An Interpreting Animal: Hermeneutics and Politics in the Human Sciences

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Dedication

To my family.

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Abstract

Beginning with a historical study of the human sciences' position between the natural sciences and the humanities, this dissertation examines the consequences of the fixation on questions of method that has characterized this positioning. Drawing on the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, I illustrate how it is that methodological concerns can serve to obscure other, more fundamental concerns. Gadamer uses Aristotle's ethics to make this point about method, and I take the further step of bringing this intersection of Aristotelian ethics and Gadamerian hermeneutics to bear productively on the human sciences. The result of this work is an approach to the human sciences characterized less by attention to methods and more by appreciation of ends. I argue that in the development of what I call "political teleology" the human sciences exploit their particular strengths, and find their political import.

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And here I am at 2:30 a.m. writing about technique, in spite of a strong conviction that the moment a man begins to talk about technique that's proof that he is fresh out of ideas.
-Raymond Chandler, in a May 5, 1939 letter to Erle Stanley Gardner

Introduction

Raymond Chandler, the American novelist and author of short stories, gives voice here to a conviction that is shared by many who pass their days in the admirably named humanities. As important as technique may be to the fruition of an idea in a novel, a work of art, or a study of human history, it is the idea itself that is central. Technique is a handmaiden that aids in the realization of an idea, and to find oneself preoccupied with technique is to find oneself devoid of ideas. It is only in the absence of ideas that the technique itself becomes conscious and is elevated to a topic of inquiry and conversation in its own right. From Chandler's perspective woe be unto the novelist who finds himself writing a treatise on technique, for the motive force of his work has abandoned him. Chandler's view is far from universally shared even among his fellow writers, but it does find curious resonances in faraway halls of inquiry, in the words of thinkers whose subject matter is as distant as can be imagined from the exploits of Phillip Marlowe—Chandler's most enduring character.

In April of 1963, two years before being awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics for his work in quantum electrodynamics, Richard Feynman—then known primarily for his contributions to the Manhattan Project—delivered a series of speeches at the University of Washington entitled "A Scientist Looks at Society." In his first lecture, "The Uncertainty of Science," Feynman discusses what we mean when we use the word "science." Feynman argues that science has three aspects—science as a special method

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of finding things out (the *scientific method*), science as the body of knowledge arising from the things found out, and science as the new things we can do once we have found something out, or the actual doing of new things (what we usually call *technology*).[1] While Feynman acknowledges the importance of and the popular fascination with technology as the self-conscious application of scientific knowledge, and embraces the power of the scientific method, neither of these is truly central to his view of natural science. Rather it is the contents, the body of knowledge of science that captures Feynman's imagination. Not the method; not the self-conscious application to technology; it is "the things found out" that constitute the real contribution of science. "This is the yield. This is the gold. This is the excitement, the pay you get for all the disciplined thinking and hard work."[2]

On both sides, then—from the humanistic perspective of the novelist and from the scientific perspective of the preeminent physicist—the *technical*, *methodical* element of inquiry is dismissed as necessary but insufficient to understanding the nature of their respective fields. And yet between the two, on that disputed plain of inquiry covered by the social sciences, questions of method remain an abiding obsession. The reasons for this are myriad, and work themselves out in the history of these unique sciences. As a preliminary determination we may notice the following. That against the humanities the social sciences do aspire to a level of objectivity and rigor, traits that the natural sciences have secured at the altar of the scientific method. But against the natural sciences where

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[1] Richard Feynman, <u>The Meaning of it All: Thoughts of a Citizen-Scientist</u> (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1998).
[2] Ibid, 9.

the definite article makes sense in discussing scientific method, the social sciences are privy to no such singularity. Natural scientists take the scientific method for granted simply because it is *the* scientific method. The social scientist must make do with *a* method, and one whose scientific credibility is ambiguous at best. In short, the social sciences focus on method because method is both a matter of some concern (in ways that do not trouble the humanities) and a matter of some ambiguity (in ways that would not occur to the natural scientist).

The singularity of the social sciences resides in their plurality. This, of course, is rather too simple—literary theorists, against Chandler, continue to dispute method in the humanities just as the history of the scientific method casts some doubt on that proud definite article—but simplifications can be revealing. On the part of the social sciences the contested status of method has resulted in a kind of disciplinary fracture that periodically erupts in moments of tremendous debate and discontent. A recent eruption took the form of the "Perestroika" movement in political science, where a motley crew of area studies specialists, theorists, advocates of qualitative and interpretive approaches, and others aligned to voice their discontent with a perceived hegemony of game theorists and large-n statistical modelers in the discipline's primary organs. That such a dispute should be possible in the first place, let alone that it should have the "legs" that it did and does, speaks to the state of the social sciences vis-à-vis method.

It is in such a context that this project plays out. In it I concern myself with a number of questions and problems that find as their unifying theme this methodological preoccupation of the social sciences, and that engage with a number of significant bodies

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of thought along the way. In the philosophy of science I engage with seminal thinkers like Auguste Comte, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Max Weber as well as modern counterparts like Bent Flyvbjerg; in the field of philosophical hermeneutics I take up Hans-Georg Gadamer in depth; and in philosophical ethics I engage Aristotle and his modern advocates like Alasdair MacIntyre. Each step and its attendant engagement builds upon the last, and the point at which we find ourselves in Chapter V will hopefully reflect specifically on the many steps between that final chapter and these introductory statements. At this point, then, a roadmap of these engagements and their relation to one another may be helpful, and it is in that spirit that I offer the following.

In Chapters I and II I explore the history of the social sciences with a particular attention to the status of interpretation in these sciences. In doing so I open a place for and elucidate the contributions of the hermeneutic philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer to our understanding of this status, and the particular ways in which Gadamer's approach goes beyond that of earlier hermeneutic philosophers. We begin in Chapter I with an examination of this history of interpretation in the social sciences, and how an attention to interpretation can throw light on the relationship between the social sciences and the natural sciences. In so doing I engage with a range of thinkers who set the terms of the modern debate over the status of the social sciences. "Naturalists" like Auguste Comte; "humanists" like Wilhelm Dilthey; and those who, with Max Weber, attempt to walk the line between these extreme positions. This review serves to make clear that the division between positivist and humanist approaches to the social sciences has deep roots, and that this division is founded in large part on differences of method. The introduction of

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Gadamer's hermeneutics in Chapters I-II serves to illustrate that the methodological preoccupations of Dilthey et al served to unnecessarily limit the vision of early hermeneutic approaches to the human sciences.

The fundamental element in Gadamer's hermeneutics—the idea that can help us to move beyond method—is his idea of hermeneutic application as an element in all understanding. The result of my analysis is that it becomes apparent that approaching interpretation as a method of social science is insufficient—this approach failed under Dilthey, and in any case Gadamer's approach appears to penetrate to a deeper level. Where Dilthey's methodological approach engages the problem as an epistemological issue having to do with how we attain understanding in the human sciences, Gadamer's approach to the problem is ontological—it deals with the more fundamental issue of what it is to understand in the first place. In addition I suggest that Gadamer's hermeneutics, particularly as it relates to tradition, has more political potential than Gadamer's critics and even Gadamer himself imagined.

In Chapter III I seek to further examine the nature of a Gadamerian intervention into the human sciences by following Gadamer's explanation of hermeneutic "application"—his unique addition to hermeneutic theory that allows him to move beyond earlier thinkers like Dilthey and Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher—by way of the Aristotelian intellectual virtue of *phronesis*. I examine Gadamer's use of the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* or practical wisdom as a kind of parallel construct, similar in important ways to Gadamer's own hermeneutic application. This invocation of

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phronesis serves as the opening for an intervention in the social sciences that goes well beyond Gadamer's own aspirations.

I argue in Chapter III that the social sciences constitute a nexus of practical wisdom and hermeneutic application where Gadamer's contributions to hermeneutic philosophy and Aristotle's ethical reflections can be mutually illuminating. The social sciences engage with practical wisdom insofar as they are uniquely concerned with human action regarding that which could be otherwise, and which is not well understood in terms of technical wisdom (*techne*); they engage with hermeneutic application because the social sciences are concerned before all else with understanding and, as I illustrate in Chapters I and II, Gadamer has convincingly shown that human understanding necessarily invokes hermeneutic application. Thus the parallel between *phronesis* and application does more than serve as a handy illustrative device to clarify the meaning of Gadamer's hermeneutics; it further outlines what it would mean to reconsider the social sciences as both *phronetic* and hermeneutic. The danger here—and it is a real danger, one to which Bent Flyvbjerg and other scholars reflecting on the social sciences have fallen victim—is to seize on *phronesis* as a new method. But that brings us right back to Dilthey's epistemological approach and his eternal and fruitless search for a method unique to the social sciences. Gadamer's reading of *phronesis* allows us to escape this fate by virtue of the features that *phronesis* and application share—both are neither learned nor forgotten; both call for a thinking-together of means and ends; and both necessarily *matter* to the individual. I examine each of these parallels in depth in Chapter III, and begin to draw out consequences for the social sciences.

I take up these parallels and examine them in a new light in Chapter IV, where the consequences for the social sciences *and* political theory are given shape. If we understand the social sciences as *phronetic* and hermeneutic as my reading of Gadamer and Aristotle suggests, then we must see these sciences as 1) concerned with the interrelationship between means and ends and 2) as intrinsically *meaning to* the practitioners of the social sciences. Drawing on Gadamer's <u>The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy</u> I suggest in Chapters IV and V that the key to realizing both of these elements of the social sciences is by way of the apparently outmoded Aristotelian ideas of the Good and teleology. In light of Gadamer's hermeneutics I envision the Good in this context as a contingent or "political *telos*." This is not the Good of stereotyped Platonism—a universal, absolute, or ideal that exists outside of human practice. Nor is this an appeal to the Good as wholly relative—a kind of perspectivism holding that any good will do—as those in the Platonic tradition might fear. Rather, I exploit the fundamental features that *phronesis* and application share to envision the Good as an end that is co-constituted by the means of its own realization. This is a vision of the Good as both the Aristotelian *anthropinon agathon* (human good), and the *hou heneka* (for the sake of). In this view the social sciences as phronetic and hermeneutic are uniquely positioned as a field of contestation where the human Good (*anthropinon agathon*) is debated in ongoing deliberation that is necessarily plural, and where an idea of a final good as *hou heneka* has not been abandoned in favor of relativism.

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In my interpretation tradition plays a key part in this understanding of the Good that is both contestable and stable enough to serve as a *telos*. In his argument for what he calls "orthodoxy" G.K. Chesterton writes

> Tradition means giving a vote to most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about…. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father.[3]

Something like this understanding of tradition is shared by Gadamer, and when fused with Aristotelian teleology it can serve as a stabilizing influence to moderate the pluralist tendency toward perspectivism. The social sciences necessarily both draw on and participate in tradition in their struggle to articulate and pursue the Good as *telos*. This view as I elaborate it in this dissertation moves beyond the Gadamerian interest in "what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing" and the Aristotelian understanding of *telos* as independent of our conscious intentions. It further sets aside the methodological preoccupations that have derailed contemporary considerations of the social sciences. A teleological social science is precisely concerned with where we as a society are going and ought to be going, and how our social scientific practices contribute to the achieving of that end.

This process of articulation and pursuit of societal ends makes this vision of social science inherently political. This makes my approach distinct from other contemporary attempts to integrate *phronesis* into the social sciences by way of an emphasis on power.

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[3] G.K. Chesterton, <u>Orthodoxy</u>, in <u>The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton, Vol. 1</u> (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 250-251.

As I note in Chapter V, both Flyvbjerg and Kelvin Knight argue that a focus on power will lend political credence to "*phronetic* social science." My approach stays closer to Aristotle himself on this point. Power is an important consideration in politics and is clearly an element of the political as ruling and being ruled in turn. This more simplistic reading of power in Aristotle has been forcefully challenged by contemporary Aristotle scholars like Jill Frank, Stephen Clark, and Charlotte Witt. As I discuss in my Conclusion my approach differs from that of these scholars insofar as I do not focus on expanding a contemporary Aristotelian notion of power, but rather on something more fundamental. Power in my thinking is not as important to politics as what informs the use of power—in short, a vision of the good. This is the core of my argument for a teleological social science articulated in terms of a political hermeneutics.

By the end of this project I hope to have drawn out the consequences of the Gadamer/Aristotle nexus for the social sciences and for political theory. The result being a re-imagining of the social sciences as practiced not by those laboring as technicians with tools for understanding and manipulating society, but rather as practiced by scholars uniquely taken up with questions of the end or *telos* of human society. This brings an inherently political aspect to the social sciences, and draws on political theory in Aristotelian terms as concerned with a vision of the good that my Gadamerian approach understands as contingent, and contestable, but still coherent.

The context within which this project has taken shape—as a dissertation project in political theory that draws on Aristotle and Gadamer, and that hopes to say something significant about the social sciences—demands that a pair of questions be answered.

First, as a project in political theory, these pages must respond to the commonplace observation that Gadamer has little or nothing to say about politics, an observation made not least of all by Gadamer himself. Second, as a study in social science, the reflections on Gadamer and Aristotle that constitute its bulk should signal a direction for the social sciences, or at the very least identify a locus for intervention in the social sciences that is uniquely illuminated by the Gadamer/Aristotle nexus. My thinking on both of these questions leads me to consider a single response—the political implications of Gadamer's thought are implicit in the reimagining of the social sciences that I propose. In short, the direction that the Gadamer/Aristotle nexus suggests for the social sciences is political, and this in the very specific sense that it implicates the good for humanity. In the Aristotelian terms of Chapter IV, both the *anthropinon agathon* (human good), and the *hou heneka* (for the sake of) are invoked here as the social sciences are reinterpreted in teleological terms.

One final terminological point in concluding this introduction: Throughout what follows I use the terms "human science" and "social science" somewhat interchangeably. The choice between the two in particular cases has been governed by multiple considerations including the usage habits of the scholars I am discussing, the cultural standards of the historical contexts I am engaging, and care in attempting to avoid unnecessary anachronism. My own preference—for reasons that will become clear in what follows—is in favor of the language of the "human sciences," and so that is the terminology I have adopted in most cases where the above considerations are not determinative.

The Status of Interpretation in the Philosophy and Practice of the Social Sciences

As political theorists it can be tempting to think that our brethren within political science—the ones with the surveys, the statistics, and social experimentation—may be a bit behind the curve. "Don't they know", we may ask in astonishment, "that these scientific pretensions of theirs are bound to fail? That social life is too complex to be reduced, flattened in this way? That this is not the way to really understand the social?" These criticisms are easy and so they are common, perhaps too common, certainly more common than sustained reflection on how it has come to be the case that we who have such profound knowledge of political texts, such detailed knowledge of the opinions and inclinations of our countrymen, can have such contradictory views of what it is that we ought to be doing in order to better come to terms scientifically with the social world; or indeed, can hold such disparate views as to what this "scientifically" should mean.

This first part of my study is intended as a partial examination of this state of affairs. Two beliefs sustain the following reflections. The first belief, serving as the background of the study, is that the status of interpretation in the social sciences— whether it is an artifact of bygone, less-scientific era, one method among many in the social scientist's 'toolbox', or an overarching ontological prior that structures all understanding—stands as one of the most vexing unresolved issues in contemporary

social science.[1] In spite of claims on all sides to have finally resolved the issue, interpretation particularly understood in methodological terms remains a highly contested subject.

The second belief—the explicit concern of this chapter—is that the ongoing debates in the philosophy of science concerning the relationship between the human and the natural sciences can be illuminated by an examination of the status of interpretation within the various sciences. Each of the views of interpretation mentioned above—interpretation as an artifact of a less-scientific era, one method among many, or an overarching ontological prior that structures all understanding—casts light on debates concerning the relationship between the human and the natural science, and the persistence of these debates can help us to understand the tenacity with which these conflicting viewpoints seize the imaginations of social scientists. If our understanding of the social sciences is at least in part situational vis-à-vis the natural sciences, then any inquiry that might help to elucidate this relationship is worth pursuing. Inquiry into the status of interpretation promises such elucidation.

Historically the debate over the fact and features of the difference between the human and the natural sciences has oriented our understanding of the status of interpretation in the social sciences. If a purpose of this project as a whole is to consider the status of the social sciences in relation to the natural sciences and humanities, it is

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[1] See for instance Dallmayr and McCarthy, "The Crisis of Understanding," in <u>Understanding and Social Inquiry</u>, eds. Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 1-15; Jürgen Habermas, <u>On the Logic of the Social Sciences</u>, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson and Jerry A. Stark, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press: 1991); Rabinow and Sullivan eds., <u>Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look</u>, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

worth considering in turn this historical narrative about the role and status of interpretation. In short, I propose we think of the reception of interpretive approaches to the practice of social science in terms of the perceived relationship between the human sciences and the natural sciences in the philosophy of science.

One way of telling the story of the reception of interpretation in the social sciences is to offer the reader a set of debates that have helped to frame this reception. Readers familiar with the political science discipline of international relations are certainly aware of the strengths and weaknesses of this "great debates" approach. My approach will be somewhat different. I will not offer pitched battles between clearly delineated camps, an approach that lends itself to clear exposition but sacrifices the heart of the matter—the ideas, often complex and interrelated, that give birth to these debates and their multi-vocal legacies. I will attempt instead to do these ideas justice by focusing on the work of key protagonists in these debates and their attempts—halting, abortive, and only provisionally successful--at transcending or entrenching the perceived difference between the human and the natural sciences.

The apparently contradictory approaches to the role of interpretation in the social sciences today find their roots in these attempts at resolving this problem, thus highlighting an interesting feature of the role played by interpretation in the history and practice of the social sciences: debates over the status of interpretation mark both of the birth of the social sciences and the locus of contention within the contemporary social sciences. With this interesting positioning in mind, what follows proceeds in a manner intended to illustrate this relationship between historical debates and contemporary

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understandings, noting how the latter have their roots in the former, but without being fully determined by these historical debates.

The first section deals with the original debate over whether or not the human sciences ought to adopt the methods of the natural sciences—a debate which frames much contemporary discussion of interpretive methods in social science. The second section briefly discusses Max Weber and his position in the middle of this debate, and the varied legacy which is the fruit of this position. The third section traces out a major mid-twentieth century reversal in the philosophy of science which saw the preeminent standing of the natural sciences undermined by significant challenges both from within and without, and the implications of this reversal for how we view both the natural and the human sciences. The essay ends with an engagement with Charles Taylor's attempt to reassert the distinction between the human and the natural sciences, and a discussion of the contemporary status of interpretation in the social sciences.

I argue that in the course of this study it becomes evident that approaching the social and natural sciences with the lens of interpretation in hand yields a view of the social sciences that differs substantially from that embraced by traditional narratives. While these narratives tend to view interpretation as a method to be embraced or rejected, this study shows that interpretation touches far more than questions of methodology, and goes right to the core of all human understanding. Once interpretation is revealed as central to all understanding, different grounds of distinction between the natural and the human sciences begin to emerge.

Family Feuds: Positivism and Dilthey's Hermeneutics

To speak polemically, the story that I wish to tell begins after the natural sciences have made their deal with the devil, sacrificing understanding for explanation, and have begun to reap great benefits for mankind in the form of the accumulation of information, benefits rivaled only by the terrors wrought by the inability to comprehend the meaning of this new information. Meanwhile the social sciences are suffering an identity crisis that will continue to today. All of this is just another way to say that our story begins with Max Weber, which is another way still to say that it begins at the dawn of the twentieth century. Weber is interesting for many reasons, not least of which is the fact that his work draws on but fails to resolve the most important debates raging in the philosophy of social science at the time. As a result his work has been taken up by partisans on all side of these debates. To begin, then, we must take a brief look at these debates.

Positivism

Few terms in the philosophy of social science are as disputed as positivism. Its mere mention is enough to throw many off into diatribes and polemics unrivaled by even the most didactic preacher. In spite of the immense scholarship devoted to pro and con evaluations of positivism, the term's definition is elusive. While it is generally agreed that as a philosophy positivism in its modern form is traceable to the nineteenth century

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philosopher Auguste Comte,[2] the path from Comte to contemporary philosophers of science is twisted indeed.

For our purposes I will define positivism as the conjunction of several related views.[3] In the terms favored by philosophy these include a rejection of ontology in favor of epistemology; an empiricist epistemology; and a deductive-nomological account of scientific explanation. To reject ontology in favor of epistemology is to turn ones attention away from arguments about "what is" toward those about "what can be known." The particular view of "what can be known" embraced by positivism is described by empiricism, a view which holds that the knowable is composed exclusively of the observable. These epistemological views are wedded to a deductive-nomological account of scientific explanation which insists on all explanations taking the form of a true general law combined with some statement of initial conditions.

The results of this conjunction of views include a model of scientific understanding that is familiar to many of us from primary science education. I throw a champagne glass into the fireplace and it shatters spectacularly. The positivist rejects any

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[2] Comte's magnum opus <u>Cours de Philosophie Positive</u> (1830-1842) is translated and condensed to two volumes in Auguste Comte, <u>The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte</u>, trans. Harriet Martineau (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 1853). In fact it was Comte who coined the term "positivism" (as well as the term "sociology").

[3] The following condenses and synthesizes key components of positivism that evolved over time and in the works of many authors. For a brief summary of the history of variants of positivism in the social sciences and their antagonists see Steve Smith, "Positivism and Beyond," in <u>International Theory: Positivism and Beyond</u>, eds. Steve Smith, Ken Booth & Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11-44. More involved studies of the topic can be found in Christopher Bryant, <u>Positivism in Social Theory and Research</u> (London: Macmillan, 1985), Leszek Kolakowski, <u>Positivist Philosophy</u> (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), and Peter Halfpenny, <u>Positivism and Sociology</u> (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982).

explanation of the sort which says that the glass broke because all champagne glasses strive toward this highest end, and in its realization reach their highest potential as champagne glasses. That would be a kind of ontological explanation, focusing on what it is to be a champagne glass, and those are right out for positivists. Instead the positivist's explanation would focus on what we can know about champagne glasses from observing them. Every time the positivist has seen a champagne glass thrown into a fireplace it has shattered. Perhaps our positivist has set up elaborate experiments to repeat this motion—the throwing of a champagne glass into a fireplace with the élan appropriate to such a motion—controlling for all extraneous variables. In keeping with the deductive-nomological model of scientific explanation, the positivist explains that this particular champagne glass broke when thrown into the fireplace because of a true general law established by observation (all observed champagne glasses of X kind thrown into fireplaces of Y composition with force Z break) combined with certain initial conditions (this particular champagne glass, fireplace, and force of toss are of types X, Y, and Z).

