter*, ch. 7.

Against this backdrop, the present paper aspires to show how recourse to the hermeneutic dimension—as manifested in particular in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics--is needed to correct for these phronetic lacunae, both by elucidating the conditions needed to advance the dialogical ideal and by providing these with the requisite philosophical grounding. Other benefits aside, this can assist in furthering the praxically-oriented mission which Flyvbjerg assigns phronetic researchers, namely, to "contribute to establishing the conditions for dialogue where such conditions are not already present." Moreover, through thus vindicating the merits of the hermeneutic approach as a needed complement to the phronetic, this paper will also help clarify how Gadamerian hermeneutics can contribute to the deliberative democracy debate, with which the present topic has strong affinities, a theme that has so far remained relatively underdeveloped in the literature.

ADVANCING THE DIALOGICAL IDEAL AND THE CONDITIONS OF ITS POSSIBILITY

In effect, then, the present paper seeks to correct for a seeming anomaly at the core of the phronetic project in its efforts to render policy debate more meaningful and productive. As noted above, the anomaly arises in virtue of Flyvbjerg's repudiation of the Habermasian discourse model in favour of a power-riven conception of real-world policy making on the one hand, and his subsequent unqualified embrace of the dialogical ideal as the indispensable means of achieving judicious and equitable policy outcomes on the other. Thus, Flyvbjerg is emphatic that:

> Reaching the dialogical mode of communication seems crucial for practicing *phronesis* in a democratic society. … Dialogue . . . is a prerequisite for informed democratic decision-making. And dialogue is the vehicle by means of which research can best hope to inform the democratic process. . . . Thus, in order to be effective, phronetic researchers avoid polemics and look for dialogue. They also look for how they themselves may contribute to establishing the conditions for dialogue where such conditions are not already present.[4]

However, the problem is that not only does the phronetic template lack an account of the conditions under which inherently power-riven political debate and adversarial contestation can give way to a dialogical resolution but, in addition, in repudiating the Habermasian discourse conditions as out of touch with *Realpolitik*, Flyvbjerg effectively intensifies the anomaly, given that the discourse model is specifically intended to elucidate the conditions under which distorted discursive interaction can be corrected for. The problem is further compounded by the fact that

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[4] Ibid., 159; cf. also 139-40, 158.

while the phronetic template valorises the dialogical ideal, it fails to explain how it can transcend the power-riven distortions that allegedly characterise all political debate. In short, then, the problem is that not only does endorsement of the dialogical ideal conflict with the realities of socio-political life as represented by Flyvbjerg himself but also in the absence of a developed alternative to the repudiated discourse model, the phronetic template lacks the conceptual resources it needs to underwrite and justify its endorsement of the dialogical ideal. Equally importantly, however while Flyvbjerg may have been intemperate in dismissing the Habermasian discourse model, its reinstatement will not suffice to resolve the problem. For as Flyvbjerg rightly contends,[5] its highly abstract and decontextualised character is at odds with the phronetic commitment to situatedness and contextuality as integral to making both social science and policy debate matter. Moreover, the Habermasian discourse model is by no means sufficiently dialogical in the requisite sense. Against this backdrop, the present paper aspires to show how recourse to the hermeneutic dimension can provide the needed corrective for these phronetic lacunae, in the process elucidating the conditions needed to advance the dialogical ideal as well as going some ways toward providing these with the requisite conceptual underpinnings. As a basis for developing this theme, Gadamerian hermeneutics provides a natural complement to the phronetic approach in virtue of the crossovers and affinities between the two, most notably their conjoint endorsement of the dialogical ideal, their correlative commitment to reaching understanding through situated dialogical interaction, their conjoint recognition of the need to factor in particularity and difference, and their mutual appreciation of the centrality of *phronesis*.[6] Nonetheless, the differences between the two approaches are at least as striking as the similarities and in what follows it is these differences which will be to the fore, since the intent is to establish that strengths of the hermeneutic approach can compensate for the weaknesses of the phronetic in ways needed to advance the dialogical ideal in a manner commensurate with Flyvbjerg's emphasis on situatedness and contextuality.

To this end, I begin by foregrounding the hermeneutic emphasis on the indispensability of open-minded questioning for advancing the dialogical ideal. For while there is a marked affinity between the phronetic and hermeneutic approaches in valorising questioning, especially when contrasted with the Habermasian emphasis on the validation of preformed validity claims, it is nonetheless the case that

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[5] Ibid., ch. 7.

[6] Traditionally translated as "prudence" or "practical wisdom", but also appropriately as contextualised, or attuned, judgment or, indeed, as "practical judgment" (John Forester, "An Instructive Case-Study Hampered by Theoretical Puzzles," *International Planning Studies* 6, no. 3 (2001): 265).

compared to the hermeneutic, the phronetic preoccupation with just four value-rational questions constitutes too narrow an investigative focus to be truly conducive to advancing the dialogical ideal along the lines envisaged by Flyvbjerg. Hence, recourse to the hermeneutic dimension is needed to establish that the phronetic template's delimited focus on a circumscribed set of value-rational questions must give way to engagement with the broader context of investigative inquiry as a necessary prerequisite for achieving a more comprehensive and textured understanding of the problematic policy situation as a prelude to responding to it more effectively.