Since Comte positivism in the philosophy of social science has been tied up with what has been called naturalism--the view that the social sciences ought to attempt to approximate the natural sciences by embracing their methodology.[4] Comte viewed all sciences as progressing through three stages of development in the knowledge they attain—from theological to metaphysical knowledge and finally to positivist knowledge.

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[4] J. Donald Moon, "The Logic of Political Inquiry: A Synthesis of Opposed Perspectives," in Political Science: Scope and Theory (Handbook of Political Science, vol. 1), eds. Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (Reading, MS: Addison-Welsey, 1975), 131-228 treats naturalism and its sometimes adversary humanism (discussed below) at some length.

He saw the natural and mathematical sciences as having completed this progression and sought to bring the sciences of society--which he saw as the pinnacle of the sciences--to the same point.[5] In fact, since Comte methodological unity has attained something like the status of holy writ in positivist circles, with faith in this doctrine constituting the key identifying feature of otherwise disparate positivist philosophies of science. It is in relation to this constellation of beliefs that a focus on interpretation becomes significant.

Positive science is fundamentally suspicious of the idea of an interpretive component in scientific understanding for reasons that can be traced back to its fundamental tenets. The positivist reliance of empiricist epistemology is particularly important in this regard. If knowledge flows from observation, as empiricism holds, then the certainty of our knowledge is directly tied to the certainty of our observations. Observations that are uncertain--that is to say, observations that require conscious *interpretation* on the part of the researcher--are suspect. If we extend this logic to the preferred method of theory-testing in the natural sciences, experimentation, we come to the conclusion that the best experimental result in this model is the self-evident one, the observation that requires no such interpretation. This brings to the fore a further basic belief of positivism: scientific knowledge is *objective* and *value-neutral*. The results of an experiment are independent of the beliefs, preferences, values, and individual psychology of the experimenter. No matter who conducts (and thus observes) a given experiment, the result must be consistent in order to be a valid source of scientific knowledge. This is the essence of the replicability that underlies claims to scientific

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[5] Auguste Comte, The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte, trans. Harriet Martineau (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 1853).

knowledge. Insofar as an observation requires interpretation, a subjective element remains. Hence experiments are designed so as to minimize subjective elements, and are repeated by different scientists in order to "control for" subjective interpretive elements.

This is all well and good in the natural sciences (except that it is not all well and good, but we'll get to that), but it is not immediately clear whether this kind of explanation and the attendant view of interpretation are appropriate or even possible in the social sciences. Appropriate or not, however, the appeal of positivist philosophy of science to social scientists is eminently understandable. The promise of attaining scientific knowledge of society and the prospect of progressive social change through the application of this knowledge makes positivism an appealing philosophy for social scientists in the early twentieth century and today.

Dilthey's Hermeneutics

Around the same time that the positivists were attempting to bring the human sciences under the conceptual and methodological sway of the natural sciences, the late nineteenth century thinker Wilhelm Dilthey set himself to the task of establishing the coherence, legitimacy and independence of the human sciences.[6] Dilthey asked "What is

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[6] This is as good a point as any to address a point of translation and usage. Dilthey's term *Geisteswissenschaften* is translated here as in most contemporary scholarship as "human sciences" and is taken to incorporate disciplines generally kept separate from one another in the anglo-american context: the humanities as well as the social sciences. It is worth noting that early translations of Dilthey rendered the term as "human studies," and that the designation of these studies as "sciences" comes only after later authors inspired by the "universal hermeneutics" of H. G. Gadamer had established the importance of an interpretive element (key to Dilthey's differentiation between natural science and human studies) in the natural sciences as well. In light of this shared feature

the complex of principles which underlies, at one and the same time, the judgment of the historian, the conclusions of the national economist, and the concepts of the jurist, and gives them their certitude?"[7] In short, Dilthey was after a foundational science that would serve the human sciences as mathematics and mechanics served the natural sciences of his day—as the shared, universal basis that provided methodological coherence to the disparate sciences of physics, chemistry, etc.[8]

Seeing himself as a kind of Francis Bacon for the human sciences, Dilthey made it the (unfinished) work of his life to find an independent grounding for the sciences of man to serve as mooring against the onslaught of Comte's positivism. Comte and the positivists' preferred solution to the need for a foundational science for the human sciences was to subsume these sciences under the methodological umbrella of the natural sciences, at least insofar as this was possible. While agreeing to a certain extent that the human sciences ought to be scientific, Dilthey differed strongly from Comte and others in that he rejected the methodology of the natural sciences as an appropriate route to this end. The human sciences ought to complement the natural sciences, in Dilthey's view, but must remain separate from them. According to Dilthey, "The answers of Comte and

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it seemed somewhat disingenuous to reserve the term "science" for natural and not human studies. See Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi, "Preface to all Volumes," in <u>Wilhelm Dilthey Selected Works Volume I: Introduction to the Human Sciences</u>, eds. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), xiii-xv, 56n. But now we're getting ahead of ourselves.

[7] Wilhelm Dilthey, <u>Introduction to the Human Sciences:An Attempt to Lay a Foundation for the Study of Society and History</u>, trans. Ramon J. Betzanos (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 72.

[8] Ramon J. Bezanos, "Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction", in Wilhelm Dilthey, <u>Introduction to the Human Sciences:An Attempt to Lay a Foundation for the Study of Society and History</u>, trans. Ramon J. Betzanos (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 31.

the positivists as well as John Stuart Mill and the empiricists to these questions [of the foundational science underlying the special sciences collected under the term human sciences] seemed to me to mutilate historical reality to accommodate it to concepts and methods of the natural sciences."[9] The human sciences, in Dilthey's view, needed to develop a methodology of their own to counter the natural scientific methods adopted by positivism.

Dilthey was not alone in opposing the encroachment of the natural sciences—his contemporaries in the "Historical School" argued against this move as well, finding recourse in Romantic notions of sympathetic immersion by the researcher in the particularities of historical research. Dilthey found little help here, noting that

> Historical vision and comparative procedures by themselves are incapable of establishing an autonomous system of the human sciences.... When Comte, John Stuart Mill, and Buckle made a new attempt to solve the riddle of the historical world by borrowing principles and methods from the natural sciences, the Historical School could only protest ineffectually against their impoverished, superficial, but analytically refined results by appealing to a more vital and profound intuition which, however, it was unable either to develop or to ground.[10]

This is not to say that Dilthey himself found the attempts of the positivists anything other than "impoverished" and "superficial"—recall that he accused Comte and Mill in particular of offering answers that "mutilate historical reality to accommodate it to

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[9] Wilhelm Dilthey, <u>Introduction to the Human Sciences: An Attempt to Lay a Foundation for the Study of Society and History</u>, trans. Ramon J. Betzanos (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 72.

[10] Wilhelm Dilthey, "Preface," in <u>Wilhelm Dilthey Selected Works Volume I: Introduction to the Human Sciences</u>, eds. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 48-9.

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concepts and methods of the natural sciences"[11]—Dilthey simply found the grounds of these criticisms offered by the Historical School woefully inadequate to the task.

Dilthey's primary concern was to bring the human sciences to a kind of methodological parity with the natural sciences. That being the case, he aimed not to undermine the impressive claims of the natural sciences, but rather to lay the groundwork for similar aspirations in the human sciences. The goal was neither to assimilate to nor to undermine the natural sciences, but rather to *complement* them. This began with distinguishing the human from the natural sciences on the basis of their different subject matters, but what Dilthey was ultimately after was a *general methodology of the human sciences* that would rival the methodology of the natural sciences.

Dilthey felt that certain features of the methodology of the natural sciences simply did not make sense when applied to human things. The search for absolute causal explanatory laws, for instance, seemed futile in light of the fact of human will. Dilthey sought a method by which the lived experience (*Erlebnis*) of human beings could be understood objectively. Where the methodology of the natural sciences was designed to discover the law-like regularities that make *explanation* possible, the methodology of the human sciences would be designed to discover the facts of lived experience that make historical *understanding* possible.[12]

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[11] Wilhelm Dilthey, Introduction to the Human Sciences:An Attempt to Lay a Foundation for the Study of Society and History, trans. Ramon J. Betzanos (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 72.

[12] In what follows I attempt to synthesize several strands within Dilthey's thought. I am heavily indebted to Betzanos' overview of Dilthey's thought in Ramon J. Betzanos, "Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction", in Wilhelm Dilthey, Introduction to the Human

Dilthey observed that the approach of the positivistic natural sciences outlined above relied heavily on representation (*Vorstellung*), whereby the scientist attempts to take an objective attitude toward the content of consciousness. The scientist's consciousness contains representations of physical phenomena, these representations are taken to be true reflections of the world as it is, and thus they are treated as objective facts--as data. In this model the scientist is the subject who takes the content of his own consciousness as his object. This is rendered unproblematic by the empiricist faith in the truth of representation (*Vorstellung*). The human sciences, on the other hand, work with a different mode of consciousness—not representation (*Vorstellung*), but lived experience (*Erlebnis*). According to Dilthey *Erlebnis*, unlike *Vorstellung*, is immediate--it is not given to consciousness or even thought by consciousness, it is simply lived. The subject/object divide within consciousness that is implied in *Vorstellung* cannot be presumed when the object is human life itself rather than some representation of external reality within the human mind.

This is not to say that objectivity is impossible for the human sciences, but rather that it must be conceived differently. *Erlebnis* itself may be opaque to objectification--at least without the "mutilations" imposed by positivism—but lived experience does produce the material for its objectification. In Dilthey's view *Erlebnis* produces "expressions" (*Ausdruck*)—the objectifications of life found in law, religion, art, culture, and all of the other objects of the human sciences. It is these expressions that can be known through *Verstehen* (understanding). Thus *Verstehen* can come to grasp Erlebnis,

Sciences:An Attempt to Lay a Foundation for the Study of Society and History, trans. Ramon J. Betzanos (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), esp. 22ff.

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though only indirectly through *Ausdruck*. Lived experience produces expressions which are in turn grasped by understanding. In Vico's terms, *scimus quod facimus*—we know what we have made.[13] It is through this cycle that the human sciences can find objectivity.

It is worth noting that in the *Erlebnis*/*Ausdruck*/*Verstehen* cycle Dilthey thought that he had found the basis for objectivity in the human sciences, but not a *method* for these sciences. The question still remained how it was that the various human sciences ought to go about gaining understanding of the expressions of life. Dilthey puzzled over this problem for his entire career, examining the psychological methods of Hume, Berkeley and Locke as well as the phenomenological method of Husserl as possible candidates for the foundational science or methodology of the human sciences. The last place that Dilthey examined and the place where he seems to have thought that he had found such a methodology was in the interpretive methods of hermeneutics. The methodological pollutant rejected by the natural sciences would become foundational to the human sciences.

The particular features of Dilthey's hermeneutics do not concern us here. It is worth noting however that his search for a method for the human sciences that would secure understanding consumed him for the entirety of his career, and that he was ultimately not successful in defining such a methodology to his satisfaction. This search nevertheless continues among many more contemporary philosophers of human

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[13] Cited in Betzanos (1988): 24.

science.[14] The differentiation of the human sciences from the natural sciences on the basis of their respective methods continues to frame the contemporary debate, and so it is worth considering the key features of this position particularly insofar as they differ from positivism. First, where positivism preached as its highest tenet the methodological unity of all science, Dilthey explicitly argued for a separate methodological basis for the human sciences over against the natural sciences. Hence where the positivists were explicitly *naturalist* in orientation, Dilthey can be thought of as a *humanist*. Second, where positivist visions of science prized precise explanation through causal laws, Dilthey's hermeneutics sought understanding. This distinction between explanation and understanding, borrowed in part from Droysen, remains among Dilthey's most important and controversial contributions to the philosophy of science. Finally and most importantly for the current study, Dilthey embraced interpretation as the key methodological feature of the human sciences, arguing that interpretation did not necessarily imply subjectivism. This provides us with a second prominent orientation toward the status of interpretation in the human sciences. Rather than following the positivists in rejecting interpretation as an artifact of pre-scientific modes of investigation, Dilthey argued that interpretation--systematized and objective, yes, but interpretation nonetheless—should be embraced as the methodological hallmark of human science.

This marks the original framing of the relationship between the human and the natural sciences, and the role of interpretation as a methodological tool is central. This

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[14] Perhaps most explicitly in E. Betti.

framing persists through the contemporary context where argument between "naturalists" and "humanists" continues on the basis of their differing views as to the appropriate methodological comportment of the social sciences. Such diverse thinkers as the philosophers Jürgen Habermas and Paul Ricoeur, the political theorists Fred Dallmayr, Sheldon S. Wolin and Richard Bernstein and, arguably, the social and political philosopher Charles Taylor revisit this debate in their work, making their cases in terms of the methods appropriate to social science.[15] The historical debate within the philosophy of science between positivism and Dilthey's hermeneutics serves as the frame of reference for the contemporary understanding of the social sciences, an understanding premised on the idea that interpretation is not to be rejected, but embraced.

Dilthey's somewhat hyperbolic attacks on positivism aside, it is also worth mentioning the ways in which the two philosophies converged. Like his favorite antagonists Comte, Mill, and Buckle, Dilthey believes in scientific solutions to sociological problems. Like them he rejected metaphysics, sharing the positivist preference for epistemology. Dilthey was also receptive to the idea of causal laws operating in the social world;[16] he simply saw the expectation that these laws be of the

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[15] Cf. Jürgen Habermas, "Discussion," in Understanding and Social Inquiry, eds. Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977); Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation, trans and ed. J. B. Thompson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Fred Dallmayr, Dialogue Among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Sheldon S. Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," in American Political Science Review, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Dec., 1969), 1062-1082; Richard J. Bernstein, Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

[16] Makkreel and Rodi make a persuasive if unpopular argument that this is the case in their "Introduction to Volume IV," in Wilhelm Dilthey Selected Works Volume

same kind and exhibit the same specificity as natural laws as folly. These similarities are anything but minor, and in fact constitute essential features of the intellectual climate within which both the positivists and Dilthey and later hermeneuticists worked. This intellectual climate—dedicated to a vision of progress and fueled in part by a faith in the ideal of objective science—has persevered for some time, and proven decisive for many practitioners and philosophers in the social sciences to the present day. In order to better see how important these shared features were, it is helpful to look briefly at the work of a thinker who worked in this climate, and who found himself in the thrall of both positivism and hermeneutics to the extent that later thinkers in both traditions have been able to claim him as a forebear.

Max Weber between Positivism and Hermeneutics

The furor that Dilthey displays in attacking positivist visions of the unity of natural and human science may lead the casual observer to adopt an either/or attitude with regard to this debate. Either you agree with the positivists that the human sciences ought to adopt the methods of the natural sciences and leave interpretive understanding to aesthetics or you agree with the humanists that the human sciences, concerned as they are with meaningful social phenomena, must develop a separate methodology that embraces interpretation as the appropriate means to gain understanding of the social world. Indeed today, more than a century after Dilthey's initial exchange with the positivists, this framing of the debate persists particularly in the social science disciplines that embraced

IV: Hermeneutics and the Study of History, eds. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 17-29.

the positivist project most strongly—economics, sociology, and political science. But as early as the turn of the last century there was considerable unease about this way of framing the issue, and no thinker more explicitly embodies the desire, in the words of one commentator, to "have it both ways" than Max Weber.

The critic and Weber scholar W. G. Runciman characterizes Weber's thinking on this topic quite well:

> Weber's position...should be construed as a self-conscious and deliberate attempt to have it both ways. He agrees with the Positivists that the social sciences are value-free and causal. But he denies that this agreement is incompatible with the view that there is nevertheless a difference of kind between the sciences of nature and the sciences of man. Or to look at it the other way around: he acknowledges the peculiarities of human social behaviour as a subject for science, but believes it possible to allow for them without compromising scientific method.[17]

As this diagnosis of apparent eclecticism may suggest, Weber's philosophy of social science is complex and nuanced to the point of being quite baffling. The situation is not helped by the fact that Weber's contributions in this field span decades and include not only systematic works of social theory (Economy and Society), but also polemical reviews of others' work, lectures and other occasional pieces (most notably "Politics as a Vocation" and "Science as a Vocation"), pseudo-Marxian works of social and economic history (The Agrarian History of Rome in its Significance for Public and Private Law) and mature works of sociology (the flawed, incomplete, but still masterful classic The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism). Nonetheless an attempt should be made to understand in broad outlines the ways in which Weber managed to broker a tentative

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[17] W. G. Runciman, A Critique of Max Weber's Philosophy of Social Science, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 16.

peace between the conflicting views, and the reasons why this peace was doomed to fail.

Key to this work was Weber's observation that the near-polar opposition of the human to the natural as understood by Dilthey was overdrawn. For instance Weber agrees with Dilthey and others that where the natural sciences take primary interest in the *quantitative* and exact aspects of the phenomena they study, the human sciences concern themselves with the *qualitative*, psychological and intellectual (*Geistig*) aspects of the phenomena that concern them, and thus must maintain a prominent place for empathic understanding beyond that recognized by the methodology of the natural sciences. Nonetheless, he notes, "this distinction in itself is not a distinction in principle....Aside from pure mechanics, even the exact natural sciences do not proceed without qualitative categories."[18] While it may be tempting to read into Weber contemporary understandings of the qualitative aspect of all understanding, natural or social, this is not Weber's ambition. Instead he is merely pointing out that natural science too takes its points of reference from the qualitative social world in the form of the subjective interests and social context of the scientific researchers. *Scientists* are subjective, socially situated, and saddled with value judgments. *Science itself* in Weber's view can and should still aspire to objectivity and value neutrality.

Weber is not solely interested in revealing the respects in which natural science resembles human science. Likewise, Weber turns his attention to the human sciences and notes the ways in which it can and should follow the natural sciences. Note Weber's

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[18] Max Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," in Understanding and Social Inquiry, eds. Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 26.

definition of a "law" in social science, paying special attention to his use of ideas drawn from both positive and hermeneutic traditions: "[Laws are] typical probabilities confirmed by observation to the effect that under certain given conditions an expected course of action will occur, which is understandable in terms of the typical motives and typical subjective intentions of the actors."[19] Much of the first part of this statement recalls the deductive-nomological account of scientific explanation forwarded by positivists: the language of laws combined with "certain given conditions" draws directly from this account. The second half of the definition, however, draws on the hermeneutic tradition: the language of understanding, motives, and "subjective intentions of the actors" vividly recalls Dilthey's philosophy of "lived experience."

So Weber's philosophy of social science manages to incorporate features of both positivist and humanist visions of science. He maintains a place in the social sciences for causal, explanatory laws, but also "attempted to incorporate the concept of interpretation into his account of social-scientific explanation, and thus to bridge the chasm that Dilthey and others had dug between 'explanation' and 'understanding'."[20] He retained a place for the interpretation of subjective intentions and the subjective understandings of meanings as well as allowing for the subjective orientations of the scientist, but noted that "it obviously does not follow from this that research in the cultural sciences can only have results which are 'subjective' in the sense that they are *valid* for one person and not for

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[19] Max Weber, "Basic Sociological Terms," in <u>Understanding and Social Inquiry</u>, eds. Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 49.

[20] William Outhwaite, "Hans-Georg Gadamer," in <u>The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences</u>, ed. Quentin Skinner, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 33.

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others."[21] In fact, Weber had a rather robust understanding of the *objectivity* of sociological knowledge, albeit objectivity of a very specific type:

> The *objective* validity of all empirical knowledge rests exclusively on the ordering of the given reality according to categories which are *subjective* in a specific sense, namely, in that they present the *presuppositions* of our knowledge and are based on the presuppositions of the *value* of those *truths* which empirical knowledge alone is able to give us.[22]

In short, objective empirical knowledge is possible, but only on the basis of presuppositions that are subjective in the sense that they are oriented by human interest and values. This proposition was at the time and continues to be controversial. The extent to which Weber succeeded at his ambitious project remains a matter of considerable debate, and it is beyond the scope of this essay to evaluate Weber's project as either success or failure. But if his goal was to bring to a close debates concerning the relationship between the human and the natural sciences on the basis of their shared objectivity, he clearly failed. This failure is most apparent in the divergent legacies that Weber can claim: on the one hand Weber is praised by some for taking a decisive step away from interpretive understanding toward a unified vision of science beholden to the model of the natural sciences, and, on the other hand, Weber is lauded by others as an interpretive scientist par excellence, responsible for establishing the legitimacy of interpretive social science against the impositions of the positivists.

A preeminent example of the former legacy is championed by prominent Weber translator and social theorist Talcott Parsons. In the introduction to his English language

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[21] Max Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," in Understanding and Social Inquiry, eds. Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 32, *italics* in original.
[22] Ibid, 36, *italics* in original.

translation of Weber's <u>Economy and Society</u> Parsons puts forward his interpretation of Weber as solidly in the positivist tradition of unifying human and natural science, writing

> What Weber did was to take an enormous step in the direction of bridging the gap between the two types of science, and to make possible the treatment of social material in a systematic scientific manner rather than as an art. But he failed to complete the process, and the nature of the half-way point at which he stopped helps to account for many of the difficulties of his position.[23]

As this excerpt makes clear, Parsons acknowledges that interpretive aspects remain in Weber's philosophy of social science, but ultimately believes that these elements held Weber back, accounting for "the difficulties of his position." According to this reading, Weber is "bridging the gap" between the human and the natural sciences by importing into the former the methodology—the "systematic scientific manner"—of the latter.