BEYOND VALUE-RATIONAL INQUIRY

As just noted, the phronetic and hermeneutic approaches share an important point of affinity in affirming the importance of opening an issue up for investigation through sustained questioning, as reflected in the Gadamerian emphasis on "the priority of the question."[7] Moreover, in this both approaches stand in contrast to the Habermasian (and more generally deliberative) preoccupation with the assertion and justification of preformed validity claims and hence with appraising preformulated answers rather than posing investigative questions.[8] Thereafter, however, the differences between the phronetic and hermeneutic approaches are more marked than the similarities. In particular, the phronetic approach differs from the hermeneutic in defining itself as concerned with responding to a delimited set of just four "value-rational" questions, as Flyvbjerg terms them. As delineated by Flyvbjerg, these are: "Where are we going?; Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?; Is this development desirable?; What, if anything, should we do about it?"[9] Of these, the last concerning what should be done in response to the problematic policy situation is clearly the most primary.

From a hermeneutic perspective, however, the problem is that the value-rational questions are too circumscribed and narrowly focussed to be of much help in advancing the dialogical ideal along the lines envisaged by Flyvbjerg himself. For in thus circumscribing a priori the nature and range of questions to be asked, the phronetic template defines the agenda too narrowly from the outset to facilitate a genuine advancement in understanding. In contrast, recourse to the hermeneutic

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[7] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 1989), 362f.

[8] Cf. Darren R. Walhof, "Bringing the Deliberative Back In: Gadamer on Conversation and Understanding," *Contemporary Political Theory* 4(2005): 160-64.

[9] Flyvbjerg, "A Perstroikan Straw Man Answers Back," 76; *Making Social Science Matter*, 60, 136-37.

dimension reinforces the need for to undertake a more comprehensive investigation of the problem domain as a prerequisite for advancing the dialogical ideal. Indeed, although undeniably meritorious in their own right, Flyvbjerg's value-rational questions can only be properly posed and judiciously answered within this broader investigative context. The realisation that the other value-rational questions are subservient to the fourth, viz. what should be done in response, further reinforces this assessment. Accordingly, on a hermeneutic analysis the first requirement for advancing the dialogical ideal is that participants maintain a radically open-minded stance whereby, fuelled by a commitment to achieving a textured understanding of the problematic situation in its multifaceted complexity, they allow that its investigation may take them in unanticipated directions. Correlatively, as a guiding motif the hermeneutic approach valorises the Socratic *docta ignorantia*,[10] thereby alerting participants to the need for maintaining a stance of radical investigative openness in recognition of the fact that neither the best way forward nor the most appropriate set of questions to be asked nor indeed the best way of posing these is already known. Likewise, to safeguard against premature closure the hermeneutic approach emphasises the need to keep the guiding questions open and to allow them to inform the progress of inquiry for its duration.[11] Claims are of course made as inquiry progresses but, importantly, their status is simply that of temporary answers, provisionally asserted on the way to an enhanced, even transformed, understanding of the subject matter, which will emerge only through sustained engagement with the problematic situation itself. The hermeneutic approach thus affirms that there is a pronounced developmental aspect to policy inquiry. As it progresses, the (provisional) answers participants receive to their questions should cause them to effect a modification in their initial prejudgments, thereby opening up the way for a new series of questions better attuned to the particularities of the situation. In thus highlighting the need for well-attuned questioning, the hermeneutic template also foregrounds an indispensable aspect of *phronesis* neglected on the phronetic account itself, namely, the importance of cultivating the ability to engage in well-directed, informed and attuned questioning, conducive to opening the topic up for further productive questioning oriented toward acquiring a well-grounded appreciation of the problematic situation. At the same time it renders it apparent that right questioning is an art that cannot be methodologically determined, that "there is no such thing as a

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[10] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 362-64.

[11] As Dallmayr puts it in a related context, "only the rekindling of questioning … can provide an antidote to this danger of congealment" ("Beyond Monologue: For a Comparative Political Theory," *Perspectives on Politics* 2(2004): 254).

method of learning to ask questions",[12] or of "acquiring the right horizon of inquiry."[13] Rather, the ability to ask the right questions—that is, to interrogate the subject matter in ways that will genuinely open up the topic and advance the inquiry instead of prematurely closing it off or misdirecting it—is something that the hermeneutic inquirer must come to develop through experience, as again exemplified on the Socratic template. In reinforcing this point, the hermeneutic approach again goes beyond the phronetic is affirming that the problematic situation must be allowed to disclose itself primarily in its own terms and according to its inner logic, at the behest of appropriately attuned and evolving questioning.

In foregrounding such features, presupposed by the phronetic template but not explicitly accounted for on it, the hermeneutic approach begins to demonstrate its capacity to complement the phronetic by compensating for its weaknesses, staring with its tendency to delimit the agenda too narrowly in advance. As we shall now go on to consider, a further invaluable feature of the hermeneutic approach is its sensitivity to the partial and perspectival character of human understanding, which in alerting participants to the fact that they are inevitably viewing the matter under investigation from a particular standpoint, simultaneously enables them to recognise that others who occupy different hermeneutic situations will have different viewpoints and perspectives to bring to bear, to which they must remain open if they truly aspire to attain a developed understanding of the complexities of the problematic situation. In so doing, as we shall see, the hermeneutic approach conceptualises the encounter with difference as an indispensable resource for advancing the dialogical ideal rather than as a source of intractable adversarial contestation, as portrayed on the phronetic account.