The opposed camp, which sees Weber as a proponent of a kind of hermeneutics in the Dilthean tradition, is well represented by Jürgen Habermas. Responding directly to Parsons reading of Weber, Habermas accepts large portions of the characterization of Weber as "interested in knowledge as a part of his general theory of social behaviour," and allows that within that general theory "Weber accords methodologically subordinate status to the understanding of meaning."[24] But, he continues, Weber's interest in human knowledge stretched far beyond his commitment to a general theory of social behavior, and that the "deduction and verification of hypotheses concerned with laws...form

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[23] Quoted in "Introduction" in <u>Understanding and Social Inquiry</u>, eds. Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 21.

[24] Jürgen Habermas, "Discussion," in <u>Understanding and Social Inquiry</u>, eds. Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 66.

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preliminary studies, which as such do not lead us straight to 'the knowledge we are striving for'."[25] It is not in the formulation and testing of such hypotheses, but rather in interpreting their significance that knowledge of the social world lies. From this viewpoint Weber is less the torchbearer of positivist science than an early practitioner of interpretive science in the Dilthean mold.

Regardless of where one falls in this debate over Weber's legacy, it seems clear that while Weber, perhaps inadequately but in any case courageously, engaged these issues head on in his work, contemporary social science seems resigned to leave such problems to the whimsy of philosophers or, insofar as is convenient, rehash the debate ad nauseum in terms of the clash between positivism and interpretivism. The truth, as Weber attests, seems to be that these two traditions of thought are not so antithetically positioned as contemporary social scientific discourse--with its emphasis on diametrically opposed camps or "separate tables"—prefers to see them. In fact they share certain important premises, premises that Weber and others valued sufficiently to allow them to hold to versions of both positivism and interpretivism simultaneously. These premises have since, however, been undermined.

"An Extraordinary Reversal"

The reversal that ultimately subverted the premises shared by both positivism and Dilthean hermeneutics took place not on the contested battleground of the philosophy of social science, but rather in the formerly stable natural sciences. While these thinkers

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[25] Ibid.

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disagreed as to the appropriate relationship between the natural sciences and the human sciences—specifically whether the methods of the former were suited to the latter—theorists from Comte and Dilthey through Weber took it as established that these methods and the philosophies of science that supported them were both perfectly appropriate in the natural sciences, and oriented towards an ideal of objectivity. Throughout the twentieth century, however, these shared understandings came under sustained attack, with surprising results for the philosophy of social science. Somewhat less surprising was the original locus of these attacks.

Of the major tenets that the positivist theories of science discussed above borrowed from the philosophy of natural science the weakest historically has been its somewhat naïve empiricism. Even Hume, an early proponent of the view that the constant conjunction of observed events was the route to scientific understanding, had his doubts. The sociologist William Outhwaite summarizes the basic nature of these doubts memorably:

> ...even an inquisitive child will feel that there is something unsatisfactory about explaining 'why' something has happened by saying that it always does. If I ask why my train is late, I may be partially reassured to be told that the 8:55 is always late, but even British Rail would hardly dare to offer this statement as an *explanation*.[26]

Indeed Outhwaite struggles to understand how a view of scientific understanding so vulnerable to even common sense criticisms could have maintained its status quite so

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[26] William Outhwaite, New Philosophies of Social Science: Realism, Hermeneutics and Critical Theory, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 21. *Italics* in original.

long as empiricism did.[27] In any case he notes that in light of this and other weaknesses, "the history of empiricist philosophy of science in the twentieth century is basically that of its dissolution or at least its transmutation."[28]

The decline in faith in empiricism was symptomatic of a more general fall from grace for the natural sciences. It certainly didn't help matters that some of the greatest difficulties with classical models of scientific understanding were being encountered in physics, the branch of natural science revered as a paragon to positivists. The discovery, for example, that the sacrosanct rules of classical physics break down at the atomic level in ways that cannot be accounted for by either classical or relativistic equations had even Einstein scratching his head.[29] The coup de gras came at the hands of a sociologist of science—T. S. Kuhn—who set out to understand how members of the scientific community come to embrace explanations of the physical world that seem to directly

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[27] Outhwaite finally settles on accusing empiricists of "a pathological fear of ontology and, in particular, of notions of natural necessity." While this no doubt had some impact on the perseverance of empiricism (recall the related positivist distaste for ontological explanations) a more sympathetic reading would note that for all its flaws empiricist science was, for quite some time, undeniably successful both in terms of its results and in relation to prior philosophies of science such as Aristotelian teleological accounts. Nonetheless we may venture that the fatal shortcoming of later empiricists was not in the justifiable pride in their successes but rather in not realizing that this success was in spite of, rather than because of, empiricism.

[28] Ibid, 26. Outhwaite overstates here. While it is clear that the prestige of classical empiricism suffered from a steady decline in the twentieth century, modified versions of empiricism—notably that embraced by the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle—survived and even thrived well into the twentieth century.

[29] In response to the apparent fact that sub-atomic particles behave probabilistically rather than in a manner governed by traditional rules of causality, an exasperated Einstein objected that "God does not play dice." Decades later science journalist Jennifer Ouellette quipped that "...contrary to all expectations, it appears that at the atomic scale, God is the master crapshooter in a microcosmic casino." Jennifer Ouellette, Black Bodies and Quantum Cats: Tales from the Annals of Physics, (London: Penguin, 2005), 180.

contradict received knowledge (as appeared to be the case when Einstein proposed relativity).

The publication of Kuhn's <u>The Structure of Scientific Revolution</u> in 1962 marks a major turning point in the history of the philosophy of science. His argument that theory change in the natural sciences, or the shift from one "paradigm" to another, contained irrational elements, and the suggestion that the perseverance of scientific theories had as much to do with intellectual inertia as with the merits of particular theories undercut the popular image of natural science as guided above all by reason. While Kuhn himself resisted the more relativistic of this view's implications many of his colleagues and disciples—most prominently Richard Rorty and Paul Feyerabend—were more than happy to bring this line of thought to its apparent conclusion: an "anarchist" or "Dadaist" view of science in which "anything goes."[30]

These developments—the decline of faith in empiricism, and the doubt cast by Kuhn and others on the rationality of natural science—seemed to conspire to bring about the reversal alluded to above: a kind of parity was established between the human and the natural sciences, though not in the way envisioned by the positivists. Rather than unifying the human and the natural sciences under the methodology of positivism, these developments brought the two scientific traditions together in their mutual dependence on interpretation as the route to understanding. Interpretation was no longer a wedge that divided the human and natural sciences, but rather a shared (if hidden) premise. Charles Taylor summarizes the results of this strange development for the human sciences with

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[30] See esp. Paul Feyerabend, <u>Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge</u>, (London: Verso, 1978), 184-214.

characteristic wit:

> This is an extraordinary reversal. Old-guard Diltheans, their shoulders hunched from years-long resistance against the encroaching pressure of positivist natural science, suddenly pitch forward on their faces as all opposition ceases to the reign of universal hermeneutics.[31]

We saw that with positivism a methodological unity of the human and the natural sciences was sought leading to the cordoning off of interpretation from scientific understanding. In this view the appropriate role of interpretation in the human sciences is no role at all; interpretation is an artifact of earlier, metaphysical forms of understanding. Conversely Dilthey's hermeneutics sought to sharply differentiate between the natural and the human sciences, treating interpretation as the method uniquely suited to the human sciences. Now the universal importance of interpretation indicated by Taylor in his summary of the post-Kuhnian climate seems to turn the positivist goal of bringing the human and the natural sciences together on its head, viewing interpretation itself as the unifying factor--an essential component of all understanding.

But debate continues, and with important consequences for our understanding of the relationship between the natural and the human sciences and the role of interpretation in each. In this sense the two narratives engaged above—that of the historical debates concerning the natural and the human sciences on the one hand and the engagement with contemporary understandings of the status of interpretation in the social sciences—begin to converge as it becomes clear that interpretation can no longer be considered primarily as one method among others. The following section will address one attempt to reassert

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[31] Charles Taylor, "Understanding in Human Science." <u>Review of Metaphysics</u> 34 (September 1980), 26.

the distinction between the human and the natural sciences as this knowledge of the new status of interpretation begins to reflect in turn on the debate on the relationship between the natural and human sciences. As this example will make clear the contemporary debate must concern itself not only with whether a meaningful distinction can be made between the natural and the human sciences, but also with the further question of the nature of this distinction in light of the new, universal status of interpretation.

Old Wounds: The Case for Reasserting the Distinction between the Human and Natural Sciences

Charles Taylor continues his above assessment of the ceasing of opposition "to the reign of universal hermeneutics" in the following manner: "This is a pleasing fancy. Moreover it has been supported by very insightful people with convincing argument....But I think this is wrong".[32] In spite of the argument that the distinction between the human and the natural sciences should be abandoned on the basis of the observation that the natural sciences have been shown to rely on interpretive understanding no less than the human sciences, Taylor suggests that interpretive understanding means very different things in the two cases.

Taylor argues that one of the key requirements that characterize the natural sciences is that of *absoluteness*. In Taylor's formulation, to apply the criterion of absoluteness in natural science is to hold "that the task of science is to give an account of the world as it is independently of the meanings it might have for human subjects, or of

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[32] Ibid.

how it figures in their experience."[33] At first blush the application of this criterion seems to be a reversion to the view shared by early positivists and Dilthey that the natural sciences were objective and free from interpretation. On closer examination, however, this proves not to be the case. Taylor's identification of the requirement of absoluteness as the core attribute of natural science derives from his realist philosophy of science, which can be contrasted rather starkly with earlier positivist and empiricist philosophies of science.[34]

Recall that empiricist/positivist philosophy of science emphasized correlations between observables, arguing that such correlations could be explained by reference to a general law known to be true plus a set of initial conditions. Where empiricists saw correlation of observables, realists see causal powers possessed by substances—a kind of pseudo-ontological account that positivism would disavow. The empiricist emphasis on general laws as the foundational explanatory mechanism in natural science is replaced in realism with a belief that scientific understanding emerges as a refinement of ordinary understanding or pre-understanding of things as they actually are, not merely as they appear. For realists this pre-understanding can never be fully stated insofar as no set of true formulations plus sets of conditions would exhaust the breadth of this understanding. This implies a kind of implicit grasp of substances and their causal powers that it is the job of interpretation to elucidate, clarify, and elaborate; thus Taylor's observation that

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[33] Ibid, 31.

[34] For an accessible and far more detailed analysis of scientific realism and its relation to other prominent philosophies of science, see William Outhwaite, New Philosophies of Social Science: Realism, Hermeneutics and Critical Theory, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

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natural science, like human science, relies on a kind of interpretive understanding.

But this is not the kind of understanding or use of interpretation that reigns in the human sciences, according to Taylor. Taylor argues that the key difference between the natural and the human sciences has to do with the latter's reliance on what he (following Elizabeth Anscombe) terms "desirability-characterizations," which violate the requirement for absoluteness embraced in the natural sciences.[35] In short, Weber's error was his attempt to make the human sciences value-neutral. In the human sciences interpretive understanding means understanding what human beings value or find to be desirable, a kind of understanding that is inevitably and irreducibly subjective and value-laden. Interpretation in the human sciences serves not only the purpose of clarifying pre-understanding (interpretation plays this role in realist philosophy of *natural* science as well), but in addition the task of assessing value-relationships. Attempts to couch human science in the absolute terms of natural science will inevitably end up missing something essential about the human experience that it is the task of human science to understand.

Because of this difference Taylor argues that the distinction between human and natural sciences must be maintained in spite of the fact that both varieties of science include interpretive elements. He argues this position against those who attempt to impose the requirement of absoluteness in the human sciences [e.g. behaviorism in political science] in spite of understanding their principled reasons for wanting to import this principle into the human sciences. Likewise Taylor's position can also be read to entail that the "desirability-characterizations" so essential to the human sciences have no

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[35] Charles Taylor, "Understanding in Human Science." <u>Review of Metaphysics</u> 34 (September 1980), 30-31.

place in the natural sciences.

Taylor's argument against the imposition of the requirement of absoluteness in the human sciences seems sound to me. One difficulty that becomes clear with further reflection is that it is not entirely clear that even the natural sciences can meet this standard of absoluteness. In other words, absoluteness strikes me as a precarious demarcation standard between the human and the natural sciences. *If* we are to maintain a principled distinction between the human and the natural sciences we must seek out a more robust basis for this distinction than their different methods (Dilthey) or their different claims to absoluteness (Taylor). In my view Taylor's approach to "desirability characterizations" touches on a fundamental point, one that the following chapters will take up. For the time being a focus on interpretation illustrates a key contribution formulated in different ways and contexts by Kuhn, Taylor, and others: interpretation can no longer be approached as a merely methodological issue. There is something more at stake here than methods.

"Over and above our wanting and doing": Interpretation beyond Method

At the same time that Kuhn was formulating his thinking on paradigm change in natural science a change of a very different kind was occurring in the philosophy of interpretation. The German philologist and philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer was engaging with Dilthey's hermeneutic theory and finding it wanting. We will recall that Dilthey sought to establish a methodology of the human sciences that was separate from but equal to the methodology of the natural sciences. In search of this methodology he

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turned to the philosophy of interpretation—hermeneutics—as the ideal methodology for the human sciences. Thus with Dilthey interpretation achieved the height of being deemed the ur-methodology of human science. Gadamer argued that this view of interpretation as methodology (a view that remains prominent today) was unnecessarily limiting—interpretation is not one methodology among many, he argued, but the prerequisite of *all* human understanding.

Along these lines Gadamer famously stated in the preface to the revised second edition of <u>Truth and Method</u> that "[His] real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing".[36] By noting that his concern was not with "what we do or what we ought to do" Gadamer was attempting to clear up a confusion that had followed the publication of <u>Truth and Method</u> by explicitly stating that he was not concerned with method as such— he was not taking a stance "against method" as Paul Feyerabend would do—rather he was concerning himself more fundamentally with the basic prerequisites of all human understanding. To understand, he claimed, was to interpret. There is no more immediate form of understanding, empirical or otherwise. Hermeneutics was, from this perspective, *universal*.[37]

Where Taylor and other philosophers influenced by Gadamer tended to portray the ascendance of universal hermeneutics as implying the dissolution of the

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[36] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u>, Trans revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall, Second, revised edition, (New York: Continuum, 1989), xxviii.

[37] This, of course, is moving rather quickly. A sizable portion of my dissertation deals with Gadamer at greater length, the intention at this point is merely to introduce his thought in broad strokes.

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methodological distinction between the human and the natural sciences (a distinction that Taylor then tries to re-draw in terms of absoluteness), it is worth noting that Gadamer drew no such conclusions himself. In spite of the hermeneutic element involved in both the human and the natural sciences, Gadamer did not, in his own work, collapse the distinction between the two. This presents an interesting puzzle: If in light of universal hermeneutics we can no longer understand interpretation in terms of the methodological distinction between the human and the natural sciences, then what status can interpretation have for the contemporary practice of the social sciences?

Though I've attempted in the above to resist the tendency to fall too easily into simple binaries, the story I've endeavored to tell here no doubt falls into its own traps of oversimplification. For instance, the primary distinction made between naturalist positivists and hermeneutically inclined humanists is deceptive. As the contrast between our discussion of Dilthey and the penultimate discussion of Charles Taylor shows, those who argue for the separation of the natural and the human sciences (all ostensible humanists) disagree vehemently as to the nature of the difference between natural and human science—whether it is methodological, a matter of subject matter, the preferred cut of their suits—the list goes on. Likewise, we need not look any further than the contrast between Comte and Feyerabend to see that those convinced of the unity of science (both are "naturalists" in this sense) are quite a diverse lot when it comes to the particular terms of the détente between the natural and the human.

That said, we are in a position now to better see how the analysis of the status of interpretation in the social sciences has led to an increasingly refined understanding of the debates concerning the relationship between the natural and the human sciences. To summarize somewhat schematically, positivist philosophies of social science introduced the idea of a methodological unity between the natural and the human sciences, and this unity presupposed a minimization of interpretive elements in both forms of science. Dilthey sought a separate methodology for the human sciences, and saw hermeneutics as the science of interpretation as a prime candidate. In the midst of these methodological debates, Weber's social science attempted to find a middle ground, incorporating interpretive elements, but hanging onto important aspects of positivist philosophy. By the 1960s the debate had shifted dramatically, and as the natural sciences were shown to rely on interpretation the methodological distinction between natural and human science was once again thrown into question. In light of the apparent elision of this distinction, Charles Taylor attempted to reassert the distinction between natural and human science by showing that, while both relied on interpretation of a kind, interpretation meant very different things in each case. Finally, Gadamer's hermeneutics begin to point the way toward a reconfigured understanding of interpretation that exceeds the boundaries of methodological debate between humanists and naturalists, but with uncertain ramifications for our understanding of the distinction between the human and the natural sciences.

My aim in this chapter has not been to adjudicate these more local disputes, nor even to "choose a side" in the larger debate, a debate which is far broader and richer than

my discussion here can capture. Instead my primary aim has been to draw attention to what I take to be the central notion at stake in these debates—the role of interpretation in the social sciences. Indeed, the debates discussed here throw substantial light on this issue, though a considerable amount of work remains to be done.

II

Hermeneutics beyond the Text: *Subtilitas Applicandi* and Gadamer's Universalizing of Interpretation

In the previous chapter, I briefly discussed the long history of the philosophy of social science, with a particular emphasis on the tension between positivist visions of the social sciences that would bring the social sciences under the auspices of the natural sciences and the humanist vision of a methodologically distinct and more human social science that was advocated early and forcefully by Dilthey. At the end of that chapter I hinted at the fact that Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics pointed a way beyond this longstanding quarrel, and that his intervention turns on the universality of interpretation. The time has come to dig a bit more deeply into Gadamer's hermeneutics, how Gadamer's approach differs from Dilthey's and, further, to examine some of the ways in which Gadamer's work has inspired resistance within political theory.

In addition the preceding chapter illustrated how an attention to interpretation broadly conceived could be helpful in analyzing the relationship between the social and the natural sciences. In the course of that discussion the term "interpretation" was used somewhat broadly and referred to perspectival features of the dispositions of individual scientists, a certain subjectivism inherent in scientific method, even the analysis of a kind of relativism in perception. In these broad terms, interpretation has been used to highlight the non-objective elements at the heart of sciences that have historically striven for objectivity. In the present chapter I will seek to bring more clarity and specificity to the term "interpretation" by focusing on the particular philosophy of interpretation put

forward in Gadamer's hermeneutics. In focusing on Gadamer's hermeneutics it will become clear that our earlier, more casual use of the term interpretation rests on some problematic assumptions about the relationship between subjectivism and objectivism, a relationship that Gadamer probes incisively.

This chapter begins by elaborating on the ways in which Gadamer's hermeneutics help us to move beyond the limitations encountered in Dilthey's approach. In particular, by shifting emphasis away from epistemology and concerns about method and toward a more fundamental, ontological understanding of hermeneutics, Gadamer is able to escape the naïve objectivism that characterizes much of Dilthey's work. We then proceed to examine Gadamer's hermeneutics in some detail, focusing on his understanding of *application* as an inescapable aspect of hermeneutic practice, and how the linguistic ontology that Gadamer develops implies the universality of hermeneutics and expands the purview of hermeneutic practice far beyond the constraints of textual interpretation. Finally, this chapter discusses Gadamer's rehabilitation of prejudice, authority, and tradition, and how his views on these topics bring him into conflict with advocates of ideology critique in the human sciences, most notably Jürgen Habermas. The somewhat open-ended nature of the debate between Habermas and Gadamer suggests an opportunity to further develop a hermeneutics of the human sciences that takes seriously Gadamer's efforts to universalize hermeneutics.

Gadamer and Dilthey

A logical place to start is with one of the major protagonists of the last chapter—

Professor Dilthey. As we discussed there, Dilthey played a major role in the debates between *naturalists* who sought to bring the social sciences under the methodological sway of the natural sciences and *humanists* who sought to establish an independent methodological validity for the human sciences. If we hope to understand the role Gadamer can play in reconfiguring our contemporary understandings of the social sciences it would be wise to begin with Gadamer's evaluation of the contribution of this key figure in the history of the social sciences. On this matter Gadamer does not disappoint. As has been mentioned, <u>Truth and Method</u> is not only a philosophical tract, but is also and perhaps more importantly an exhaustive history of hermeneutic philosophy—and Dilthey is one of the towering figures of this history.

In the previous chapter we discussed Dilthey's role in the methodological development of the human sciences in some detail. There we discovered that Dilthey's entanglement with the epistemological preoccupations of innovators within the natural sciences had led him to conceive of the unique features of the human sciences in methodological terms—the human sciences would earn their stripes, as it were, by establishing a methodological validity independent of the natural sciences. In this chapter, our focus moves from the methodological battles within the human and natural sciences to the evolution of hermeneutical theory. Dilthey played a key role in this evolution, as Gadamer notes, though Dilthey's contributions in this area, too, are limited by his context. Where Dilthey's contributions to the independence of the human sciences had been limited by the methodological influence of the natural sciences, his contributions to the development of hermeneutical theory were limited by both this and a

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rather different influence: that of romantic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and the appropriation of these hermeneutics by the "historical school". In a nod to Dilthey's indebtedness to these earlier traditions, a substantial division of the second part[1] of Gadamer's magnum opus is entitled "Dilthey's entanglement in the aporias of historicism." In order to get to the heart of the dialogue between Gadamer and Dilthey it will be necessary to understand this entanglement and what it means for the development of hermeneutics and for the prospects of understanding in the human sciences, and to examine how Gadamer moves beyond Dilthey with his own philosophical hermeneutics.