BEYOND ADVERSARIAL CONTESTATION

As indicated at the outset, at its core the phronetic template is beset by an anomaly. For on the one hand, commensurate with its putative commitment to *Realpolitik*, it prides itself on placing plurality, conflict and power "at its centre",[14] in the process deeming the Habermasian discourse model irrelevant because incapable of accommodating this reality. Yet, on the other hand, on Flyvbjerg's own telling, this unconstrained adversarial contestation cannot continue unabated, but must rather give way to more cooperative modes of interaction conducive to advancing the

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[12] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 365, cf. 367

[13] Ibid., 302.

[14] Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter*, 109.

dialogical ideal in the interests of judicious and equitable decision making. In effect, then, it transpires that while unremitting conflict and contestation may be the starting point, it cannot be allowed to continue unabated but must rather give way to more cooperative forms of interaction in the interests of a judicious and equitable outcome. Indeed, since "reaching the dialogical mode of communication" is "crucial for practicing *phronesis"*, not only must "phronetic researchers avoid polemics and look for dialogue", they themselves must "contribute to establishing the conditions for dialogue where such conditions are not already present." But as prefigured earlier, the problem is that having repudiated the Habermasian discourse model the phronetic template lacks the resources needed to underwrite, or even identify, the requisite "conditions for dialogue." Without further clarification, then, it remains something of a mystery how the initial, discordant "cacophony" can be transcended in favour of "dialoguing with a polyphony of voices", as Flyvbjerg enjoins.[15] Here again, the hermeneutic approach has much to offer by way of a corrective for this lacuna at the heart of the phronetic template. In particular, it can contribute through reconceptualising the encounter with difference, not as an irrevocable adversarial contest, but as a resource for underwriting a process of transformative learning capable of yielding an increasingly enlarged and enriched understanding of the problem domain. In this regard, there are two main aspects to the hermeneutic response: reconceptualisation of our relations to the other in terms of dialogical reciprocity rather than adversarial contestation and, correlatively, construal of our interaction with the other as a stimulus to enlarged understanding rather than as a barrier to consensus. The first of these constitutes the focus of the present section, and second the focus of the next.

Although dismissed by Flyvbjerg as irrelevant to the phronetic project, Habermas is in fact a potential ally in the quest to overcome adversarial and other unproductive modes of participant interaction. Of particular relevance here, is the "symmetrical reciprocity" requirement associated with the discourse model,[16] whereby as a counterbalance against pursuing unduly self-interested agendas at the expense of others, participants are enjoined to place themselves in the shoes of the other, to trade places with them conceptually, as it were, so as to gain an appreciation of how the situation seems from their perspective. But while the symmetrical reciprocity condition may provide a useful reference point, this Habermasian characterisation will not suffice to compensate for the corresponding lacuna in the phronetic template. Whatever may be its merits in counteracting egocentrism, the presupposition of

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[15] Ibid., 139.

[16] For a brief elaboration on background, see Iris Marion Young, "Asymmetrical Reciprocity: On Moral Respect, Wonder, and Enlarged Thought," *Constellations* 3, no. 3 (1997): 341-42.

symmetrical reciprocity will not serve as an adequate representation of how participants in policy debate need to interact with one another as a basis for advancing the dialogical ideal. For in presupposing mirror imagery and a ready interchangeability of perspectives, this requirement falls prey to the abstract (or unqualified) universality that plagues the Habermasian deliberative model in general, due to its one-sided focus on the "generalised" other to the neglect of the "concrete" other.[17] Indeed, as Young points out, initial impressions notwithstanding, the symmetry requirement is ultimately undesirable as well as impossible to fulfil.[18] In addition to the fact that our life histories and experiences differentiate us in ways that render it impossible to trade places with one another, this requirement homogenises difference to the extent of ruling out for the possibility of learning from the encounter with otherness in ways that would stimulate a genuine advancement of understanding. Nonetheless, in postulating "asymmetrical reciprocity" as a corrective for the excesses of symmetrical reciprocity Young goes too far in the other direction,[19] as this effectively magnifies difference to the extent of rendering the identification of points of communication and contact well nigh impossible. Here again, recourse to the hermeneutic dimension embodies a more productive alternative in the form of "dialogical reciprocity", along the lines valorised in Gadamer's analysis of I-Thou relations in response to his critique of its deficient modes.[20]

In a socio-political context, this entails engaging with the other dialectically in such a way that each party strives to attain "an understanding of what the other takes herself to be doing", through raising "critical questions about the other's position", and issuing "reciprocal rejoinders."[21] On the one hand, then, dialogical reciprocity has the merit of recognising that we could never stand in for the other and claim to know what they are thinking and feeling, still less could we articulate their position better than they could themselves. On the other hand, it simultaneously corrects for the excesses of asymmetrical reciprocity, instead enjoining that understanding is indeed possible provided we are prepared carefully to attend to and learn from what

[17] Ibid; cf. Seyla Benhabib, "The Utopian Dimension in Communicative Ethics," in *Critical Theory: The Essential Readings*, ed. David Ingram and Julia Simon-Ingram (New York: Paragon House, 1991); Paul Healy, "Rethinking Deliberative Democracy: From Deliberative Discourse to Transformative Dialogue," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37, no. 3 (2011): 297-99.

[18] Young, "Asymmetrical Reciprocity," 346-49.

[19] Ibid., 350-53.

[20] Lorenzo Simpson, *The Unfinished Project: Toward a Postmetaphysical Humanism* (London: Routledge, 2001), especially ch. 5; cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 358-61; Healy, "Rethinking Deliberative Democracy," 300-01.

[21] Simpson, *The Unfinished Project*, 80.

the other has to tell us. Moreover, in enjoining us to relate to the other on a basis of comparable validity and dialogical equality, dialogical reciprocity entails refraining both from assuming that we already know what the other has to offer by way of insight into the problematic situation and from simply tolerantly listening to what they have to say while dismissing it as irrelevant to our own concerns. Instead, it requires that we register the others' insights as truth claims that could pose a challenge to our preformed views about the problematic situation, thereby acknowledging the possibility of learning from them in ways that transcend our initial expectations.[22] Accordingly, dialogical reciprocity enjoins participants to respond to the challenge posed by the encounter with otherness by factoring into their overall understanding of the problematic situation the best insights embodied in the other's position as a basis for achieving a more comprehensive and textured understanding. Moreover, as elaborated below, given the appropriate conditions, this can eventuate in the emergence of a potentially transformative "fusion of horizons" capable of opening up an expanded range of possibilities for thought and action, beyond those initially envisaged by any of the participants. Endorsement of dialogical reciprocity thus has the advantage of opening up a productive middle ground with the potential to compensate for the limitations of both the Habermasian and phronetic templates.

In effect, then, the hermeneutic approach corrects for the shortcomings of both the Habermasian and phronetic templates by treating difference as a resource which, appropriately engaged with, is capable of stimulating a principled, and potentially transformative, advancement of understanding as a basis for determining what the problematic policy situation requires by way of a response. Accordingly, the hermeneutic approach valorises dialogical reciprocity not only on ethical grounds, as is often assumed to be the case, but equally on epistemic grounds—in virtue of its capacity to sustain the creative tension needed to underwrite the principled, and potentially transformative, advancement of understanding, along the lines elaborated in the next section.

BEYOND CONSENSUS

In the previous section it was contended that the hermeneutic endorsement of dialogical reciprocity has the potential to correct for the excessively adversarial conception of socio-political relations proffered by Flyvbjerg. In this regard, recourse to the hermeneutic dimension again proved to be an indispensable asset in correcting for the phronetic failure to specify what the dialogical ideal entails by way of policy

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[22] Healy, "Rethinking Deliberative Democracy," 302-03.

outcome and how this outcome is to be rationally secured. To complete the picture, the aim in this section and the next is further to elucidate how the hermeneutic approach can compensate for the lacunae at the heart of the phronetic project through vindication of the potentially transformative advancement of understanding as the appropriate *telos* for situated dialogical inquiry, as a correlate to treating the encounter with otherness as a potent stimulus to transformative learning rather than as a barrier to consensus. To this end, as prefigured in the previous section the hermeneutic approach vindicates the importance of relating to the other as a genuine Thou and correspondingly valorises the importance of seeking to learn from the other without either assuming that we can step into their shoes or unduly magnifying the differences. In developing this theme below, we shall see that far from distancing us from socio-political reality, as Flyvbjerg contends with regard to the Habermasian discourse model, the hermeneutic approach helps attune us to it in ways that yield productive policy outcomes beyond what can be readily accounted on for on either the phronetic or Habermasian templates.

Noteworthy in the first instance is the priority the hermeneutic template accords to "the actual elucidation of the subject matter"—in this case the comprehensive elucidation of the problem domain—over the "one-sided viewpoints" proffered by the differently situated participants. In this way, it renders the preformed views of the participants subservient to the advancement of understanding about it.[23] Thus on this approach, participants are enjoined to accord priority to elucidating the problematic situation in its own terms and according to its own logic instead of seeking to impose their own self-interested prejudgments (or prejudices) on it at the expense of others, so as to come to achieve a better understanding of it in its multifaceted complexity as a necessary prerequisite for assessing how best to respond to it. In thus rendering the contrasting views of participants subservient to the advancement of understanding about the problematic situation itself, the hermeneutic approach counteracts the phronetic tendency to polarise policy makers into "winners" and "losers", construing them instead as participants in a conjoint process of dialectical inquiry. The guiding image thus becomes that of participants being bound together in an inquiry governed by a subject matter of common concern and on this basis being led into a dialogical encounter which regulates the course of their further interaction. As elaborated below, this ensures that the situated perspective of each is allowed to make a real contribution to the elucidation of the problematic situation instead of being dismissed

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[23] Rudiger Bubner, "On the Ground of Understanding," in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice Wachterhauser (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 72-73; Paul Healy, "Hermeneutic Rationality: A Contradiction in Terms?," in *Hermeneutic Rationality/La Rationalité Herméneutique*, ed. Maria L. Portocarrero, Luis A. Umbelino, and Andrzej Wiercinski (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), 63-64.

as an obstacle either to consensual validation or the pursuit of one's own power-riven interests. On this basis, the hermeneutic approach can elucidate how the previously aggravated differences in viewpoint highlighted on the phronetic template can be harnessed in the service of advancing the dialogical ideal in a way that goes beyond both the phronetic and Habermasian templates. In effect, then, the hermeneutic approach corrects for a significant lacuna in the phronetic by treating engagement with difference as a resource that can fuel a situated learning process capable not only of advancing participants' understanding of the problematic situation but also of underwriting the emergence of potentially transformative new insights.