Historicism[2] in its most radical expression understands man in a profoundly

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[1] The entirety of this part of <u>Truth and Method</u>, entitled "The extension of the question of truth to understanding in the human sciences", is, not surprisingly, of great interest to us here. In it Gadamer deals not only with Dilthey, but also with Schleiermacher, Ranke, Droysen, Husserl, Count Yorke, and (at length) Heidegger. Obviously we will not be able to touch on Gadamer's dialogue with each of these thinkers. We will, however, have occasion to return to and linger on Gadamer's surprising and (at least on the surface) out of place discussion of *Aristotle* in this part of the text.

[2] It is impossible to discuss historicism in the context of the sciences without recalling the work of Karl Popper. In his 1936 essay of that name Popper notes

> I mean by 'historicism' an approach to the social sciences which assumes that *historical prediction* is their principal aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the 'rhythms' or the 'patterns', the 'laws' or the 'trends' that underlie the evolution of history.

It should be clear from Professor Popper's judicious use of scare quotes that he finds these aims and assumptions somehow inappropriate. In fact Popper faults social science based on this version of historicism on several points. Importantly for Popper, such a vision of social science is based on a faulty understanding of the form and function of scientific theory formation and testing. In short, historicism of this stripe yields theories that are based on a singe instance (history does not repeat, after all), which are inappropriately generalized into formal laws of history. The problem is one of mistaking singular historical hypotheses for universal laws.

Historicism, as Popper uses the term, trades in "historical prophecy"—the making of predictions that govern long-term, largely impersonal historical movements. Popper's historicist doctrine *par excellence* is Marxism, which he understands as describing the

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historical sense. On this basic and profound historicity of man Ortega y Gasset would write that "Man has no 'nature'; he has history. His being is not one but many and manifold, different in each time and place."[3] This is a thoroughly historicist sentiment, though perhaps it goes a bit further than Dilthey would like. Rather, for Dilthey man *has* a nature, but this nature is expressed in manifold different ways through history. In fact it is through history that we can come to understand man's nature. The challenge that Dilthey took on in his philosophy of the human sciences was to develop a methodology of the human sciences that would take man's historicity seriously. Dilthey, as the preceding chapter has hopefully made clear, was no Comptean, but he did grow to intellectual maturity in an atmosphere saturated with French positivism. He agreed with elements of Comte's approach (his law of the three stages of man—theological, metaphysical, and scientific—and his basically historical approach) but ultimately thought that Comte himself fell into a naïve, crude metaphysical trap by attempting to apply the methods of the natural sciences to historical man.[4] Dilthey was determined not

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development of the economic system that renders historical intervention on the part of individual humans largely impossible. The key features, then, that characterize historicism in Popper's terms include the specification of "laws of history" based on observed trends; the understanding of these laws as governing future long-term trends in the development of human society; and a sense of disconnect between individual agency and these grand historical forces. It is this last point that leads Popper to align historicism with forces inimical to individual liberty. It will become clear as this section progresses that Gadamer's use of the term "historicism" as he applies it to Dilthey is distinct from this use of the term by Popper.

[3] Jose Ortega y Gasset, Concord and Liberty (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1946), p.148.

[4] Ramon J. Betzanos, "Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction", in Wilhelm Dilthey, Introduction to the Human Sciences:An Attempt to Lay a Foundation for the Study of Society and History, trans. Ramon J. Betzanos (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 22ff. In his introduction Betzanos also notes that Dilthey's Comtean inclinations

to make the same mistake.

In the previous chapter we noted how Dilthey sought to ground the objectivity of the human sciences in the *Erlebnis/Ausdruck/Verstehen* cycle—basing the objectivity of the human sciences on lived experience (*Erlebnis*) rather than on the positivist grounds of representation (*Vorstellung*). We also noted there that in the *Erlebnis/Ausdruck/Verstehen* cycle Dilthey thought that he had found the basis for objectivity in the human sciences, but not a *method* for these sciences. Gadamer notes that Dilthey "takes up romantic hermeneutics and expands it into a historical method—indeed into an epistemology of the human sciences."[5] We are now in a position to examine how Dilthey sought to remedy the methodological shortcomings of the naturalists through the use of Romantic hermeneutics.

In his appropriation of romantic hermeneutics Dilthey hoped to develop a method for the human sciences that satisfied both of his pressing needs—to avoid the positivist mistake of applying the methodological criteria of the natural sciences to the human sciences, and simultaneously to develop a methodology more appropriate to the historical nature of man. Romantic hermeneutics seemed well suited to the task. In the work of thinkers like Schleiermacher romantic hermeneutics sought to understand historical literary texts in terms that coincided with the intentions of the author—to discover through the work of interpretation the truth that lies in historical texts. In response to the

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would ultimately lead him to reject ontology, associating it with an outmoded, "metaphysical" approach (51-52). This feature of Dilthey's approach will be crucial in distinguishing his approach to the human sciences from Gadamer's.

[5] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 198.

Enlightenment's emphasis on progress and the overcoming of the past, Romanticism "cherished the past simply because it was past."[6] This revaluation appealed to Dilthey the historicist, and he sought to take the insights that romantic hermeneutics had applied to historical *texts* and apply them to historical *man*.

In the analysis of historical texts, romantic hermeneutics make much use of what has been called the "hermeneutic circle"—the observation that we come to understand a text through the interplay of the part and the whole. We approach a text with a preconceived understanding of its meaning. When a particular detail of a text comes into conflict with that pre-understanding we examine the context of that detail, and perhaps modify our understanding of the text as a whole. This new and modified understanding of the text now provides the context for future parts of the text, and so the circle loops back on itself. Dilthey found this process appealing:

> This process is repeated in reconstructive understanding. At first it encompasses the whole in a premonition or presentiment until it raises the whole to a conscious unity informed by knowledge of particularity. Herewith the circle implicit in the concept of interpretation is solved insofar as the individual components can only be understood from the whole and vice versa…[7]

Gadamer parses this move nicely, noting that "Dilthey's logical analysis of the concept of context and coherence in history, in fact, consists in applying to history the hermeneutical principle that we can understand a detail only in terms of the whole text, and the whole

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[6] Joel Weinsheimer, Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 168.

[7] Gesammelte Schriften, XIV, 659. In Rudolph A. Makkreel, Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies (Princeton University Press 1975), 268.

only in terms of the detail."[8]   In short, Dilthey transposed the method adopted by romantic hermeneutics into his historicist vision of man. Understanding history for Dilthey is a matter of understanding discreet details (the objectification of *Erlebnis* in *Ausdruck*) in light of a larger historical context, and using these discreet details to form a more coherent picture of this larger historical context. In Dilthey the hermeneutic method, the circle of part and whole—which romantics had used to interpret historical texts—was applied to history itself.

So Dilthey's attempt to reconcile man's historicity with the possibility of universally valid, objective knowledge was composed of these two parts: on the one hand, a basis for objectivity; on the other hand, a method for obtaining this objective knowledge. The basis for objectivity was supplied by the turn to lived experience and its expressions; the method was provided by the hermeneutic principle of the part and the whole. The human scientist would gain knowledge of history by way of his access to the particular expressions of lived experience provided by human cultural artifacts like law and art. These expressions, taken together, could yield something like universal history—an objective view of the development of history conceived by way of history's own vicissitudes. In Gadamer's words,

> Dilthey thought that the knowledge of increasingly large historical units could be conceived according to this schema and expanded to constitute knowledge of universal history, just as a word can be understood only in terms of the whole sentence, and the sentence fully understood only within

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[8] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 198.

the context of the whole text, indeed of the whole of literature.[9]

The "words" of history—expressions of lived experience—are read like a book. The infinite variety of man's historical experience ultimately composes a unified whole—universal history. This history emerges in the play between the part and the whole, as ever-larger units of history fall under the sway of objective knowledge.

This is a massively ambitious approach to the understanding of history and one that, if successful, would undoubtedly establish Dilthey as something like a "Galileo for the human sciences."[10] But the analogy of history to text raises difficult and uncomfortable questions for the Dilthean and for the social scientist who embraces this understanding of the role of interpretation in human science. Some of these questions are seemingly innocuous—textual interpretation is notoriously fraught with controversy, how is historical analysis to accomplish an objectivity that the model of textual interpretation cannot sustain?—others are potentially devastating. The greatest of these problems emerges from the conflict inherent in Dilthey's desire to both understand history in its own terms—as it is experienced by those who live it—and to bring these experiences to objectivity. To put none-too-fine a point on it: Who is the "reader" of the book of history? If that reader is the scientist himself as Dilthey suggests, how is it possible that he—a historically conditioned being—can attain objectivity? To continue the quotation from above, "applying this schema presumes, of course, that one can overcome the fact

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[9] Ibid. 231. The plausibility of Gadamer's interpretation is supported by his citation of Dilthey in this passage: "Life and history have a meaning just like the letters of a word."

[10] Karl Popper, "Historicism," in Popper Selections, ed. D. Miller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). 289.

that the historical observer is [himself] tied to a time and place."[11] Viewed in this light,
Dilthey's belief that "historical consciousness was supposed to rise above its own
relativity in a way that made objectivity in the human sciences possible",[12] seems
hopelessly misguided. How did Dilthey find himself in this situation?

At least part of the explanation lies in Dilthey's acceptance of the positivist
emphasis on epistemology, and his related distaste for ontology, an emphasis and distaste
that are broadly if not universally shared in contemporary philosophy of social science.
In Betanzos's words, "Dilthey takes it as historically demonstrated, especially through
the work of Kant and the British empiricists, that epistemology and psychology, which
deal solely with the data of consciousness, constitute the only proper subject matter of
philosophical knowledge."[13] Dilthey, drawing on the same empiricist foundations that
inspired his ideological enemies, comes to their familiar conclusion: any philosophical
inquiry which attempts or claims to go beyond the directly perceived facts of
consciousness to inquire into the nature of being itself—that is to say, any attempt at an
ontological analysis—smacks of metaphysics and must be banished from scientific
investigations. Ortega y Gasset, with his typical panache, describes Dilthey as

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[11] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J.
Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989),
231.
[12] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J.
Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989),
234.
[13] Ramon J. Betzanos, "Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction", in Wilhelm Dilthey,
<u>Introduction to the Human Sciences:An Attempt to Lay a Foundation for the Study of
Society and History</u>, trans. Ramon J. Betzanos (Detroit: Wayne State University Press,
1988), 51.

"hampered…by the epistemological mania, that Kantian and positivist *ontophobia*."[14]

I argue that this *ontophobia* is problematic in two senses—both in itself and in its consequences. In the first instance, Dilthey's aversion to ontology belies a mistaken belief that by focusing on epistemology one can develop an essentially ontology-free philosophy. Implicit in any theory of knowledge is an attendant theory of being—if nothing else a set of assumptions concerning that-which-can-be-known. In the second instance—with regard to its consequences—this *ontophobia* acts to effectively blind Dilthey to issues like the one noted above. If one approaches history with an eye only to the epistemological challenges posed by history as an object, one is blinded to the ontological status of that object. In Dilthey's case the result is a blindness to the fact that history itself as the object of historical consciousness does not only stand apart from the interpreter as an objective thing-to-be-known, but also implicates the knower himself as a historical being. The Diltheyan emphasis on epistemology—an emphasis that is identical with the method-centered approach to hermeneutics—overdraws the distinction between the knower and the known, the subject and the object of historical research.

Put another way, in my view the problem is not so much that Dilthey *lacked* an ontological basis for his epistemology—this, as we have seen, is impossible; the problem is that his *disavowal* of any such ontology caused him to overlook the consequences of the ontology implied by his epistemology, particularly insofar as these consequences trouble the relationship between the subject and the object of history specifically and the human sciences more generally. Dilthey sought to establish the independence of the

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[14] Ibid, 52

human sciences on these epistemological bases. He argued that the human sciences have different objects of knowledge that require different methodological approaches. In developing these methods Dilthey drew on romantic hermeneutics and the model of textual analysis that looks for knowledge in the relationship of the part to the whole. Expressions of lived experience were thus understood in terms of their historical context, which context came to be further understood on the basis of these expressions. All of this culminates in a view of history as a body of knowledge different from, but equal to the natural sciences in terms of objectivity.

The argument that I would like to pursue here is that Dilthey's epistemological approach to the differences between the natural sciences and the human sciences is bound to be inadequate. The fundamental difference between the two lies not only in how we come to know the objects of study in each case, but further in the *nature* of these objects of study, and the extent to which these may be considered *objects* at all. In short, what is needed is not an epistemology of human science to rival that of the natural sciences. What is needed is an ontology of the human sciences. Where the former approach may yield methodological recommendations for practitioners of the human sciences, these methods are of little use if we continue to fundamentally misunderstand that to which these methods are to be applied. This shift from epistemology to ontology brings us precisely to the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. I will argue here and in the following chapters that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics provide us with the ontological orientation necessary to move beyond the methodological concerns of Dilthey's approach, and that this orientation bears significant fruit for the social sciences

in general and for political science in particular. To begin to see how this will be the case, it will be necessary to examine Gadamer's specific contributions to hermeneutic philosophy in greater detail. Only then will we be in a position to evaluate the potential significance of Gadamer's hermeneutics for the human sciences.

Gadamer's Contributions to Hermeneutic Philosophy

In the previous chapter I touched briefly on Gadamer's hermeneutics and made a claim for the importance of the *universalizing* of interpretation in his philosophical hermeneutics. The time has come to examine this claim more closely. The following sections begin with the hermeneutics of the text—the practice of interpreting historical texts—and the significance of textual interpretation within the human sciences generally and political theory specifically. It is in this context that Gadamer's contributions to hermeneutic philosophy can be made explicit. These contributions bear implications that stretch far beyond the realm of textual interpretation and what it means to understand a text to the very depths of what human understanding means in general.

The Hermeneutics of the Text

The turn to traditionary or canonical texts, particularly those of Attic Greece, is well established in political theory. By the first century BC Cicero was turning to the works of Aristotle and finding insights that he could relate to the Roman experience in between republic and empire. Over a millennium and a half later Plato's influence would inspire Kant's transcendentalism, and centuries later still Socrates' thought would serve

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as a motive force in Hannah Arendt's political theory. This is no less the case today, and the reasons for this ready resort to the ancients seem relatively clear. In a cynical mode we may say that reference to the ancients confers a kind of instant legitimacy on philosophical and theoretical projects. If I can claim that my theory is shared in some way by so great a thinker as Plato, perhaps some of the latter's authority will adhere to my project. On a more charitable reading, though, the turn to the ancients can act as a spur to contemporary thinkers. In the shadows of the origins of the Western tradition we may find untapped resources that can serve as the starting point for a new line of thinking. Alternatively, we may find in the ancient polis an ideal type to which our own political systems can be compared.

With one or some combination of these ends in mind, contemporary thinkers generally develop or apply some interpretive [hermeneutic] method to the traditionary text at hand in order to discover the starting points, critical insights, or ideal types that they seek. After all, it is far from obvious how a particular text—written hundreds or even thousands of years ago by an author who may or may not speak an unfamiliar language and who most certainly occupies a different cultural milieu than that of the interpreter—ought to be read in this new historical context. The problems posed by turning to a Greek thinker for insights into mid-twentieth century politics, or to a German writing in an interwar context for solutions to the problems of the early twenty-first century, seem most intractable.

Indeed at first glance it seems that the only interpreter who might have an easy time of this trouble would be the thinker who postulates a radical break between the

traditional and the modern. A moment's reflection, however, reveals the many difficulties awaiting the thinker with such a hypothesis in hand. All of these difficulties seem to point the contemporary thinker towards the necessity of some systematic method of analysis that can render their inquiries and results credible if not absolutely certain.

And so as the conversation of philosophy with its earlier self continues throughout history, so too has the evolution of hermeneutic philosophy carried on. This evolution, from Plato's reflections on the pre-Socratic philosophers to contemporary uses of canonical texts in political theory is twisted, controversial, at times quite dull, and in any case well beyond our concern here. For my purposes the key point turns on how Hans-Georg Gadamer revolutionized philosophical hermeneutics and expanded the range of its influence beyond the interpretation of historical texts to include the very structure of human thought and understanding. In our later discussions, this new, universalized hermeneutics will provide a starting point for a rethinking of the self-understanding of the social sciences.

One of Gadamer's central hermeneutical insights is that the tripartite division of early hermeneutics[15] into *subtilitas intelligendi* (literally the talent of intellection or understanding: the realm of the self-evident, that which needs no explanation), *subtilitas explicandi* (the talent of explication or interpretation: the occasional work of making transparent the meaning of a text that is obscure) and *subtilitas applicandi* (the talent of applying or application: taking the insights of a text and making them do work for us) is

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[15] This tripartite division was introduced by J.J. Rambach, who added *subtilitas applicandi* to the Pietist division of *subtilitas intelligendi* and *subtilitas explicandi*. See Joel Weinsheimer, Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 184ff.

really no division at all.[16]

Early hermeneutics held that *subtilitas intelligendi* governed everyday acts of understanding—understanding that did not require the self-conscious use of interpretive methods. Thus understanding much writing in history and non-fiction was taken to be primarily an act of intellection, of simply reading what was on the page and understanding it in an unmediated fashion. *Subtilitas explicandi*, then, was needed when the meaning of a text was not self-evident, but rather required some act of interpretation on the part of the reader. Poetical texts, for example, were taken to require some form of explication. Finally *subtilitas applicandi* denoted a third and separate cognitive act whereby the meaning of a text—apparent now thanks to the work of *subtilitas explicandi*—could literally be applied to a task at hand. In this application the meaning of the text is essentially re-interpreted into the contemporary context.[17]

Prior to Gadamer's writing, Schleiermacher's romantic hermeneutics had united understanding (*subtilitas intelligendi*) and interpretation (*subtilitas explicandi*) by arguing that interpretation is not some special faculty recruited when meaning is not self-evident

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[16] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 307. It is worth commenting here that Gadamer takes the following discussion as further fodder for his argument that understanding is not about the explicit application of a method, but is instead a matter of comportment: "It is telling that all three are called subtilitas—i.e., they are considered less as methods that we have at our disposal than as talents requiring a particular finesse of mind."

[17] This model of interpretation also differs from the Medeival and Rennaisance Christian interpretive practice of so-called four-fold hermeneutics, which featured the following levels: the literal (historical) level, the allegorical (typological or figural) level, the tropological (moral) level, and the anagogical (eschatological) level. Romantic hermeneutics (and historically-minded hermeneutics more generally) have semi-analogues for the literal and allegoraical levels in intellection and explication, and are less interested in the moral and eschatological aspects of interpretive practice.

but is instead always implicated in understanding. In doing this, romantic hermeneutics illustrated that interpretation is not occasional but continual—an ongoing process in which we come to understand the world. Insofar as we understand anything at all—not just obscure or arcane texts but also aspects of "everyday life"—we engage in interpretation. This interpretation can be more or less *conscious* on the part of the interpreter,[18] but it occurs in every case of understanding nonetheless.

It was this model of hermeneutics that Dilthey drew from in constructing his epistemology of the human sciences. The unification of understanding and interpretation that romantic hermeneutics established would point the way toward the use of hermeneutics as Dilthey's preferred method for gaining understanding within the human sciences. Nonetheless the romantic hermeneutics that Dilthey embraced kept application (*subtilitas applicandi*), understood in this sense as the self conscious *use* of an interpreted text's meaning for one's own purposes, safely at arm's length. Dilthey considered application to be a separate process, and one best set aside if one aspired to scientific objectivity. Anders Odenstedt puts it concisely:

> According to Dilthey…the use of the past for current purposes in theological and legal hermeneutics, and the corresponding tendency to see historical texts as possibly providing answers to current questions, easily result in anachronism and should be avoided if history is to achieve scientific status.[19]

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[18] In fact this work of interpretation is more often than not entirely non-conscious, and this is precisely what interests Gadamer. It is in this respect that Gadamer can be read as saying that language like history, does not belong to us, we belong to it (see pp. 20-21).

[19] Anders Odenstedt, "Tradition and Truth: Dilthey and Gadamer on the History of Philosophy" in <u>Lychnos: Annual of the Swedish History of Science Society</u>, 2006, 167.

As this concise description makes clear, for Dilthey application of the meaning of a historical text to one's own situation involves a conscious choice, and the danger of anachronism makes this a choice that is clear for the scientist.

Nonetheless, bringing interpretation and understanding together as romantic hermeneutics did extends the purview of interpretation considerably. Beyond this accomplishment of romantic hermeneutics, Gadamer takes a step further by reading application (*subtilitas applicandi*) in a more fundamental, ontological sense: Gadamer argues that application is inseparable from interpretation and understanding. If the unique accomplishment of romantic hermeneutics was to show that interpretation is continual rather than occasional, Gadamer's further contribution with his philosophical hermeneutics was to show that all interpretation (and hence all understanding—remember that romantic hermeneutics established the unity of interpretation and understanding) is *applied* in the sense that it is practiced by an interpreter whose present situation is involved in the work of interpretation. Gadamer writes:

> In the course of our reflections we have come to see that understanding always involves something like applying the text to be understood to the interpreter's present situation. Thus we are forced to go one step beyond romantic hermeneutics, as it were, by regarding not only understanding and interpretation, but also application as comprising one unified process. This is not a return to the pietist tradition of three separate "*subtleties*," for, on the contrary, we consider application to be just as integral a part of the hermeneutical process as are understanding and interpretation.[20]

All understanding is interpretation and application. These are not in fact separable talents or methods but rather integrated facets of all understanding, indeed, of

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[20] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u>, Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 308.

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all human *being*. This is the primordial and truly universal nature of hermeneutics according to Gadamer—that insofar as we understand we interpret; we apply. It was the accomplishment of romantic hermeneutics to make it impossible to speak of interpretation as an occasional practice—instead interpretation is continual. Gadamer moves beyond romantic hermeneutics by showing that this ongoing interpretation is not separable from the interpreter and her own context. Gadamer's hermeneutics is *universal* in this sense—interpretation is both temporally ongoing, and ontologically all encompassing. Gone is the view of application as a conscious, after-the-fact process of the intellect. In its place stands Gadamer's understanding of application as the inescapable entanglement of the interpreter and that which is interpreted. No sphere of human existence escapes the play of interpretation, and the interpreter's relation to the world is implicated in this process. This is a tricky point, and one that is central to Gadamer's hermeneutics, so a bit of explanation may be in order.

Gadamer's illustration of this point draws on two examples selected from the "home field" of hermeneutics favored by Schleiermacher and Dilthey: legal and theological interpretation. By examining Gadamer's treatments of these fields, we can gain a better sense of what this tripartite configuration of understanding/interpretation/application entails. On the topic of these classic hermeneutical fields, Gadamer writes:

> A law does not exist in order to be understood historically, but to be concretized in its legal validity by being interpreted. Similarly, the gospel does not exist in order to be understood as a merely historical document, but to be taken in such a way that it exercises its saving effect. This implies that the text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly—i.e., according to the claim it makes—must be understood at

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every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application.[21]

Insofar as one understands a law or scripture as meaningful, one has already applied that law or scripture to one's own situation. The question of whether one takes the further, conscious step of using or appropriating that law or scripture for one's own purposes is a separate issue. The important thing for Gadamer is the process of understanding itself, a process that always includes application in this new sense. The contrast with Dilthey and his fears about anachronism is striking. According to Gadamer legal and sacral tradition are not unchanging, historically circumscribed bodies of doctrine. As soon as a law is taken as a historical artifact, as soon as scripture is reduced to the novelty of historical literature, the effective power of the law to adjudicate and of scripture to save are lost.

This insight forms the core of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Against dogmatists in both legal interpretation and scriptural exegesis who seek the one true meaning of the text at hand, against romantic hermeneutics with its emphasis on rules of interpretation, Gadamer offers a hermeneutics of application that subsumes earlier models of hermeneutics. This extension of the meaning of hermeneutics has extraordinary consequences for the interpretation of texts. Any pretensions of complete objectivity on the part of the interpreter are called radically into question.[22] If interpretation is always in part an application to one's own situation, then complete distanciation from the meaning of the text and the tradition that bears this meaning cannot possibly be accomplished.

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[21] Ibid: 309.

[22] N.B. "Called into question", but not completely undermined. As we will see, Gadamer has his own arguments concerning the possibility of objectivity in interpretation.

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Objectivity in this naïve sense is not only impossible in light of this implication, though; it is entirely inappropriate. Insofar as we understand, we interpret and apply; and this extends far beyond textual interpretation to include one's entire understanding of the world—natural, physical, social. This is simply our way of being in the world.

Lest we imagine that Gadamer's arguments against naïve objectivism collapse into a tacit acceptance of an equally naïve subjectivism, it is worth noting that Gadamer's arguments against the latter are even more forceful than those against the former.[23] If the characteristic fault of objectivism is to artificially create distance between the interpreter and the text, the more serious fault of subjectivism is the confusion of the meaning of the text with the psychological states either of the author or of the interpreter. Gadamer was, after all, a student of Heidegger's, and the latter's antagonism towards subjectivism in favor of an ontologically distinct, non-humanist understanding of Being constitutes one of his major contributions to the philosophy of the 20th Century. Gadamer's primary criticism of Betti (a preeminent bearer of the Diltheyan tradition) relates to this point. While Betti "seeks the mean between the objective and the subjective element in all understanding", Gadamer argues, "he is able to justify this task—which is the real

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[23] This is attributable, in part, to the fact that subjectivist philosophies of interpretation held considerably more sway at the time of the writing of Truth and Method than naively objectivist hermeneutics. This is arguably still the case today within the field of hermeneutics. In the world of the social sciences the debate is more evenly matched. This is what makes Gadamer's hermeneutics so interesting for the social sciences—its status as neither objectivist nor subjectivist, properly speaking. See Bernstein's Beyond Objectivism and Relativism for a fascinating discussion of this in-between space.

hermeneutical one—only by a kind of *analogy with psychological interpretation*".[24] On this point Gadamer also finds himself opposed to Leo Strauss whose search for esoteric meanings requires attempting to understand the author of a text better than he understood himself. In this, Gadamer argues, "[Strauss] underestimates the difficulties of understanding, because he ignores what might be called the dialectic of the statement".[25]

I believe that these criticisms of the latent subjectivism implicit in both Betti's and Strauss's philosophies may tell us more about Gadamer's hermeneutics of the text than they do about either Betti or Strauss. What starts to emerge from these comments is an understanding *of* understanding in which a frontier between objectivism and subjectivism (the navigation of which "is the real hermeneutical [task]") is discovered in the form of a dialogue with the text. This dialogue prizes neither the objectivity of a historically circumscribed text, nor the psychological state of the author or interpreter, but rather the *meaning* of the text—a meaning that is underdetermined by both the subjectivist and the objectivist interpretation. This is precisely the domain of application—application is the forging of this dialogue in language between the interpreter and the text in which the meaning of the text emerges as something irreducibly *other* that either the interpreter or the text in itself.

Beyond the Text

We are now well beyond the naïve objectivism that characterized Dilthey's

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[24] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 511.
[25] Ibid: 535.

epistemological approach.[26] By reducing the problem of interpretation to an issue of method, and relegating hermeneutics to the status of a "foundational science" for the human sciences, Dilthey approached understanding in epistemological terms. For Dilthey what we understand is what we can know objectively, and hermeneutic interpretation provides the methodology through which we can attain this knowledge. With Gadamer and his incorporation of application into the purview of hermeneutics, we move away from this epistemological understanding of hermeneutics to a more foundational, *ontological* approach. This is a move that in my view has profound implications for social science.

Gadamer introduces his linguistic ontology late in <u>Truth and Method</u>, after he has already developed a full-fledged hermeneutic philosophy. This philosophy deals primarily with how it is that human beings come to understanding: through language. The meaning that comes across in language does not exist prior to interpretation in some objective form, waiting for the appropriate interpretation. Rather, meaning literally comes to be in language. Gadamer's linguistic ontology seeks to extend this insight beyond the purview of textual interpretation:

> We can now see that this activity of the thing itself, the coming into language of meaning, points to a universal ontological structure, namely to

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[26] It is worth noting that Dilthey is not without his defenders on this front. For a recent treatment of objectivism in Dilthey, Gadamer, and Habermas that is much more sympathetic to Dilthey's approach, see Austin Harrington, "Objectivism in Hermeneutics? Gadamer, Habermas, Dilthey" in <u>Philosophy of the Social Sciences</u> 2000; 30, 491.

the basic nature of everything toward which understanding can be directed. *Being that can be understood is language*.[27]

This passage implies a striking linguistic ontology. The most radical reading of the passage "Being that can be understood is language" insists that everything that is and that can be said to be understandable—from the table before us to the deepest feelings of our hearts, to the stratification of the political world—can be formulated in language. *If it cannot be said, it is not understood*. Understanding is identified with language, and language is identified with being.[28] This is the core of what Gadamer means by the "universal ontological structure" of language—everything that we can understand as being can be put into language; or, rather, in coming to language, everything that can be understood comes to be.

Language in this sense is not a perfectly neutral medium through which meaning can be communicated. For Gadamer, following Heidegger, human beings always already find themselves "thrown" into a world that preexists them. Language, then, belongs to a world that preexist our self-conscious cognitive processes. The meaning of those things that can be understood emerges as human beings come to understand this world through

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[27] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 474, *italics* in the original.

[28] In this reading we can be agnostic as to the existence of a pre- or non-linguistic reality—whether in the guise of Platonic forms or neurophysiological bases to human self-understanding. The key feature is meaning itself and how human beings come to understanding through language. Features of this reading of Gadamer's *Being that can be understood is language* bear a striking resemblance to a common interpretation of Wittgenstein's cryptic "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence", the concluding thought in his <u>Tractus Logico-Philosophicus</u>. Gadamer, too, seems willing to "pass over in silence" elements of reality that cannot be said, and so cannot be understood. I will not pursue this connection here, but it is suggestive of interesting affinities between two otherwise quite different thinkers.

language. This understanding of language underscores a unique and controversial aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutics: the relationship that Gadamer posits between human beings and history:

> In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live…. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.*[29]

We do not make the history to which we belong any more than we make the language that we speak. Indeed, it is through the language that we speak that *history makes us*. This view of history, and the rehabilitation of tradition and authority that goes along with it, constitute a major point of contention within the human sciences. If we belong to history in this way, if our prejudices play a role in our reality that can rival or even supersede our rational judgments, what prospect can there be for critique of preexisting traditions or oppressive forms of authority? These are precisely the questions that occurred to Jurgen Habermas in his reading of Gadamer's Truth and Method, and they are the questions that will bring us back from the ethers of hermeneutic philosophy to the grounds of the human sciences.

Gadamer in the Context of the Human Sciences

There can be little doubt that there is a kind of clarity to an author's self-presentation in debate and dialogue that is often missing in canonical texts. But there is

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[29] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 276-277, *italics* in the original.

no need to assume that this clarity is the result of the author's *self*-presentation. In a more Gadamerian vein, it seems as though the truth arises from the *dialogue itself*. In that spirit a better grasp of Gadamer can be gleaned from the dialogues he sustained, both with those from whom he drew and with those contemporaries who challenged him. This approach also has the benefit of situating Gadamer in a context apart from the history of hermeneutics—the context of the human sciences.

One of Gadamer's most frequent interlocutors is Jurgen Habermas, and the longstanding debate between the two illustrates how Gadamer's linguistically grounded ontology shapes his approach to social philosophy and the human sciences.[30] On the face of it, Gadamer and Habermas have quite a lot in common. As Sherratt notes, "Habermas

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[30] A full account of this debate is well beyond the range of the current project, and would have to account for considerable modifications to the interlocutors' positions and the changing intellectual climates of the 30+ years of dialogue between the two thinkers. For our purposes I will be focusing on the earliest iteration of the debate, where the terms and stakes of the distinction between hermeneutics and critical theory are established. For more thorough treatments of the Gadamer-Habermas debate, see the relevant works by each author, most essentially Habermas's essays "A review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," in Understanding and Social Inquiry, ed. Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy (Notre Dame University Press, 1977) and "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," in Interpreting Politics, ed. Michael T. Gibbons (New York: New York University Press, 1987) as well as Gadamer's "Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and the Critique of Ideology: Metacritical Comments on *Truth and Method*," in The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985). Commentary on the debate is extensive, and includes Scheibler's Gadamer: Between Heidegger and Habermas, (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2000); Richard Bernstein's Beyond Objectivism and Relativism Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) and "What is the Difference that Makes a Difference: Gadamer, Habermas, and Rorty," PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Assiciation, Vol. 1982, Volume Two: Symposia and Invited Papers (1982), 331-359; Martin Jay, "Should Intellectual History Take a Linguistic Turn? Reflectiond on the Habermas-Gadamer Debate," in Fin-de-Siècle Socialismand other Essays, (New York: Routledge, 1988), 17-36; William Outhwaite, New Philosophies of Social Science: Realism, Hermeneutics and Critical Theory, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); etc.

has many of the same intellectual enemies as Gadamer, notably the intrusion of crude scientific methodologies into the humanities, positivism in particular."[31]   Habermas's familiar critiques of the privileging of instrumental or strategic reasoning in the modern era,[32] for example, seem right in line with the hermeneutic rejection of the positivistic model of human science. Habermas, like Gadamer, objects to the ahistorical, means-oriented approach that positivism embodies and seeks to counter that tendency with an alternative approach to human understanding.

The enemy of my enemy is not my friend, however, and Gadamer and Habermas's shared antagonism toward positivism masks deep divisions between the two thinkers.[33] The deepest of these divisions find their origins in the dramatically different approaches to reason and rationality embraced by the two thinkers. Habermas is an avowed advocate of the "unfinished project" of the Enlightenment, and embraces the enlightenment emphasis on human (communicative) rationality as a route to overcoming

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[31] Yvonne Sherratt, <u>Continental Philosophy of Social Science: Hermeneutics, Genealogy, Critical Theory</u>, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 95.

[32] See esp. "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'" (1968) and <u>The Theory of Communication Action</u> (1981).

[33] These divisions are theoretical, but also temperamental; given this fact the debate was notable for a remarkable amount of mutual respect and appreciation. In an interview with Riccardo Dottori Gadamer memorably characterizes one aspect of the debate saying "I think the tremendous thing about the experience that I had with Habermas is that our attempt at a conversation has shown us both that we must learn from each other and that the arguments that we brought into the discussion weren't pushed further simply because they came from the other person, but, rather, we gave as good as we got. He was unable to make a political person out of me; I was unable to make a philosophical person out of him—he remained a political thinker." Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Ethics and Politics," in <u>A Century of Philosophy: Hans-Georg Gadamer in Conversation with Riccardo Dottori</u>, trans. Rod Coltman with Sigrid Koepke (New York: Continuum, 2003), 92. Part of my goal in the pages that follow will be to examine precisely the *political* implications of Gadamer's hermeneutics in a way that Gadamer himself would not, and to do so from what Gadamer might consider a *philosophical* perspective.

prejudice and ideology. In this sense Habermas follows Kant in his emphasis on the potential of human rationality. For Gadamer, on the other hand, the legacy of the Enlightenment emphasis on rationality is more mixed. In Gadamer's view the Enlightenment project overemphasizes both the possibility and the desirability of a break from tradition and authority, a break that the Enlightenment claims to accomplish through reason. Ingrid Scheibler summarizes the debate well:

> …the debate remains an exchange between two positions: Habermas's commitment to a project that follows the Enlightenment in its view of tradition and authority as essentially dogmatic forces and that sees rational (emancipatory) reflection to be operative in the *agonistic dissolution* of these forces, and Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy , which seeks to combat the Enlightenment "prejudice" by emphasizing that rational reflection is also at work in a reflective *acknowledgement* of authority and tradition.[34]

The differing views of the legacy of the Enlightenment thus lead to differing views of the value and scope of authority and tradition. The Enlightenment devaluation of tradition and authority against reason—the tendency to eschew the former in preference for the latter—is well-established in political theory, where this rebellion against tradition and authority was part and parcel of the early-modern political project. From this perspective Gadamer's rehabilitation of these concepts may strike us as strange. Nonetheless Gadamer argues that prejudice, authority and tradition play key roles in human understanding, and thus they figures prominently in his hermeneutics.

Gadamer's rehabilitation of the concept of prejudice begins as an examination of the Enlightenment prejudice *against* prejudice. The Enlightenment view of prejudice

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[34] Ingrid Scheibler, Gadamer: Between Heidegger and Habermas (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 4, *italics* in the original.

emanates from Kant's insistence that "Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another."[35] In this view, prejudice is due either to over hastiness in thought or, more insidiously, to over reliance on the authority of others.[36] Thus an antithesis is established between reason—the fruits of the use of one's own understanding "without the guidance of others"—and unreason or intellectual immaturity, understood as the unthinking acceptance of authority. Understood in this sense, prejudice is a precondition that limits freedom by tying oneself to received tradition—to the authority of the past. The child of the Enlightenment exercises reason by rooting out these prejudices (through the use of Kantian abstract reason or the ruthless application of Cartesian universal doubt) and eliminating their foundations in authority and tradition.

The question that Gadamer explores is whether this antithesis between reason and prejudice is tenable. In the course of this exploration Gadamer notes the seemingly obvious fact that there are, in fact, legitimate prejudices. Starting from this fact, he then sets out to discover the *ground of the legitimacy* of prejudices or, in other words, their *authority*. Gadamer observes:

> The Enlightenment's distinction between faith in authority and using one's own reason is, in itself, legitimate. If the prestige of authority displaces one's own judgment, then authority is in fact a source of prejudices. But this does not preclude its being a source of truth, and that is what the Enlightenment failed to see when it denigrated all authority.[37]

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[35] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'"

[36] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 271.

[37] Ibid, 279.

In this reading, reason and prejudice are not opposed. Reason, insofar as it seeks truth, loses a powerful ally by denigrating prejudice based on authority. The essence of authority for Gadamer is an acknowledgement of knowledge. Authority properly understood is a property that is earned over time and through examination, not the unexamined root of misunderstanding and obfuscation. Authority "has nothing to do with blind obedience to commands. Indeed, authority has to do not with obedience, but rather with knowledge."[38] For Gadamer true authority need not be authoritarian. The distinction rests on the availableness of true authority to examination. An appeal to authority is not a closing off of dialogue by fiat, but rather an invitation to examine the grounds of knowledge.

For Gadamer, authority in this sense is well illustrated by the authority that adheres to that which has been sanctioned by tradition. Tradition does not have authority simply because it designates "what has always been the case." Rather, tradition as "what has always been the case" earns its authority through the continual examination and dialogue that has characterized its creation and endurance. "Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change."[39] In fact, absent the authority of tradition and the productive prejudice that is supported by this tradition, understanding of any kind is compromised. Prejudice is not an *obstacle to* understanding, but rather a *precondition of* understanding. Thinking historically, tradition and prejudice constitute a starting point of the hermeneutic circle

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[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid, 281.

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discussed above. We understand from the perspective of one situated within a tradition, constituted by an entire complex of prejudices (pre-judgments) and fore-understandings. It is only from this situated perspective that we can understand at all, and it is this situated perspective that stands to be "affirmed, embraced, cultivated"—to be preserved or altered in keeping with an ever-expanding understanding.

It is this thesis of Gadamer's—the insistence that tradition informs all understanding and that prejudice is in this sense inescapable—that ultimately brings him into conflict with Habermas. Arguing from a perspective inspired by the Enlightenment rationalism that Gadamer questions, Habermas challenges the hermeneutic claim to universality. According to Habermas the hermeneutic claim to universality depends on this role of tradition as informing all understanding, but there are aspects of our reliance on tradition that must be challenged. In particular, in his review of Gadamer's <u>Truth and Method</u> and later in his essay "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," Habermas argues that understanding rooted in tradition fails to penetrate the workings of power in language. This shortcoming is particularly pronounced in cases of what Habermas calls "systematically distorted communication." Habermas argues that "the dogmatism of the context of tradition is subject not only to the objectivity of language in general but also to the repressivity of forces which deform the intersubjectivity of agreement as such and which systematically distort everyday communication."[40] Habermas's use of the terms "dogmatism," "repressivity," "deform," and "distort" make it clear that in his view tradition can have a negative or constraining effect on our understanding. This critique

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[40] Habermas. "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," in <u>Interpreting Politics</u>, ed. Michael T. Gibbons (New York: New York University Press, 1987), 197.

draws our attention to the myriad ways in which the tradition we inhabit, the very language we use, bears with it power structures that can be repressive, damaging, or limiting to our understanding.

Of course this observation begs the question of how, exactly, one can expect to uncover or reveal these hidden workings of power in tradition and language, and Habermas has an answer.

> It is only the formal anticipation of an idealized dialogue, as the form of life to be realized in the future, which guarantees the ultimate supporting and contra-factual agreement that already unites us; in relation to it we can criticize every factual agreement, should it be a false one, as false consciousness.[41]

Here Habermas's debt to the Enlightenment is clear: he appeals to an idealized speech situation—idealized in the sense that it can be constructed through reason alone, this is what makes the idealized speech situation "formal"—and uses this situation as a benchmark to evaluate all actually existing communication. Through this idealization Habermas seeks to circumvent the distortion inherent in tradition—the distortion that characterizes *ideology*. The allusion to "false consciousness" makes it clear that Habermas has in mind the psychoanalytic model. The patient in analysis is incapable of escaping his or her own psychosis, and so depends on the analyst to provide an external measure of evaluation. The analyst is capable of perceiving distortions in the inner life of the patient that are opaque to the patient him- or herself. Habermas's idealized speech situation plays this analytical role—society, in the thrall of the systematically distorted communication that characterizes language and tradition where power operates

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[41] Ibid, 198.

unexamined, is incapable of generating rational standards of evaluation *internally*, and so must turn to idealized speech situations for assistance. In short, Habermas argues that the universality of hermeneutics based on tradition runs into difficulty when that tradition is itself infected by systematically distorted communication (ideology). In such instances an appeal to an external, perfectly rational ideal must be made. This is the basis of Habermas's critique of ideology.

But I argue that this appeal is problematic. For one, even if the analyst can play the part of the external observer to a patient's neuroses,[42] it is far from clear that an analogous role can be played by an appeal to ideal speech situations in the case of society. To put it rather bluntly, who is society's shrink? If we take Gadamer's hermeneutics and linguistic ontology seriously, then it becomes clear that even conceptualizations of idealized speech situations can emerge only from within the language of a given tradition—there is no escaping the universality of hermeneutics. Habermas, for his part, acknowledges this fact: "it is, of course, true that criticism is always tied to the context of tradition which it reflects…. There is no validation of depth-hermeneutical interpretation outside of the self-reflection of all participants that is successfully achieved in dialogue."[43] Here Habermas notes that there is no "outside" of tradition—critique is always situated and is in this sense always internal to language and dependent on the hermeneutical experience.

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[42] Habermas seems to dramatically underestimate the entanglement of the analyst in even the most ideal analytical situations.

[43] Ibid, 201.

But where does this leave us with regard to the investigation and understanding of human society? What can the human sciences learn from this exchange? Paul Ricoeur's treatment of the debate has proven to be popular in part because it refuses to choose between the two sides, preferring to see Gadamer's hermeneutics and Habermas's critique of ideology as two moments in the same process. The first, reconstructive moment is provided by Gadamer's hermeneutics and coincides with the recollection of tradition. The second, critical moment is provided by Habermas's critique of ideology and coincides with the anticipation of freedom from domination. Ricoeur argues "nothing is more deceptive than the alleged antinomy between an ontology of prior understanding and an eschatology of freedom….In theological terms, eschatology is nothing without the recitation of acts of deliverance from the past."[44] I am not interested in recreating this antinomy, and I find Ricoeur's attempt at a conciliatory philosophy that embraces both sides of the debate to be both subtle and admirable. Nonetheless I wonder whether something is lost in this conciliatory approach. In particular, I want to push the question of whether the turn to ideology critique—the eschatological moment that Ricoeur speaks of—is both appropriate and necessary.