Equally importantly, however, in thus valorising conjoint dialectical inquiry as a corrective for the excesses of an unduly adversarial orientation, the hermeneutic template simultaneously challenges the heavily consensual orientation endorsed by the Habermasian discourse model together with the related presumption of the homogeneity and interchangeability of participant perspectives. As epitomised by Young, the problem with a heavily consensual orientation is that it desensitises participants to real differences in hermeneutic standpoint, thereby closing off "the creative exchange these differences might produce" in the interactions among diversely situated others,[24] and therewith the potential for real mutual learning such as could promote the emergence of an enlarged, and potentially transformed, understanding of the problematic situation. Essentially, this is because on a consensual analysis, disagreement and difference inevitably emerge as barriers to be transcended rather than as indispensable stimuli to the situated advancement of understanding. Correlatively, the discourse model masks the situated and perspectival character of any given viewpoint, and therewith the potential for learning from differently situated others who view the problem situation differently from their distinctive standpoints. As a corrective, the hermeneutic approach valorises the real contribution that each situated perspective can make to the elucidation of the problem situation, instead of dismissing it as an obstacle to consensual validation. It thus valorises the importance not only of respecting difference, but of preserving it with a view to actively learning from it. In this way, the hermeneutic approach aspires to harness the encounter with difference as a resource for attaining a more comprehensive understanding of the problematic situation rather than seeking to suppress it as an inconvenient obstacle. To this end, through foregrounding the inherently partial and perspectival character of human understanding, the

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[24] Young, "Asymmetrical Reciprocity," 347. While not a hermeneutic theorist as such, Young exhibits significant convergence with the hermeneutic stance, most notably in terms of her emphatic embrace of situatedness, particularity, and dialogue.

hermeneutic template seeks to remind participants that they are inevitably viewing the matter under investigation from a particular standpoint, thereby apprising them of the need to acknowledge that others who occupy different hermeneutic situations will have different viewpoints and perspectives to bring to bear, to which they must remain open if they truly aspire to attain an understanding of the problematic situation that can do justice to its complexity. Correlatively, it enjoins participants "to proceed as if they could learn from, and be challenged by, the other",[25] in the spirit of dialogical reciprocity and as entailed by the Gadamerian conception of I-Thou relations. Embarked on under such conditions, the encounter with difference functions as a potent stimulus to the advancement of understanding in that it reveals one's own construal of the problem domain as perspectival relative to that of differently situated others. In so doing, it alerts participants to the need to factor in other perspectives alongside their own if they are to respond to the situation in a way that can take due account of the needs, values, and interests of all concerned.

In this regard, it is important to be clear that the Gadamerian concepts of "reaching agreement" and "producing unity" through dialogue need to be understood in the context of an inherently transformative conception of inquiry which, while not at odds with attaining consensus as such, aspires to transcend the constrictive connotations of this term.[26] Thus in counter distinction to the sense of agreement about a preformed viewpoint that that term "consensus" can convey, the ideal of *Sich-Verstandigen in einer Sache* as anticipated *telos* envisages a considerably more open-ended, developmental conception of inquiry, oriented toward the transformative advancement of understanding. More specifically, it connotes "an advance in understanding" as a result of the fact that "something is heard and learned from another who sees things from a different angle, and that two or more perceptions can come to augment each other" in what Gadamer famously terms "a fusion of horizons".[27] In this connection, Gadamer speaks of the dialogue partners coming "under the influence of the truth of the object," and thereby "being transformed into a communion" in which their understanding of the subject matter is

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[25] Simpson, *The Unfinished Project*, 89.

[26] Thus, as Gadamer himself puts it, "To understand each other means much more than to agree about something" ("What Is Truth?," in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice Wachterhauser (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 45).

[27] P. Christopher Smith, "Toward a Discursive Logic: Gadamer and Toulmin on Inquiry and Argument," in *The Specter of Relativism: Truth, Dialogue, and Phronesis in Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 163-64.