To the question of appropriateness allow me to reprise the crucial element of Gadamer's hermeneutics—its universality. Even if we accept the second "moment" of critique, we would be underestimating the power of Gadamer's hermeneutical insights if we were to take this moment as separable from or independent of the first, reconstructive

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[44] Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and Critique of Ideology," in <u>Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences</u>, ed. John B. Thompson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 100.

moment. Indeed, I argue that to think of Gadamer's hermeneutics as preeminently reconstructive is to overlook the transformative potential of the dialogic relationship to tradition that is implied in these hermeneutics. Reconstruction, critique, anticipation, all are elements of an essentially hermeneutical orientation to the world that is essentially inescapable. There is no *outside* from whence to evaluate society, tradition. *Being that can be understood is language* and the language we speak is in turn the language that speaks us—we *are* in language, and this language is borne by tradition.

To the question of necessity I offer the following chapters. One of the greatest limitations of Habermas's critique and even of Ricoeur's reading of the debate is the tendency to read the hermeneutics of tradition as monological. In this reading tradition speaks through us. But Gadamer's hermeneutics are essentially dialogical, and it is this aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutics that is too often overlooked in treatments of Gadamer within the human sciences. I will argue that there is in fact no need to look outside of Gadamer's hermeneutics in order to find resources for critical engagement in the fields of the human sciences. Instead, by developing the dialogical aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics we can uncover an understanding of tradition that is both open to and dependent on interpretation.

This point is well illustrated by Gadamer's theory of the fusion of horizons. If we conceptualize one's horizon as it relates to human understanding as the range of what is understandable from one's own historical position, it becomes clear that one of the tasks of human understanding is the expansion of this horizon to encompass ever greater range. Further examination makes it clear that one's horizon is both conditioned by tradition and

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open to constant revision. For Gadamer, the horizon of the present and the historical horizons of tradition are not isolated, but rather are intimately related. This is what Gadamer calls the fusion of horizons:

> Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.*[45]

The hermeneutical process involved in the relationship of the present with tradition involves neither the subordination of the horizon of the present to that of the past, nor the trumping of historical horizons with the horizon of the present. Rather, understanding emerges in the fusion of these horizons as the two are brought together in dialogue.

Gadamer notes "it must be emphasized that language has its true being only in dialogue, in *coming to an understanding*."[46] "Reaching an understanding in language places a subject matter before those communicating like a disputed object set between them. Thus the world is the common ground, trodden by none and recognized by all, uniting all who talk to one another."[47] In understanding how this might be the case it would be well to recall the hermeneutical *subtilitas* of application. Above application was discussed as the element of hermeneutical experience that points to the implication of the interpreter with that which is to be interpreted. In the case of tradition and the fusion of horizons the nature of application becomes clear. Application in this case refers

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[45] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 306, *italics* in original.
[46] Ibid, 446, *italics* in original.
[47] Ibid.

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to the sense in which any act of understanding involves just such a fusion, where tradition is taken up and affirmed, embraced, cultivated—preserved in such a way as to be meaningful in our own enlarged horizon.

But this relation to the past is not the only aspect of application; Gadamer's own texts point the way toward a different and largely unexamined side of application. This new facet begins to emerge in Gadamer's discussions of the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*. In <u>Truth and Method</u> Gadamer draws a parallel between application and *phronesis* as a way to clarify the role of application in mediating the relationship between the universal and the particular. Gadamer notes that if the hermeneutical problem involves taking up one and the same tradition time and again, but understood in different ways, then something like the relationship between the universal (tradition) and the particular (the contemporary context) is implicated.[48] Gadamer turns to Aristotle's ethics and the concept of *phronesis* or practical wisdom in particular for help in illustrating this dynamic. But Gadamer's use of *phronesis* may illustrate more than it intends. Beyond serving as an example of how application works in the interpretation of tradition and historical texts, I will argue that Gadamer's appropriation of *phronesis* in <u>Truth and Method</u> and elsewhere points the way to a revitalized vision of the human sciences that brings elements of Gadamer's hermeneutics to bear on the traditional political theoretical domain of *phronesis*. This point of intersection between application and *phronesis* is productive for imagining a human science that is both critical and traditional, and that takes seriously the *human* aspects of the human sciences. Toward this end I will turn

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[48] Ibid, 312.

next to the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, and to Gadamer's appropriation of this concept.

Phronesis and Application in Gadamer's Hermeneutics: From Illustration to Illumination

In the previous chapter, we elaborated on Gadamer's unique approach to hermeneutic theory, noting how the tripartite division of early hermeneutics into *subtilitas intelligendi* (literally the talent of intellection or understanding: the realm of the self-evident, that which needs no explanation), *subtilitas explicandi* (the talent of explication or interpretation: the occasional work of making transparent the meaning of a text that is obscure) and *subtilitas applicandi* (the talent of applying or application: taking the insights of a text and making them do work for us) is really no division at all.[1] We then went on to analyze how this unification of hermeneutics succeeded not only in expanding the purview of hermeneutics beyond the occasional work of making sense of a difficult text, but served to effectively universalize the hermeneutic situation by showing how every act of human understanding involves both interpretation *and* the application of understanding to the world we inhabit. The third talent, *subtilitas applicandi*, now understood as an element of all understanding, remains somewhat obscure. Gadamer makes it clear that he does not mean "application" in the colloquial sense of consciously applying a piece of information objectively obtained. This difference is part of what

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[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 307. It is worth commenting here that Gadamer takes the following discussion as further fodder for his argument that understanding is not about the explicit application of a method, but is instead a matter of comportment: "It is telling that all three are called subtilitas—i.e., they are considered less as methods that we have at our disposal than as talents requiring a particular finesse of mind."

distinguishes Gadamer's universalized hermeneutics from Dilthey's more methodologically oriented approach. Nonetheless, the precise contours of "application" need further specification.

In this chapter I seek to further specify these contours by following a line of argument that Gadamer himself suggests. In turning to the Aristotelian intellectual virtue of *phronesis* or practical wisdom, Gadamer finds a concept that parallels his own understanding of application. In particular, Gadamer focuses on the distinction between *phronesis* and *techne*—the arts and crafts, technical wisdom—in his analogous treatment of *phronesis* and application. The ways in which practical wisdom and technical wisdom differ illustrate important elements of *phronesis* that Gadamer argues are shared with hermeneutic application. This fact alone is sufficient to recommend further study of Gadamer's reading of Aristotle. If, by understanding the difference between *techne* and *phronesis*, we can come to a better understanding of Gadamer's concept of application, then a study of these intellectual virtues as understood by Gadamer is bound to be fruitful.

Beyond this connection between *phronesis* and application, however, a further parallel presents itself. While Gadamer states that the connection between *phronesis* and application is purely analogical, I argue that the parallel goes beyond analogy to suggest a deeper connection between interpretation and ethical understanding. In particular, the vision of application that emerges from the dialogue with *phronesis* bears directly on the practice of the human sciences, and points the way toward a vision of the human sciences at the nexus of the Aristotelian ethical virtue of practical wisdom and Gadamerian

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hermeneutics.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing Gadamer's turn to Aristotle in his discussion of application, and how this turn is premised on a deep and longstanding engagement with Aristotelian ethical theory on Gadamer's part. I then proceed to draw out three key differences that Gadamer notes between the intellectual virtues of *phronesis* and *techne*, noting in each case how Gadamer sees the difference as illuminating one facet of the concept of hermeneutic application. The aim of this chapter goes beyond a mere reconstruction of Gadamer's argument, however, and so I then proceed to argue that Gadamer's understanding of the sympathetic resonance between *phronesis* and application suggest a more fundamental symmetry between these concepts, a symmetry that is particularly evident when we turn our attention to the human sciences. I conclude by extending Gadamer's argument beyond his own intentions, by showing how each of the parallels between *phronesis* and application suggests a model for the human sciences—a model that embraces *practical* over *technical* wisdom in a manner that contrasts strongly with contemporary understandings of the practice of the human sciences. This vision of the human sciences may prove productive both in illuminating the fraught self-understanding of the human sciences and in providing a framework for a more *humane* human science.

The Turn to Aristotle

In search of a ready parallel with which to illustrate the particular role of application in this configuration, and its extension beyond the interpretation of texts,

Gadamer turns to Aristotle and the moral theory developed in the latter's *Nicomachean Ethics*. This, in light of Gadamer's philosophical interests, is not surprising. As Grondin notes in his 2003 biography of Gadamer, "From the beginning, the *Nicomachean Ethics* had occupied Gadamer's thoughts, and it continued to do so to the end."[2] In fact Gadamer referred to his 1928 *Habilitation* thesis—"Interpretations of Plato's Philebus"—as an "Aristotle book that never got off the ground".[3] Nevertheless, by the time Truth and Method was published Gadamer's thinking on Aristotle had clearly taken flight, particularly his interpretation—heavily influenced by Heidegger's—of *phronesis* or "practical wisdom".

Gadamer turns to Aristotle and *phronesis* to throw light on application in part because of the unique role it plays among the intellectual virtues in the Nicomachean Ethics. Gadamer remarks, "If the heart of the hermeneutical problem is that one and the same tradition must time and again be understood in a different way, the problem, logically speaking, concerns the relationship between the universal and the particular."[4]

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[2] Jean Grondin, Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography, Translated by J. Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 135.

[3] Ibid: 136. The fact that Gadamer can so readily describe a project concerned with the *Philebus* as an "Aristotle book" speaks to his unique reading of the affinities between Plato and Aristotle. These affinities are taken up most explicitly in his The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy, and are discussed at length in Chapter IV.

[4] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 312. The tradition to be understood that Gadamer refers to in this passage should be understood broadly as including not only the text itself but also the history of interpretations that attaches to a text throughout the years and which, as a whole, Gadamer will call the "history of effect" (Ibid: 300ff). As Gadamer writes, "…in all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work" (Ibid: 301).

This difficulty—the need to continually re-understand a tradition that pre-exists us as individual subjects, but which is still constitutive of us as individuals and is thus instantiated in our every action—is mirrored in Aristotle's thinking on the relationship between knowledge and ethical action that characterizes *phronesis*. Further, *phronesis* as "practical wisdom" is an ongoing process that necessarily implicates the individual who practices it. Thus by examining *phronesis* in more detail, we can gain further perspective on the universal character of Gadamer's hermeneutical view of the understanding/interpretation/application triad.[5]

Aristotle understands *phronesis* to be an intellectual virtue, the practice of which is equated with living a good, virtuous life. The singular feature of *phronesis*, and the quality that draws Gadamer's attention, is that it cannot be equated simply with a kind of knowledge alone. This distinguishes *phronesis* from most of the other intellectual virtues, and constitutes its link to moral virtues like courage and temperance. While it does require knowledge, Aristotle notes that it is knowledge of a particular kind, and it is supplanted in practice. "[Aristotle] is concerned with reason and with knowledge, not detached from a being that is becoming, but determined by it and determinative of it."[6] Moral knowledge as embodied in *phronesis* is not "pure", but rather practical knowledge.

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[5] The scholarship on the concept of phronesis is vast, and our engagement with it here beyond Gadamer's reading will be minimal. See for instance Sarah Broadie, <u>Ethics with Aristotle</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); C.D.C. Reeve, <u>Practices of Reason: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); W.F.R. Hardie, <u>Aristotle's Ethical Theory</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). This literature is be discussed in some detail in subsequent chapters.

[6] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 312.

It is inseparable from man's nature in practice.

Additionally *phronesis* unlike, for example, *episteme*, deals with things that are variable. According to Aristotle, *episteme* (demonstrative science) deduces necessary conclusions from first principles, that is to say, it deals with invariables.[7] Mathematics stood (and, to a certain extent, stands still) as the preeminent example of this type of demonstrative science—the conclusions of mathematics are, in this understanding, literally indisputable. They could not be otherwise. The practical ethical concerns that make up the purview of *phronesis* do not share this characteristic. Ethical decision is variable—a given situation can give rise to multiple courses of action, and the *phronemos* is required to make a choice that is *not* necessitated by *logos*, which *cannot* be reached through deductive reasoning. This characteristic of *phronesis* seems to relate quite readily to the variability that characterizes the work of textual and historical interpretation—one can posit a better or worse interpretation, just as one can make a better or worse ethical choice, but the better interpretation is not *necessitated* by deductions from first principles any more than the correct ethical action can be deduced from simple moral precepts. Moreover, the better interpretation, like the correct ethical action, is not independent of the context of the actor. Just as the *phronemos* must be sensitive to the particularities of the decision that confronts her, so to must the interpreter be sensitive to the history of interpretation that precedes her.

These same features that suggest *phronesis* as a parallel to Gadamer's understanding of application—it's being a form of knowledge that is instantiated in

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[7] <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> VI, 3. What follows is my interpretation of Aristotle's work in this pivotal chapter.

practice, it's nature in dealing with things that could be otherwise—also apply to another intellectual virtue discussed by Aristotle: *techne*—the crafts/technical wisdom. In short, while the distinction between *phronesis* and intellectual virtues like *episteme*, *nous*, and *sophia* appears to be relatively straightforward, the characteristics that separate *phronesis* from the intellectual virtues that comprehend unchanging absolutes seem to link *phronesis* to *techne*, a virtue similarly concerned with variation and choice. The artist and craftsman, like the ethical actor, deal not with the rarified realm of pure *logos*, reason, but rather with the messy and variable world of *praxis* and *poiesis*, acting and making. The question that Gadamer confronts here is whether the ethical action governed by *phronesis* is in fact a kind of knowledge of "how to make oneself." Does the ethical actor create himself in the same way that a craftsman or artist creates a work of art? The nature of the relationship that Gadamer posits between *phronesis* and application turns on the response to this question. By drawing a connection between application and *phronesis*, is Gadamer suggesting that the work of hermeneutics is akin to an art or craft?

Gadamer acknowledges that the case for such a connection between *phronesis* and *techne* is quite strong, both in the works of Greek philosophers and based on the strength of the apparent similarities between moral and artistic action.[8] Parallels between the two virtues go back at least to Socrates who, in his quest for wisdom and knowledge of the good memorably sought, and found, a kind of wisdom in the craftsmen. In the

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[8] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 314.

Apologia Socrates relates his quest to understand the words of the oracle at Delphi confirming that there is no man wiser than Socrates.[9] Socrates' questioning takes him to the doorsteps of "those reputed wise," including "public men," the "poets, the writers of tragedies and dithyrambs and the others," and finally to the craftsmen. Of the three groups it is the craftsmen that Socrates admires most, while acknowledging that their admirable knowledge can lead them to conceit. Seemingly as a result of this admiration and the parallels which give rise to it, Plato has Socrates use examples drawn from the crafts in illustrating the nature of human wisdom throughout his dialogues—perhaps most strikingly in the Republic.

The parallel has a certain appeal. Both the work of the artist or craftsman and the actions of the ethical actor seem to involve applying a kind of knowledge to a particular task. It is tempting to conclude that in the same way as an artist applies a set of learned skills to the execution of a particular work, so too does the ethical individual apply a set of learned moral injunctions to the particular case at hand. Likewise, in both the case of the craftsman and in that of the ethical person, abstract knowledge alone is insufficient to achieve mastery. Both "activities" require practice. In both areas true mastery is acquired practically—we would not expect an art historian or an aesthetic theorist to create a work of art any more than we would expect a religious scholar or moral philosopher to provide a morally irreproachable standard of conduct in their lives as they are lived. To paraphrase the moralist's defense, the signpost shows the way, it does not travel the path itself. Of course history has given us examples of art theorists who have

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[9] 21a-22e. I am relying here on Grube's translation in Plato: Complete Works, Ed. John M. Cooper (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

excelled as artists themselves—da Vinci comes to mind—and perhaps we can suppose that some ethics professors are themselves ethical people, but the point is that the former's talent for artistic expression and the latter's admirable restraint when confronted with a particularly comely or handsome undergraduate are the result not of their theoretical knowledge, but rather of their practice. A parallel between *techne* and *phronesis* asserts itself quite strongly. Gadamer notes that "There is, no doubt, a real analogy between the fully developed moral consciousness and the capacity to make something—i.e., a techne—but they are certainly not the same."[10]

It is precisely the presence of such similarities that makes the work of distinguishing *phronesis* from *techne* fruitful. By prising apart these terms we can come to more clearly specify the contours of *phronesis*, and Gadamer's reasons for connecting this intellectual virtue to his hermeneutic talent of "application." Gadamer has his reasons for preferring *phronesis* to *techne* in his search for an analogue to hermeneutic application, and many his reasons will prove helpful in establishing a sympathetic resonance between hermeneutics, ethics, and the practice of the human sciences. Gadamer states the difference most succinctly in arguing "man is not at his own disposal in the same way that the craftsman's material is at his disposal. Clearly he cannot make himself in the same way that he can make something else."[11] Gadamer elaborates on this point, offering three distinct arguments for the distinction between ethical and technical knowledge, each corresponding to an element in *phronesis* that Gadamer wants to relate

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[10] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 316.
[11] Ibid.

to his own understanding of hermeneutic application. The same points can be extended to the realm of the human sciences, where hermeneutical and ethical concerns meet.

Phronesis **and** *Techne*

The first distinction that Gadamer offers deals with the eminently practical concern of the acquisition of knowledge in each case. Specifically, Gadamer points out, "We learn a techne and can also forget it. But we do not learn moral knowledge, nor can we forget it."[12] On its face this argument seems to contradict both our experience of morality and Aristotle's ethical texts. A common humanist narrative of human development has education in moral knowledge as a centerpiece of childhood experience, and this narrative has a certain plausibility. Whether in the Judeo-Christian form of the Ten Commandments or in more secular humanist guises, the idea of learning and making use of moral knowledge seems to hold. Aristotle himself seems to argue that *phronesis* as an intellectual virtue is teachable. Aristotle writes, "Virtue, then, being two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue [of which *phronesis* is one] in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit."[13] If Gadamer hopes to maintain the point that "we do not learn moral knowledge, nor can we forget it" as it pertains to *phronesis*, he will need to account for these arguments.

Gadamer counters the claim that the moral virtue described by *phronesis* can be both taught and forgotten by arguing that, with the notable exception of children,

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[12] Ibid: 317.
[13] <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> II,1.

individuals are "always already in the situation of having to act" and thus "must already possess and be able to apply moral knowledge."[14] Adults are never not in the situation of having to make moral decisions, and thus while we can argue that humans can refine their moral sense through experience and action; it is an oversimplification to say that we "learn" virtue in this sense. This argument of Gadamer's also connects to Aristotle's seemingly tautological assertion that "we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."[15] The practical wisdom that discerns the morally right course of action in a given case is not concerned with the faithful application of a learned schema to a particular case. It is not akin to an artist's application of a learned technique to an artistic production. Rather it is a wisdom that we always already possess to some degree. Likewise we can never "forget" moral virtue or go "out of practice" in the way that a craftsperson can get a bit "rusty" in their use of technical skill. Moral decision is an ongoing process of human life from which we cannot opt out—the immoral person does not fail to make ethical decisions, rather she chooses poorly.

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[14] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 317. In the special case of children, Gadamer argues, moral decision is replaced by obedience to an elder. This argument finds a parallel in Aristotle's argument in the <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> that the moral virtues ruled in part by *phronesis* are cultivated primarily through the development of habit, not teaching, and that said habits find their most basic expression in the imitation of a model. The theme of imitation is raised by Aristotle again in the <u>Poetics</u> where Aristotle, against Plato, praises the human instinct for imitation as a gift that distinguishes men from animals and that provides a path for learning (<u>Poetics</u> IV, 2-3). The connection between the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* and moral virtues like temperance, courage, pride, etc. is discussed in more detail the following chapter.

[15] <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> II,1.

This point about learning and forgetting relates directly to one of the key elements of hermeneutic application as Gadamer understands it. Gadamer can use this aspect of *phronesis* to illustrate what he means by application in philosophical hermeneutics because according to Gadamer's hermeneutics application to is an ongoing, universal, inescapable process. We do not "apply" tools of hermeneutics to a text or situation in the same way that we apply a tool to a task or an artistic technique in the production of a work of art. Instead application works in a manner analogous to *phronesis*—just as we are always already "applying" moral virtue insofar as we act at all, so too are we always already "applying" hermeneutic insights insofar as we understand at all. To understand is to interpret, and to apply ourselves—our histories and cultural contexts—to the task. We cannot escape these histories and contexts or the prejudices that are their embodiments in our mental lives. These prejudices are best understood not as obstacles to be overcome but rather as *frameworks that enable* our understanding. Attempting to understand without them is akin to trying to act without the guidance of moral virtue. Just as it is the case that the immoral person does not fail to make ethical decisions but rather chooses poorly, so too is it the case the supposedly neutral or prejudice-free interpreter does not act without prejudice, but rather under the sway of prejudices that are poorly understood or not understood at all.[16] This first link between *phronesis* and hermeneutic application is among the strongest—it illustrates that moral and hermeneutic consciousness share important structures, and that moral action and hermeneutic understanding are similarly

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[16] Gadamer's controversial "rehabilitation of prejudice" against the Enlightenment model of abstraction and objectivity is thus best understood as a rehabilitation in the sense of revising our evaluative judgments of prejudice, not as returning prejudice to the realm of human understanding—for Gadamer, prejudice never left.

entwined with all human action.