simultaneously transformed.[28] To this end, it foregrounds the need to allow oneself to be led forward by the subject matter itself in potentially new directions, beyond the self-interested agendas of individual stakeholders. It thereby enjoins advancing beyond the one-sidedness of initial positions toward an understanding of the problematic situation which incorporates the best insights from multiple perspectives into a more textured understanding.[29] In socio-political terms, the implication is that through thus "listening across difference", participants "can come to understand something about the ways proposals and claims affect others differently situated"; and "by internalizing this mediated understanding of plural positions", they stand to gain a more enriched and judicious understanding of the problematic situation.[30] As prefigured above, under these circumstances participants can undergo a "fusion of horizons", whereby they achieve a "higher universality" in their understanding of the problematic situation and thereby experience a transformative advance in their thinking about it.[31] In policy making terms, this amounts to the emergence of an increasingly more adequate situation definition, not initially available to any of the participants, which can do greater justice to the complexity of the problem domain, thereby paving the way for the emergence of creative new policy solutions. Hence, far from being a mere optional adjunct, the "greater social objectivity" deriving from this process of mutual learning is a necessary prerequisite "for arriving at just solutions to collective problems."[32] Equally importantly, the emergence of this enlarged understanding is by no means arbitrary or fortuitous but presupposes a well-structured interactive learning process as its motive force. In this regard, Georgia Warnke foregrounds the importance of a process of "integration and appropriation", centred on a dialectical integration of the most defensible insights of diversely situated participants.[33] Elaboration on the dynamics of this rationally-motivated process constitutes the focus of the next section.

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[28] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 379, cf. 305.

[29] Cf. Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), 169; Walhof, "Bringing the Deliberative Back In," 165.

[30] Iris Marion Young, "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 128; *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 112-18.

[31] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305; cf. 379.

[32] Young, "Communication and the Other," 128.

[33] Warnke, *Gadamer*, 100.

BEYOND A POLYPHONY OF VOICES

While Flyvbjerg's metaphor of transforming a discordant cacophony of voices into a harmonious polyphony serves a useful purpose in conveying the indispensability of overcoming adversarial contestation in favour of engaging in conjoint dialogical decision making, the phronetic template actually needs to embrace an even more fundamental challenge, namely that of moulding the initially disparate and inherently antagonistic participants in policy debate into a truly cohesive deliberative body,[34] capable of advancing the dialogical ideal in ways that can ensure a judicious and equitable resolution of the contested issues. To this end, in addition to the conditions already discussed there is a compelling need to factor in a strong component of critical appraisal and accountability while ensuring that the decisions made are equitable and defensible because commensurate with the complexities of the problematic situation at hand. For while Flyvbjerg emphatically embraces the need for accountability, he fails to incorporate a developed account of what this entails, contending merely that "the significance of any given interpretation in a dialogue will depend on the extent to which the validity claims are accepted", and "this acceptance typically occurs in competition with other validity claims and other interpretations."[35] The lack is particularly acute in the context of an approach which places *phronesis*, or contextualised judgment, at its core. For without appropriate checks and balances, the exercise of judgment is notoriously open to charges of "arbitrary partisanship" (to use Habermas' phrase), all the more so if, as per Flyvbjerg, it is exercised "in the manner of a virtuoso social and political actor."[36] Here again, the problem is exacerbated by Flyvbjerg's repudiation of the Habermasian discourse model with its in-built appeal to "the unforced force of the better argument." But as before, in a phronetic context reinstatement of the discourse model would not suffice; rather, what is again called for is its contextualised dialogical reappropriation. To this end, recourse to the hermeneutic dimension again has much to offer. In particular, as we shall now consider, the hermeneutic approach can correct for three notable deficiencies in the discourse model, while simultaneously compensating for the related lacunae in the phronetic template, namely, its decontextualised and homogenised conception of the other, its relatively monological and inflexible conception of argumentative appraisal, and its eschewal of significant narrative and rhetorical features. In so doing, it can serve to underwrite the formation of a cohesive

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[34] Cf. John Forester, "Beyond Dialogue and Transformative Learning," in *Political Dialogue: Theories and Practices*, ed. Stephen Esquith (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996).

[35] Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter*, 139.

[36] Ibid., 2.

deliberative--or better dialogical—body with the capacity to secure critical appraisal and accountability while promoting situated transformative learning.

Thus firstly, recourse to the hermeneutic dimension calls for a significant reconceptualisation of how the role of the other is construed with regard to the critical appraisal and testing of proffered policy proposals. As prefigured above, the difference in question is epitomised in the hermeneutic emphasis on dialogical reciprocity which underscores the need to respond to the other as a genuine Thou, and hence allow his or her distinctive situated perspective to make a real claim on our understanding of the subject matter. Cognisant of the difference in perspective that their hermeneutic situation affords diversely situated others, the hermeneutic approach enjoins participants to commit to listening to and learning from them to ascertain what distinctive insights they could bring to bear which could correct for the limitations of their own. Importantly, however, while the hermeneutic emphasis on dialogical reciprocity does not entail taking the others' claims on faith or at face value, the hermeneutic conception of reason giving and position testing differs significantly from the Habermasian conception of argumentation. For in the spirit of Socratic inquiry, the hermeneutic template valorises an inherently dialectical exchange of good reasons conducive to underwriting a potentially transformative learning process.[37] So instead of seeking to secure consensus for a preformed stance, each party focuses on identifying the strengths inherent in other perspectives and seeks to build on these in a manner conducive to correcting for weaknesses that have also come to light. Thus pursued in a spirit of investigative openness, this dialectical exchange of good reasons can lead the dialogue partners forward to a new, potentially transformed, understanding of the subject matter, not previously available to them. In contrast to Habermasian stance, then, the hermeneutic approach embodies a genuine dialogical logic oriented toward progressively working out a (provisional) resolution to an open question, the answer to which was not known at the outset, while simultaneously satisfying the need for critical appraisal and accountability.