A second distinction relates to what Gadamer identifies as "a fundamental modification of the conceptual relation between means and end, one that distinguishes moral from technical knowledge."[17] The ends of a technical pursuit are both particular and distinct from the means employed in their realization. The end of a *techne* is particular in the sense that it is narrowly circumscribed in advance of the actions taken to reach that end. A bridge is to be built, or a representation of a particular form is to be realized in marble—these ends are determined and known in advance of the stress testing of girders or the use of the chisel or polishing cloth. Likewise in a *techne* a rather clear distinction can be drawn between these preconceived ends and the means employed to reach them. In short, a distinction between knowledge and experience holds. Knowledge governs the selection of an end in a given *techne* but the ability to realize that end is aided in practice by experience—a developed facility in the selection and use of means. In some technical endeavors the distinction is striking enough as to divide the task into separate spheres—the architect of a building project may not be its foreman. This separation of tasks is less frequently witnessed in the arts, but is evident in an evaluation in the form: "John Singer Sargent was an expert painter, but a mediocre artist" or "Helen Levitt had an eye for composition, but her mastery of photographic technology was wanting." In each case a divide between vision and execution—between ends and means—is noted and emphasized. Even when the knowledge of the end and the

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[17] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 320.

experience with the means are possessed by the same individual, the separation and in some cases disjunction between the two can be seen.

Gadamer argues that this separation is not to be found in the case of *phronesis*. In short, the "end" of practical wisdom consists in nothing other than the "means" of attaining that end—virtue displayed in living well. Just as practical wisdom cannot be learned or forgotten precisely because we are in fact always already practicing it, so too is it the case that the woman who has achieved the "end" of practical wisdom is simply the woman whose ethical life—whose decisions and actions—have been guided by practical wisdom. In this sense it is inappropriate to speak of *phronesis* as itself an end or even as aiming at a particular end. This is likewise illustrated by the relationship between *phronesis* and the moral virtues discussed above. One becomes courageous by performing courageous acts; one "becomes" a *phronemos* by acting with *phronesis*.[18]

The modification of the means/end relationship also characterizes Gadamer's conception of hermeneutic application. With the idea of hermeneutic application Gadamer seeks to disrupt the consideration of hermeneutic application as an end and interpretation as a means toward that end. Interpretation is not simply a skill set that one employs in order to come to an understanding of an otherwise obscure text which is then, in turn, consciously applied to one's own situation. Rather, interpretation, understanding, and application are intertwined. Gadamer notes that "application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but codetermines it

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[18] The subject of means and ends with regard to Aristotle's understanding of *phronesis* is discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.

as a whole from the beginning."[19] Just as the means/end relationship of ethical action and ethical being are inherently intertwined, the relationship between application as Gadamer understands it and interpretation is similarly intertwined.

In making his third distinction between moral and technical knowledge Gadamer draws on the observation that moral decision-making is taken to *matter to* oneself in a manner that is not shared by technical knowledge. Gadamer's evidence for this point links back to Aristotle's description of moral knowledge as knowledge "for oneself" in his ethics.[20] In Gadamer's somewhat elliptical way of putting it, "the self-knowledge of moral reflection has, in fact, a unique relation to itself."[21] Gadamer attempts to elucidate this "unique relation" through recourse to Aristotle's discussion of *sunesis* or "sympathetic understanding" as an analogue to *phronesis* in which the faculty of judgment is applied to a situation external to the judge.[22] The traits of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and sympathetic understanding (*sunesis*) are observed by Aristotle to reside in the same individuals—those who exhibit good moral judgment in their own lives are oft approached by others for counsel. This is *not* due to the supposed objectivity of this individual, but rather because the individual with *sunesis* takes the moral dilemma of an

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[19] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 324.

[20] Nicomachean Ethics, VI, 8, 1141b 33, 1142 a 30; Eudemian Ethics, VIII, 2, 1246 b 36 [cited in Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 316].

[21] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 322.

[22] Nicomachean Ethics, VI, 11.

other as something that matters to herself as someone who is likewise pursuing the good. This is not the cool calculus of the technician seeking an efficient outcome, but rather the judgment of one who is truly willing and able to put herself in an other's position. Likewise with *phronesis*, the *phronemos* does not approach a moral dilemma "objectively" or from the perspective of one removed from and above the decision to be made. Instead the moral decision at hand is taken to matter to the *phronemos*. The application of something like *techne* to moral decision-making results in Aristotle's *deinos* or "clever man." Describing the clever man, Gadamer follows Aristotle in observing that

> …the deinos is "capable of anything"; he uses his skills to any purpose and is without inhibition. He is aneu arêtes.[23] And it is more than accidental that such a person is given a name that also means "terrible." Nothing is so terrible, so uncanny, so appalling, as the exercise of brilliant talents for evil."[24]

The archetype of the *deinos* is Plato and Aristotle is the brilliant, beautiful, and ultimately evil Alcibiades—blessed with brilliance but without *phronesis*, he was guided by expediency and self-interest, not the good.

This last distinction bears most directly on Gadamer's understanding of the unique status of hermeneutic application, in particular the relation between the subject and object of knowledge that holds there. The idea of moral decision always mattering to the *phronemos* is mirrored here in the fact that hermeneutic understanding as presented by Gadamer, always already applies to the one doing the understanding. Understanding

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[23] Literally, "without virtue."

[24] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u>, Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 324.

is not best conceived in terms of the kind of remove that characterizes the technician's relation to his work, but rather in terms of the entanglement that characterizes the *sunesis* and *phronesis* of the truly wise man. Anything that we can be said to understand must matter to us, both in the sense that we choose to take up and investigate a text for a particular reason, with a motivation in mind, and because understanding is itself impossible without a deeper grounding in the pre-judgments and tradition that informs both the text at hand and the interpreter. This *mattering to* need not be understood in an active, conscious sense, but can rather be understood in light of the historical and cognitive prerequisites necessary to make any act of understanding possible.

Gadamer's summary of the lessons to be learned from *phronesis* in illuminating hermeneutic application is worth quoting at length:

> The interpreter dealing with a traditionary text tries to apply it to himself. But this does not mean that the text is given for him as something universal, that he first understands it per se, and then afterward uses it for particular applications. Rather, the interpreter seeks no more than to understand this universal, the text—i.e., to understand what it says, what constitutes the text's meaning and significance. In order to understand that, he must not try to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate the text to this situation if he wants to understand at all.[25]

We should take Gadamer's "must" in the final sentence to be a statement of fact, not an exhortation. He is not arguing that this is what we *ought* to do; he is arguing that this is in fact what we do whenever we understand. Application in this specific Gadamerian sense mirrors Aristotelian *phronesis* in that 1) it is not learned nor can it be forgotten, but is rather always already practiced; 2) it encompasses elements of both means and ends in

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[25] Ibid.

such a way as to complicate the relationship between the two; and 3) it requires sympathetic understanding insofar as the object of knowledge is taken as always already mattering to the subject. None of these features is shared by *techne* as Gadamer presents it.

It is worth noting that on the question of the relationship between *techne* and *phronesis* in Truth and Method Gadamer is guilty of a bit of oversimplification. *Techne*, at least as it was understood in the Greek world of Aristotle, is not as mechanistic as Gadamer presents it in Truth and Method. Following his teacher Heidegger,[26] Gadamer sees *techne* understood as technical rationality in terms of its considerable expansion in the modern era. Gadamer touches on this theme in Reason in the Age of Science and The Enigma of Health. In the latter text Gadamer notes,

> Science, obviously, has become today the primary productive factor of the human economy….No longer is it limited to the premodern implications of *techne*, namely to filling out the possibilities of further development left open by nature (Aristotle). It has moved upward to the level of an artificial counterpart to reality.[27]

It is this enlarged vision of *techne* that Gadamer seems to have in his sights in aligning application with *phronesis* in contrast to *techne*. Aristotle's *techne*, as a kind of fulfillment and development of natures design, is still essentially teleological—it aims at a good and partaking of this activity constitutes a kind of striving toward that end. In his contrast between *phronesis* and *techne* Gadamer seems to suggest that the modern

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[26] See especially Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, Translated by William Lovitt (San Francisco: Harper Perennial, 1982).

[27] Hans-Georg Gadamer, The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996): 6.

expansion of technological rationality does not share this characteristic and that this is perhaps the strongest reason for rejecting technical rationality as an analogue for hermeneutic application. This suggestion makes the examination of the precise nature of the relationship that Gadamer establishes between application and *phronesis* all the more pressing, particularly as it relates to this Aristotelian notion of striving (*orexis*).

…the same task of application…

In both the <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> and the <u>Eudemian Ethics</u> Aristotle shows that "the basis of moral knowledge in man is *orexis*, striving, and its development into a fixed demeanor (*hexis*). The very name 'ethics' indicates that Aristotle bases *arête* on practice and 'ethos'."[28] This understanding of moral knowledge as a kind of striving, and the cultivation of this striving into a "fixed demeanor" is well illustrated by Aristotle's famous example of the archer. In introducing his Ethics, Aristotle says of the good, "Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right?"[29] We learn later in the text that this aiming for a mark—this striving— is continuous, and perhaps better described as a sustained state of adjusting, correcting our aim in accordance with context and with the predispositions of the individual "archer".[30] As the shafts fly, as the moral

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[28] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 312.

[29] <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> I, 2.

[30] <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> II, 6-9. These pages also include the similar example of the respective nutritional requirements of the average person and of the wrestler Milo.

individual acts, adjustments are made *in media res*. Over time, this state of adjustment becomes a "fixed demeanor". In his interpretation of Aristotle Gadamer is not indicating that, in this fixing, the work of *phronesis* stops—that the arrow is fired and hits the mark. Rather, our moral archer continues firing arrow upon arrow, always striving, having internalized aiming to the point that it has become his demeanor, his way of being. This is the heart of the parallel between *phronesis* and application. As with our understanding of texts, our understanding of the human condition is inseparable from both our ongoing interpretations and our "applications", understood here as our way of being in the world.

In this way Gadamer uses Aristotle's *phronesis* to illustrate the sense of application as it is at work in hermeneutics. Gadamer is clear, though, that this argument is intended merely as an illustration: "…hermeneutical consciousness is involved neither with technical nor moral knowledge, but these two types of knowledge still include the same task of application that we have recognized as the central problem of hermeneutics."[31] We may accept Gadamer's reading on this point and still wish to press him further. I will argue in this and the coming chapters that Gadamer's reading of Aristotle is more than an example of a rehabilitated vision of hermeneutics; it is also an exemplar which, when worked through, can point the way to a more appropriate understanding of the social world generally.

As discussed above, Gadamer's own inclination is to relegate his discussion of

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The point being that the good (the "mean") is relative to the individual, not a fixed universal.

[31] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 315.

phronesis in <u>Truth and Method</u> to the status of illustrative example. *Phronesis* is *like* the hermeneutics of the text insofar as neither is governed by the kind of strict subject/object division that characterizes more "scientific" approaches to understanding, etc. This, however, is as far as Gadamer wants the parallel to go. *Phronesis* is a matter of ethical action; hermeneutics is a principle of interpretation. To attempt to extend the parallel further risks treating moral beings (the purview of *phronesis*) as texts, a move that Gadamer is clearly not comfortable making.

And so interpreters of Gadamer have followed his lead. To isolate one example, thinkers who work at the intersection of philosophy and social theory are under a tremendous debt to Richard J. Bernstein. He is among the very few thinkers who have systematically analyzed Gadamer's substantial debt to Aristotle, and who have simultaneously grappled with the question of what a human science that takes practical wisdom as a mode of rationality seriously.[32] But Bernstein's own approach, informed not only by Gadamer, but also Kuhn, Winch, Rorty, Arendt, and Habermas, restricts itself to identifying and supporting a general trend in social philosophy toward a more humanistic understanding of the social world. I believe that Niels Ole Bernsen's modest critique of Bernstein (or, perhaps, of "Bernstein-ism") is accurate in insisting that the philosophy that Bernstein ultimately embraces is "much more like traditional philosophy than claimed by contemporary 'anarchists,' 'irrationalists,' 'deconstructivists,' and 'post-

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[32] Bernstein's <u>Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis</u> (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983) is seminal and was crucial in the development of my own understanding of the potential inherent in the intersection between Aristotelian ethics and Gadamerian hermeneutics.

modernists'"[33] though in these more sober years since these various philosophies have lost some of their luster, I am less likely than Bernsen to view this observation as a critique. Nonetheless in the pages that follow I look to make a more pointed argument in the pages to come, an argument that goes beyond Gadamer's own intentions.

It is tempting to restrict myself to a reconstruction of key elements of Gadamer's thought for contemporary social theorists and philosophers of social science. But how *Gadamerian* is it to simply leave the matter at that? Hasn't Gadamer himself warned us of the dangers of reducing the meaning of a text to the intentions of the author? In short, shouldn't we approach Gadamer himself as Gadamerians—sensitive to the fact that meaning is something that evolves through dialogue with the text? Oughtn't our reading of Gadamer be informed by the questions we bring to him—questions that were not his own—in this case questions about the nature of the human sciences? What might be gained by a *Gadamerian approach to the relationship between Gadamer and Aristotle*?

Phronesis, *Techne*, and the Talent of Application in Human Sciences

Gadamer's work in distinguishing *phronesis* from *techne* in his elucidation of hermeneutic application goes a long way towards clarifying the nature of that unique *subtilitas* or talent as it relates to the hermeneutic task of understanding. But this parallel between *phronesis* and application that Gadamer draws is suggestive beyond its merely illustrative intent. If we understand application as universal in the sense that Gadamer establishes, and we take seriously the parallels between application and the practical

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[33] Niels Ole Bernsen, "Review of <u>Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis</u> by Richard J. Bernstein," <u>Nous</u> Vol. 20, No. 4. (1986): 574-576.

wisdom that Gadamer establishes in his treatment of *phronesis*, then a further extension of this parallel presents itself in our consideration of the human sciences. I want to argue that the human sciences occupy a point of intersection between Gadamer's hermeneutics of application and Aristotelian *phronesis*, making Gadamer's understanding of the relationship between the two particularly pregnant.

The scientific status of the human sciences—the fact that these constitute a realm of human inquiry where understanding and thus, according to the Gadamerian argument we have traced so far, interpretation and application come into play—establishes these sciences as falling under the purview of hermeneutic analysis. Application is at play in the human sciences, as it is at play universally. Likewise the human aspect of the human sciences—the fact that the "objects" of study in these sciences are human beings and societies that are worthy of and in fact demand consideration in ethical terms—establishes these sciences as appropriately ethical in the Aristotelian sense. The human component of the human sciences will become a fact of particular interest in later chapters of this dissertation.[34] For our purposes in this chapter we will restrict ourselves to investigating how the distinctions that Gadamer draws between *phronesis* and *techne* in elucidating hermeneutic application can be fruitfully extended to the study of the human sciences.

The surface similarity between *phronesis* and *techne* in Aristotle's ethics can be extended to visions of the human sciences. At first examination it may appear as though the practice of the human sciences requires each virtue as much as the other. The

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[34] Cf. Chapter V.

emphasis on methodology in the human sciences suggests a link to the technical wisdom of the artist or craftsman, who must equally set to work in using a particular set of tools to achieve an end. Likewise the fact that the human scientist inevitably relates to her subjects as human beings and not simply as objects suggests a parallel with the practical wisdom of *phronesis*. Both ethical virtues deal not with unchanging absolutes, but rather with the variable—a description that seems to fit the human sciences where culture, history, and individuality seem to lend even the most scientific proceedings a strikingly contingent air. In these and myriad other ways the human sciences seem to draw on both technical and practical knowledge—both individually and in the characteristics that the two virtues share. But a deeper consideration that takes into account Gadamer's work in disentangling the two virtues will show that the bond between *phronesis* and the human sciences is uniquely strong, and that this bond re-emphasizes the role of hermeneutic application in these fields of study.

Learning and Forgetting

Gadamer's reconsideration of hermeneutics in terms of ontology rather than epistemology has been discussed already, and this move of universalizing hermeneutics has proven to be one of the more significant developments in the history of the art of interpretation discussed in Chapters I and II. The first distinction between *phronesis* and *techne* that Gadamer draws in elucidating his concept of hermeneutic application—the fact that *phronesis*, unlike *techne,* cannot be learned or forgotten but instead is always already in play in an individual's relation to the world—can be seen to extend this

ontological move, and to cast some light on the contemporary concern over the methodological preoccupations of the human sciences. Modern mainstream human science, with increasingly sophisticated statistical tools in hand, has embraced a model of its field of study that is broadly *techno*-logical in the sense that the mastery of these statistical methods themselves—the learning and use of this sophisticated "toolbox"—has taken priority.

This method-fetishism risks obscuring the more fundamental relation that we as human beings maintain toward the human, social world—a relation over which the objectifications of method-based social science lays like a veneer. While we can learn and, in turn, forget or set aside our methods of analysis, we do not learn, nor can we forget, this more fundamental relation. As human beings, our first relation to one another and to the social world is not mediated and objectified in the ways demanded by social science. Rather we always already interact with our fellow human beings in a more immediate way. Regardless of the sophistication of our learned methodologies, the use of these methodologies never obviates this more basic relation.

Even if we accept the presence of this more fundamental relation, however, the question of the status of technological methodologies in the human sciences remains unanswered. The proponent of such approaches may respond that yes, such a fundamental relation undoubtedly exists. But it is the job of the social scientist to step back from this relation, to embrace a more objective relation so as to see the workings of social life in stark relief—unclouded by the preconceptions and biases that determine our unlearned and most basic relation to humanity. The appeal of such an approach to the

social sciences is clear, but is it tenable in light of the lessons we can learn from Gadamer's understanding of *phronesis* and application? In this instance we have learned that application is always already at play in any given instance of understanding, just as *phronesis* is not a skill set to be learned, but rather a faculty we always already possess. Combining the insights of Gadamer and Aristotle in our consideration of the human sciences, we arrive at un understanding of human science that not only makes it impossible to set aside our pre-understandings as though they were learned skills, but also makes such a setting-aside appear as undesirable, even unethical.

In other words, it is one thing to argue that it is impossible to escape tradition and prejudice—an argument that Gadamer makes forcefully in his defense of hermeneutic application—it is another, further thing to establish that something necessary and ethically desirable is lost in the attempt to escape these relations. This is the further implication suggested by the parallel between application and *phronesis*, an implication that Gadamer himself does not trace out. The unlearned and unforgettable comportment toward humanity—a comportment that constitutes our most basic understanding of things human—is not only inescapable and necessary to any understanding of humanity, it is also ethically desirable. The learned tools of social scientific methodology cannot and should not be taken to replace this comportment, but can and should only be seen to complement or supplement such a fundamental relation.

Means and Ends

If the fact that both *phronesis* and hermeneutic application can be neither learned nor forgotten suggests a modification of the way we approach the human sciences, then the modification of the means/ends relationship that is apparent in *phronesis* and application raises the prospect of an even more radical rethinking of the human sciences. The concern with the relative priority of means and ends in the human sciences has framed some of the most significant debates in contemporary social scientific practice. First in 1994 and on several occasions thereafter, together and individually, Green and Shapiro have articulated this issue in terms of the question whether social scientific research should be "problem-driven" or "method-driven". A recent discussion of the debate summarizes its terms well:

> Those who advocate "problem-driven" work claim that it is most important to start with a substantive question thrown up in the political world and then seek out appropriate methods to answer it. These scholars contend that only a problem-driven political science is likely to contribute much of practical importance to the broader communities in which we work. Critics charge that the practitioners of this approach still have little if anything to offer that is more rigorous than the best writings of journalists and historians. The first imperative today, they contend, must be to make political science more of a science. Consequently, they argue that, for now, political scientists must focus on developing more rigorous methods, restricting the terrain of study to topics to which these methods can fruitfully be applied.[35]

While this debate borrows certain terms from the long-standing dispute between humanists and naturalists discussed in earlier chapters, the context within which this feud takes place has changed significantly. The problem is construed more in terms of when the methods in question are to be applied, less in terms of which methods are appropriate.

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[35] Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, and Tarek E. Masoud, eds. <u>Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-2.

Proponents of "method-driven" research argue fundamentally for the development of means, choosing our ends in such a way as to emphasize the strengths of these methods. Proponents of "problem-driven" research instead choose to emphasize the desired ends of research conceived in terms of the problems that social scientific research ought to address, then chooses methods/means in keeping with these ends.

The Gadamer/Aristotle nexus suggests that our concern ought not to be the relative *priority* of methods as means and problem solving as an end, but rather the *interrelation* between method and problem-solving. Just as the end of understanding is inextricably intertwined with the means of interpretation; just as the end of being a virtuous individual undeniably entails the means of living a virtuous life; so to the ends and means of the human sciences cannot be pursued independently of one another, or prioritized as though the relation between the two was unidirectional (*either* we prioritize method and only then select our problems *or* we prioritize problem solving and only then select appropriate methods). The attempt to extricate and isolate the two suggests the adoption of a view toward the human sciences that is centered on the means/ends rationale of a *techne*. The human sciences, conceived as both hermeneutic and *phronetic*, cannot become a matter of simply choosing methods *or* problems but rather must conceive of both as intimately related and intertwined.

The task of further elaboration of this point—in particular the fundamental similarity between Aristotle's understanding of means and ends in *phronesis* and the vision of human science that I am proposing—will be taken up and further problematized in the following chapter. For the time being the modification suggested by the adoption

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of a view informed by the *phronesis*/application parallel is clear in outline. While a *techne*-centric approach to the human sciences attempts to choose to prioritize means over ends or vice versa, an approach informed by the sympathetic resonances uncovered in the parallels between Gadamerian hermeneutics and Aristotelian ethics recognizes the intertwined nature of means and ends in attempting to understand things human. Accepting that the human sciences exist at the nexus between a universalized vision of hermeneutics and the ethical concerns of humanity requires such a rethinking of the means/ends relation in the human sciences.