Secondly, in keeping with its core commitments to mutuality and transformative learning, it valorises a more loosely textured, interactive conception of reason giving and argumentation conducive to the constitution of a forum of "transformative criticism", along the lines valorised by Longino (1990). To this end, the hermeneutic approach endorses an appropriately interactive conception of dialectical "testing", which in the process of challenging the fixity of preformed views about the subject matter, opens up for consideration new, heretofore unrecognised, possibilities. As prefigured above, its defining characteristic is its capacity to facilitate learning from

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[37] *Truth and Method*, especially 366-68.

difference through the identification of strengths as well as weaknesses in claims emanating from diverse standpoints, with a view to building on strengths while minimising weaknesses. Through thus engaging critically with the countervailing views of others, dialogue partners seek to achieve a more comprehensive and textured understanding of the problematic situation. Accordingly, the hermeneutic approach valorises the "contrastive foil" function inherent in the critical encounter with otherness in virtue of its potential not only to make participants aware of entrenched prejudgments which delimit their ability to see beyond their familiar way of thinking, but also to alert them to new possibilities embodied in the others' stance of which they were hitherto incognizant.[38] This has the advantage not only of providing an indispensable check on existing prejudgments, but of making available new, heretofore unanticipated perspectives on the problem domain, thereby enhancing the possibility of the emergence of creative new solutions commensurate with its complexity through challenging participants to develop new, more adequate frameworks of understanding. It thereby paves the way for a potentially transformative "fusion of horizons", whereby participants can arrive at a "higher universality" in their understanding of the problematic situation, from whence the partiality of earlier, more limited, views becomes apparent.[39]

Thirdly, recourse to the hermeneutic dimension also foregrounds the need for the inherently monological and relatively rigid Habermasian conception of argumentation to undergo something of a "rhetorical" transformation so as to render it not only more inclusive, but also more responsive to difference in a manner conducive to satisfying the comparable validity and dialogical equality conditions, and correspondingly more conducive to advancing the dialogical ideal. To this end, as contended by Young, there is a need to factor in greeting, rhetoric, and narrative, even though by Habermasian standards these could seem to be distorting influences. Briefly stated, the benefit is that these more informal communicative features enable diversely situated participants effectively to communicate their distinctive experiences in their own terms to others who occupy different hermeneutic standpoints, while valorising difference through acknowledging the other as an equal partner in the policy making process.[40] Thus, although seemingly irrelevant for argumentative appraisal, valorisation of greeting serves to acknowledge the other as an equal participant whose views need to be heard and attended to on a comparable basis to

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[38] Cf. Hans Herbert Kögler, *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), ch. 5.

[39] Gadamer, *Truth and Method.*, 305; cf. 379.

[40] Young, "Communication and the Other," 123-24; 129-32; cf. *Inclusion and Democracy*, ch. 2.

one's own, however much they may challenge one's initial prejudgments. Likewise, legitimisation of a rhetorical component serves the important function of enabling participants to make their case in terms accessible, and indeed persuasive, to the audience in question so that their relevance to the problematic situation at hand becomes maximally apparent, while still remaining subject to argumentative scrutiny. Finally, legitimisation of the narrative dimension is needed to ensure that participants are not disadvantaged in gaining a hearing for their claims due to their inability to articulate them in more formalised language or in the format of structured argumentation. It likewise serves to ensure that the broader context of needs, interests, and concerns from which the more specific policy proposals derive their significance is rendered accessible to other participants, so that these too can be factored into the process of dialectical testing and appraisal. For, as Young points out, this is indispensable for promoting transformative learning in that it makes "the situated knowledge" accessible from each perspective available to differently situated participants, such that "the combination of narratives from different perspectives produces the collective social wisdom not available from any one position."[41] As we have seen, this in turn can pave the way for a fusion of horizons and the emergence of a transformed situation definition embodying creative new possibilities for responding to the problematic situation.

Thus to reiterate, the aim of the foregoing has been to establish that, potent as this metaphor may be, there is more to advancing the dialogical ideal than transforming a discordant cacophony into a harmonious polyphony of voices, as Flyvbjerg puts it. In addition, there is a need to incorporate an appropriately contextualised, dialectical conception of critical appraisal capable of underwriting a potentially transformative learning process while ensuring accountability. To secure this outcome, as we have just seen, recourse to the hermeneutic dimension again proves indispensable, thereby reinforcing the inherent complementarity of the phronetic and hermeneutic approaches. For without adequate attention to the hermeneutic dimension, the phronetic template simply cannot fulfil its dialogical aspirations.

Finally, given Flyvbjerg's repudiation of the Habermasian discourse model as too idealised and out of touch with reality, it is appropriate to conclude with some reflections on why, although no more than a fragile and elusive possibility, endorsement of the dialogical ideal is no mere utopian illusion.

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[41] "Communication and the Other," 131-32; cf. *Inclusion and Democracy*, 70-77.

A FRAGILE AND ELUSIVE POSSIBILITY, NOT A UTOPIAN ILLUSION

Given Flyvbjerg's repudiation of the Habermasian discourse model in virtue of its alleged ideality and out-of-touchness with reality, it could seem that the envisaged hermeneutic reappropriation might fall prey to a similar criticism. After all, notwithstanding its avowed commitment to situatedness and contextuality, it is manifestly underpinned by a set of idealisations, each of which seems at odds with real-world practice as represented by Flyvbjerg. Accordingly, it might seem that it, too, could easily be dismissed as a well-intentioned, but ultimately illusory, utopian ideal. But to endorse this assessment would be to grossly underestimate its potential to contribute significantly to making real-world policy debate matter, for several reasons.

Recall, first, that on Flyvbjerg's own telling advancing the dialogical ideal is by no means a fanciful external imposition but rather a needed corrective for existing distortions in real-world interaction, in the interests of instantiating a more productive form of policy debate. To achieve this outcome, it is necessary that the dialogical ideal pose a challenge to the status quo in so far as this embodies distorted practice. Were it not thus counterfactual, it could not be effective as a corrective. Indeed, on Flyvbjerg's own telling, it is precisely in virtue of their ability to implement a new form of practice that policy makers need to commit to identifying and instantiating the requisite dialogical conditions when these are not already in place. Clearly, then, the fact that the dialogical ideal conflicts with existing practice does not render it a mere utopian fantasy. Equally clearly, it must not be construed as prefiguring a utopian future. Rather, as in the case of the Habermasian discourse conditions, the dialogical ideal functions as shorthand for a set of ground rules that need to be instantiated to the greatest extent possible in the here-and-now as a basis for defensibly claiming that the policy outcomes arrived at are genuinely judicious and equitable rather than a by-product of unregulated power plays.[42] Thus, notwithstanding Flyvbjerg's repudiation of the discourse model, the point of such idealisations is essentially to inform practice in beneficial ways in the here and now.

Nonetheless, as we have repeatedly seen, the hermeneutic template differs in crucial respects from the Habermasian discourse model, with its erstwhile valorisation of "an ideal speech situation." In addition to being inherently situated and contextual, it is conjoint, interactive, and dialectical, it valorises difference, and is correspondingly oriented toward situated transformative learning in a sense that

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[42] Accordingly as Fine and Smith observe in a related context, it needs to be construed as 'a radical way of understanding and acting in the world, not an institutional blueprint for putting things right' (Robert Fine and Will Smith, "Jurgen Habermas's Theory of Cosmopolitanism," *Constellations* 10, no. 4 (2003): 487, n. 42.)

anticipates the potential liberation of creative new possibilities. Consequently, while transcending Flyvbjerg's dichotomous alternative of "winners" and "losers", hermeneutic valorisation of this transformative potential does not entail the embrace of fanciful possibilities out of touch with the realities at hand. Rather, its motive force centres on a conjoint process of situated learning, whereby through becoming appraised of commonalities, differences, and complexities of which they were not previously aware, participants simultaneously come to recognise creative new possibilities for transcending initial dichotomies through consolidating the best insights available from a diversity of perspectives.[43] The hermeneutic conditions identified above thus have the potential to liberate a situated learning potential neglected, or at best insufficiently accounted for, on the Habermasian model. Equally importantly, valorisation of the dialogical ideal does not presuppose its full and unqualified implementation, now or at any point in the future. Rather, as Chambers points out in relation to the Habermasian idealisations, any progress made in realising these at a given point in time will be no more than "gradual", "fragmentary and partial."[44]   Consequently, such idealisations need to be conceptualised as "engendering a practice" amenable to partial implementation in the here-and-now in diverse ways in diverse situations,[45] without any suggestion of a utopian future wherein their full implementation would be assured. Instead, what implementation of the requisite dialogical conditions depends on is willingness on the part of the participants in a given debate to interact with others in ways maximally conducive to advancing the dialogical ideal in the actual circumstances at hand.[46] Equally clearly, the extent to which these conditions will be instantiated in any given set of circumstances is directly proportional to the extent that participants are committed to bringing this about.

Finally, it should be noted that in valorising the inherently dialogical character of our being-in-the-world, the hermeneutic template again proffers the possibility of an alternative to Flyvbjerg's insistence on the inherently, if not irrevocably, conflictual and adversarial character of real-world socio-political interaction, an alternative which is inherently more conducive to implementation of the dialogical ideal than is

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[43] Cf. Walhof, "Bringing the Deliberative Back In", 170: The outcome "is not mere compromise or victory by one party and loss by another. A genuine change has taken place."

[44] Simone Chambers, *Reasonable Democracy: Jurgen Habermas and the Politics of Discourse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 170.

[45] Ibid., 172.

[46] Indeed, as Dallmayr puts it in relation to political theory, "the central issue here is … a shared engagement and a willingness to engage in a *mutually* transformative learning process" ("Beyond Monologue," 254; emphasis in original).

either the phronetic or Habermasian templates. For on this view, even if, as Flyvbjerg contends, the power-riven character of socio-political life constitutes an ever-present impediment, implementation of the dialogical ideal does not depend on its initiation *ex nihilo*, but rather on a more conscious and directed engagement in a dialogical process always already in train. Moreover, as we have seen, on a hermeneutic analysis implementation of the dialogical ideal is always ongoing, partial, and incomplete. A hermeneutic analysis thus renders it apparent that although no more than a fragile and elusive possibility, a commitment to advancing the dialogical ideal is far from being a mere utopian illusion.

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