Sympathetic Understanding

Just as the distinction between *phronesis* as involving sympathetic understanding and *techne* as lacking this trait bears most directly on Gadamer's understanding of the unique status of hermeneutic application, so too does it suggest the most radical rethinking of the practice of the human sciences. Hermeneutic application, like *phronesis* is never strictly instrumental. The model of coolly taking up a tool or instrument and using it dispassionately for a particular purpose is as foreign to the task of hermeneutic application as it is to the life of virtue imbued by *phronesis*. Both *involve* the subject in a way that is simply not the case for pursuits that require instead the virtue of *techne*. An artist may see his work as speaking from his self in a way that is intensely personal; likewise an architect may view her work as embodying an aesthetic, social, or even moral purpose that matters to her as a human being. But the work *of* the artist does not make the artist; the portfolio *of* the architect does not encompass who the architect *is*. But the

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practical wisdom of an individual *does* make that individual who she is. Her moral activity *is* her self. In no other sphere can the maxim "may your actions define you" find such literal fulfillment.

As *phronesis* is to action, so too is application to understanding. Understanding without application does, quite simply, not understand. The *sunesis* and *phronesis* of the truly wise man—the characteristics that encompass the sense in which a decision matters to the man—find their parallels in hermeneutic application. Just as moral decision guided by *phronesis* appears to be directed outward at first glance, but soon proves to be nothing short of the self-creation of a moral being, so too is understanding self-evidently directed toward understanding a text, but proves on further inspection to implicate the one doing the understanding. The phenomenon of hermeneutic application draws our attention to this necessarily self-reflexive quality of all understanding.

If that is Gadamer's lesson on the sense of sympathetic understanding in the parallel structure of *phronesis* and application, we begin to see how the same may also be said of the human sciences, where the moral comportment of *phronesis* intersects with the task of understanding. The objects of understanding in the human sciences *matter to* the subjects of understanding in a way that finds no easy analogue in the natural sciences. Even those natural sciences that draw most closely to the human still abstract from those features of humanity that are taken to be uniquely human. As Aristotle notes, man is a political animal, and it is in that aspect that the natural sciences fall silent.

The risk of tautology is great here—it is easy and tempting to fall into a definitional gambit where any science that deals with brute materiality becomes "natural"

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while those sciences that deal with human consciousness, social and political life, and the features of mental life that we choose to identify as peculiarly and exclusively human are deemed "human." Besides committing us to a topology in which the materialist social scientist would be quite at a loss, this move misunderstands the fundamental sense of *mattering to* as it is understood in both Aristotle and Gadamer. In short, "mattering to" is not identified simply with a conscious, deliberate mindfulness, but touches instead on something deeper. The contours of this "mattering to" and its role in the human sciences will be discussed at some length in the fifth chapter. For the time being, it will suffice to say that, adopting a viewpoint informed by the Aristotle/Gadamer nexus, humanity is more than it *thinks* it is, and it is this further aspect of humanity that will help us move toward resolving the question of the status of the human sciences.

Conclusion

A Gadamerian approach to the relationship between Gadamer and Aristotle has taken us well beyond the illustrative use of *phronesis* envisioned by Gadamer, to an appreciation of a more fundamental resonance between *phronesis* and application that can aid us in coming to a fuller understanding of the human sciences. Viewed at the intersection of an Aristotelian ethics and Gadamerian hermeneutics, the human sciences appear in a new light. Viewing the human sciences with this intersection in mind leads us to understand the human sciences in terms of practical rather than technical knowledge, an approach that is as potentially fruitful as it is contrary to contemporary understandings of a technically minded, methodologically oriented human science.

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Earlier chapters have investigated how Gadamer's move of universalizing hermeneutics has proven to be one of the more significant developments in the history of the art of interpretation; we can now see how this move in premised on a prior understanding of *phronesis* as a virtue that is neither learned nor forgotten, but always already practiced. Similarly the other traits that application shares with *phronesis* point the way toward even more interesting modifications of our understanding of the human sciences. The modified means/ends relationship that characterizes both *phronesis* and application can also be extended to the human sciences. An investigation of this relationship, its extension, and the consequences of this extension are examined in more detail in the following chapter. Likewise the sympathetic understanding that characterizes both *phronesis* and application can also be extended to the human sciences. A further study of the contours and effects of such an extension—the quest for a more humane human science—is taken up in the fifth and final chapter. In this way the relationship between Aristotle's ethics and Gadamer's hermeneutics shows itself to be far more than merely illustrative or analogical. Rather, it is a fundamental relation that resonates most strongly in those fields that exist at the intersection of the ethical and the hermeneutic—the human sciences.

<u>The Idea of the Good in the Human Sciences:</u>
<u>Reconsidering *Phronesis*, Theory, and Practice in Aristotle's Ethics</u>

Interest in and the philosophical treatment of the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* or "practical wisdom" has a rich history in contemporary philosophy and political theory. The concept is invoked in a remarkably wide range of contexts—in Hannah Arendt's political theory, in Jurgen Habermas's critical theory, in Alasdair MacIntyre's virtue ethics, in G.H. von Wright's analytic philosophy, in studies of the 18th century Catholic theologian John Henry Newman and in the philosophy of R.G. Collingwood—the list goes on. Lately *phronesis* has drawn the particular attention of thinkers interested in the philosophy of the human sciences, including most notably a study by Bent Flyvbjerg in which the possibility of a *phronetic social science* is broached, and the contours of same are outlined.[1] This diversity of application seems to suggest either that the concept of *phronesis* covers a vast range of theoretical territory or that it can be variously read to encompass whatever philosophy one may like to embrace or attack.

This chapter seeks to further specify Gadamer's contribution to the legacy of Aristotle's *phronesis*—a legacy, I argue, that remains vague in part through the ambivalence that Aristotle himself expresses throughout his ethics. The chapter begins with an outline of the major contours of Aristotle's ethical theory, drawing on both the <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> and the <u>Eudemian Ethics</u> to help situate the arguments of the

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[1] Bent Flyvbjerg, <u>Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again</u>, Translated by Steven Sampson (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

preceding chapter and further advance the arguments begun there. Even a brief consideration of Aristotle's texts uncovers several apparent inconsistencies or ambivalences, particularly in Aristotle's treatment of the intellectual virtue of *phronesis*. The second major division of the essay then proceeds to show how Gadamer's reading of the Aristotelian corpus serves to throw some light on these difficulties. Gadamer's discovery of the intertwined nature of theory and practice in Aristotle's ethics can help us to understand the origins and purposes of Aristotle's treatment of *phronesis*. By offering a compelling interpretation of the concept of *phronesis*, and by reading Aristotle together with (rather than in opposition to) Plato, Gadamer outlines an understanding of *phronesis* that moves beyond the ambivalences that appear to haunt the original texts. In a final section of the chapter, I conclude by thinking through the consequences for this re-reading of *phronesis* for the philosophy and practice of the human sciences arguing that *phronesis*, now understood as encompassing elements of both theory and practice, can serve as a kind of model for the theory and practice of human science. As the preceding chapter served to clarify and expand on the application side of the application/*phronesis* relation, this chapter focuses on the latter element in that pairing. In conclusion I suggest that in this light it seems somewhat redundant to specify or advocate for a specifically *phronetic* human science—all human science *qua* human science is already *phronetic*. Rather, the call should be to attend to how well the practices that are our human sciences reflect or concretize the good that we hope they can accomplish, the end toward which they strive. This reintegration of an idea of "the good" in human science can serve to reorient the human sciences toward their specifically *human* content.

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Aristotle's Ambivalences

We'll begin by sketching in broad strokes the major contours of Aristotle's ethical theory, paying particular attention to the role that reason plays in the life of virtue, the particular role played by the clearly important but ultimately obscure intellectual virtue of *phronesis*, and the troubled legacy of Socrates and Plato as it is carried over into the work of Aristotle. Our primary text in these matters must be Aristotle's <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u>. The <u>Ethics</u> is a difficult text in its obscurity, its unusual organization, and its tendency to repeat with minor variations points of the utmost importance. Gadamer's interpretation of Aristotle's Ethics speaks directly to some of the more maddening gaps and inconsistencies in the work, but for the purposes of this initial sketch we will restrict ourselves to discovering an outline and marking some of these difficulties for further consideration.

Aristotle sets himself a formidable task in the <u>Ethics</u> and its companion work the <u>Politics</u>. The objective of Aristotle's ethics is nothing short of discovering and elaborating upon the end or *telos* of human beings—the good of humanity, and how this end can be secured and vouchsafed within political communities. There are many different kinds of ends, and as many ways to consider something as good. In particular Aristotle distinguishes goods of effectiveness—those goods that are desirable as effective means toward other goods—and goods of excellence—those higher goods that are sought for their own sakes.[2] For Aristotle, following Plato, the best goods are those that are

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[2] 1096b6ff.

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good in and of themselves, not merely those instrumental goods that are sought as means. *Eudaimonia* (happiness or, to fuller effect, human flourishing) is just such a good. But this definition immediately runs into the difficulty that opinions differ as to what *eudaimonia* means in practice.[3] There are those who equate *eudaimonia* with pleasure, honor, wealth, or contemplation exclusively, but Aristotle finds each of these views lacking in some respect. Instead Aristotle finds the human good in "activity of soul exhibiting excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in accordance with the best and most complete."[4] The meaning of this definition is not immediately clear; some unpacking must be done before we move on. In the passages preceding this one, Aristotle makes it clear that the keys to understanding this definition of the human good rest in an understanding of human rationality and virtue.

For Aristotle, the "best and most complete" excellence of the human soul must draw on that faculty of the soul that is unique to human beings, for the function of man lies in that activity in which he alone can participate. If the good of any thing is to carry out its function well, then the good of man must lie in carrying out this unique function, and doing so in the best possible way. Of the candidate functions of the soul, Aristotle rules out the vegetative function—the life of nutrition and growth—as being shared by the lowest forms of life, and so not unique to humanity. Likewise he rules out the life of perception, which is equally shared by the beasts. This leaves the rational function of the soul, both the capacity of the soul for reason, and the related capacity of the soul to listen

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[3] Nicomachean Ethics, 1095a17ff.
[4] 1098a15. All direct quotations draw on Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics, Translated by W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

to reason. But the possession of reason alone is not enough. The "best and most complete excellence" requires not only the *use* of reason, but the *good use* of reason.

Now, reason implies deliberation—weighing options and deciding, determining the good and the best—and the soul deliberates and chooses well insofar as it is guided by virtue. Aristotle states this as a fact rather than defending it as an assertion,[5] but the discussion that follows is taken as adequate demonstration of the truth of this statement. The virtues themselves are of two kinds—one kind corresponding to that part of the soul that listens to reason, and a second kind corresponding to that part of the soul that possesses reason. Herein we find Aristotle's distinction between the moral and the intellectual virtues. The moral virtues (principally justice, courage, temperance, liberality, magnificence, pride, good temper, friendliness, truthfulness, wit, and, to a lesser extent, shame) belong to that part of the soul that listens to reason, and they are developed through habit. The intellectual virtues (*episteme*—demonstrative science, *techne*—the crafts, *phronesis*—practical wisdom, *nous*—intuitive reason, and *sophia*—philosophic wisdom) belong to that part of the soul that possesses reason, and they are acquired through teaching. Aristotle's discussion of the moral virtues—where he unveils his famous doctrine of the mean—is more interesting than illuminating. To say that virtue lies in finding the mean between deficiency and excess does little to tell us how we ought to identify that mean. Aristotle notes that the moral virtues, being acquired through habit, are developed in imitation and in practice, but Aristotle also notes that the mean is something of a moving target. The example of the respective nutritional requirements of

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[5] 1176a30ff.

Milo the wrestler and the average human goes to this point.[6] To say that one ought not to eat too little or too much teaches us little about the best decision to be made in a particular case.

Fortunately, Aristotle gives us a way out of this conundrum. The moral virtues do not subsist on their own. Recall that while the moral virtues belong to that part of the soul that *listens* to reason, the intellectual virtues belong to that part of the soul that *possesses* reason. As noted in the preceding chapter, *Phronesis* or practical wisdom is the intellectual virtue that is specifically linked with moral knowledge. Aristotle notes "Virtue…is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom [*phronesis*] would determine it."[7] So, that Aristotle intends *phronesis* to be connected to the moral virtues seems clear, but beyond the fact of this relationship, the nature of the link is somewhat obscure. The time has come to delve a bit more deeply into this puzzle. Aristotle expends a significant amount of effort expounding on the nature and role of practical wisdom—relating it to political wisdom, differentiating it from philosophical wisdom, linking it to the moral virtues—and this would certainly be a good thing, if only his explanations were better able to avoid contradicting one another.

Among the more maddening obscurities in Aristotle's approach to *phronesis* attends to the relationship between this intellectual virtue and the question of means and ends. Moral activity according to Aristotle has to do with both identifying

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[6] 1106a20ff.
[7] 1006b36-1007a2.

ends to be pursued and discerning the appropriate means to employ in that pursuit. The role of *phronesis* in the life of virtue would be well clarified by some knowledge of its relationship to means and ends. On this point Aristotle identifies *phronesis* to be concerned with deliberating well as to "what sorts of things conduce to the good life in general," that is to say, with knowledge of the means necessary to secure the good life;[8] with truly apprehending the end of deliberation;[9] and, then again, with ensuring the rightness of the means chosen in pursuit of an end that has been properly identified by moral virtue.[10] So, at various points in the text Aristotle indicates that *phronesis* is concerned with means, ends, or both. The clarity of Aristotle's presentation on this important matter of the role of *phronesis* vis-à-vis the moral virtues leaves something to be desired.

A further and related difficulty arises with regard to Aristotle's seeming uncertainty as to how to class *phronesis* among the intellectual virtues. Aristotle makes a preliminary determination in the <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> Book VI, Chapter 1, distinguishing two kinds of intellectual virtue—"one by which we contemplate the kind of thing whose originative causes are invariable, and one by which we contemplate variable things." Aristotle classes *episteme* (demonstrative science), *nous* (intuitive reason), and *sophia* (philosophic wisdom) among the former class of virtue, and classes

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[8] 1140a25-28

[9] 1142b33

[10] 1144a7-9. For an admirable attempt to reconcile these and other accounts of *phronesis* in Aristotle's ethics, see John E. Sisko "Phronesis" in <u>Encyclopedia of Ethics, 2nd Edition</u>, eds. Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker, (Routledge, 2001), 1314-1316. We will see below what sense Gadamer can make of these apparent inconsistencies.

the two intellectual virtues discussed in the preceding chapter—*techne* (the arts and crafts) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom)—among the latter. *Nous* is classed among the invariable because intuitive reason is the intellectual virtue that grasps the unchanging first principles. Likewise *episteme* is classed similarly because demonstrative science deduces the necessary conclusions that may be drawn from these first principles. Finally philosophic wisdom, as the union of *episteme* and *nous*, is also classed among the invariable, contemplative intellectual virtues. On the other hand Aristotle understands *techne* as dealing with variable things because works of art and the products of handicraft are not determined by invariable necessity, but instead could be otherwise. Finally *phronesis* is also considered to be variable as practical wisdom is concerned with choice and deliberation in human virtue. In this preliminary schema Aristotle is compelled to argue that the virtues of contemplation, and *sophia* most of all, are concerned with the highest and most finished forms of knowledge precisely because they deal with invariable truths—the first principles and the truths that reason can deduce from them.

But with respect to *phronesis* Aristotle seems to waver. While practical wisdom is clearly concerned with variable things and thus inferior to contemplation, Aristotle seems somewhat ill at ease with this conclusion. The trouble arises from the fact that virtuous action requires both knowledge of the good and activity in accordance with the good. The problem that Aristotle is confronting here is the difficulty that defines the Socratic/Platonic legacy in ethics—how are we to reconcile the Socratic exhortation to live the life of virtue by acknowledging that wisdom resides in knowing that we do not know with the Platonic insistence that it is precisely knowledge that can ensure virtue by

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freeing us from the tyranny of mere opinion? Can Socratic not-knowing be reconciled with Platonic eidetic knowledge of the good? Aristotle is intimately aware of this apparent contradiction, and he struggles with it mightily.

Aristotle's vacillation on this point is well illustrated by an examination of his treatment of the relationship between contemplation and practice in the <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> on the one hand and the <u>Eudemian Ethics</u> on the other. In the <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> one finds such seemingly unequivocal statements as the following discussion, worth quoting at length:

> From what has been said it is plain, then, that philosophic wisdom is scientific knowledge, combined with intuitive reason, of the things that are highest by nature. This is why we say Anaxagoras, Thales, and men like them have philosophic but not practical wisdom, when we see them as ignorant of what is to their own advantage, and why we say that they know things that are remarkable, admirable, difficult, and divine, but useless; viz. because it is not human goods they seek.
> Practical wisdom on the other hand is concerned with things human and things about which it is possible to deliberate; for we say this is above all the work of the man of practical wisdom, to deliberate well, but no one deliberates about things invariable, or about things which have not an end which is a good that can be brought about by action.[11]

The distinction between philosophical, contemplative wisdom and practical wisdom seems here to be quite complete. The philosophical wisdom of Thales didn't keep him from falling into a well any more than the practical wisdom of Pericles qualifies him to speak of the invariable subjects of philosophy. Philosophical wisdom is literally "useless" in the sense that it has no utility in deliberating as to "things human". Likewise practical wisdom is of no use in philosophy precisely because it is of such use in

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[11] 1141b1ff.

deliberation. "No one deliberates about things invariable"—the subject matter of philosophy—so what use could deliberative wisdom be in this case?

The water is muddied somewhat by Aristotle's treatment of the same issue in the Eudemian Ethics. At several points throughout that text the word *phronesis*—translated in the context of the Nicomachean Ethics as practical wisdom—is used to mean wisdom with no differentiation whatsoever between the theoretical and the practical.[12] In each of these instances Aristotle is comparing three kinds of life that can be said to be good—the life of pleasure, the life of politics, and the life of wisdom. In this context the word that is translated as wisdom is—*phronesis*. C.J. Rowe summarizes the situation nicely:

> …in *EE*…the practical and the theoretical tend to merge into one another; and this is reflected in the close relation envisaged between speculative and practical thinking. But in *EN*, the distinction between the two spheres is complete. Ethics and the theoretical sciences no longer have anything in common, since their subject matters are now established as being totally different in kind.[13]

This difference, a difference that cuts to the very heart of Aristotle's ethical theory, has been explained away in various ways. The most prominent explanation for the difference between the two texts follows an argument by Werner Jaeger. Jaeger argues forcefully that discrepancies between the two texts are easily understood in terms of a developmental view of Aristotle's ethics. In this view the Eudemian Ethics is simply an earlier, less-developed text. In it Aristotle remains somewhat under the sway of Plato's

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[12] E.g. at 1214a32; 1215b2; 1216a11ff.

[13] C.J. Rowe. "The Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics: A Study in the Development of Aristotle's Thought," in Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society, Supplement No. 3, 1971. 72.

thinking—thus the much closer relationship between the theoretical and the practical. After all, one lesson of the Republic seems to be that philosophical wisdom is of the highest import to the very practical concerns of those who would rule. The Nicomachean Ethics, this view continues, exhibit a more mature approach on Aristotle's part, and mark his liberation from the vestiges of Platonism. The Eudemian Ethics hold our interest as a document of Aristotle's intellectual development, Jaeger's argument suggests, but if we are in search of Aristotle's true, mature ethical theory, we should cast our gaze on the Nicomachean Ethics.[14]

Another explanation focuses on the linguistic versatility of a word like *phronesis*. The same kind of versatility can be seen in an English counterpart—wisdom. Surely this same word can be used in myriad contexts, each with a subtly (or not so subtly) different inflection or emphasis. We may say that Solomon exhibited wisdom, or that Socrates possessed that virtue. We may claim that Confucius was uncommonly wise or that Scipio's wisdom was a tribute to Rome. In Aristotle's world, there is nothing inconsistent in saying that both Pericles and Thales exhibited *phronesis*. In this view, Aristotle's ethical theory does not substantially change between the Eudemian Ethics and the Nicomachean Ethics; it is simply a case of his being somewhat more careful terminologically in the Nicomachean Ethics.[15]

These arguments are convincing as far as they go, but they focus almost exclusively on the apparent contradictions between the Eudemian Ethics and the

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[14] See especially Werner Jaeger, Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development, Translated by Richard Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934).

[15] Rowe seems to hold something like this view.

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Nicomachean Ethics. Neither confronts the difficulty of the ambiguity and ambivalence *within* the Nicomachean Ethics. Aristotle touches on the relationship between theoretical and practical knowledge at several points throughout the Nicomachean Ethics. The difficulty is apparent in Aristotle's deferral of the question of the theoretical life in his discussion of the good for man;[16] the relationship between theory and practice is manifest in his discussion/critique of the Platonic "Idea of the Good".[17] His discussion of the relationship between practical wisdom and philosophical wisdom[18] does not seem to line up with his extended discussion of the contemplative life.[19] What are we to make of these apparent inconsistencies?

The difficulty involved in establishing the role of *phronesis* in guiding the moral virtues (the confusion over means and ends) and the difficulty in defining the relationship between practical and theoretical wisdom point to a deep ambivalence in Aristotle's ethical theory. The ambivalence centers on the relationship between the particular and the universal—the appearance of the good in practice and the Idea of the Good in contemplation. Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his discussion of Aristotle's ethics, draws our attention to these tensions, and his interpretation of the causes and consequences of these difficulties points the way to a novel reading of Aristotle that has implications far beyond the arcane world of philological analysis.

Gadamer's Aristotle

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[16] 1095a.
[17] 1096a1ff.
[18] VI. 12
[19] X. 7-8.

Though best known as the author of <u>Truth and Method</u>, a text widely regarded as the most important contribution to hermeneutics of the past century—a combination of an encyclopedic reinterpretation of modern hermeneutics and a bold theoretical apparatus in its own right, as we saw in the last chapter Gadamer engaged extensively with Aristotle's philosophy generally and his ethics particularly in the course of the development of his philosophical hermeneutics. Throughout his philosophical career Gadamer would return repeatedly to Aristotle, mining the philosopher's works for insights into human practice and the work of practical philosophy. It would not be an exaggeration to say that as long as Gadamer was doing philosophy, he was engaging with Aristotle's ethics.

Gadamer makes extensive use of *phronesis* throughout his work. Chapter II discussed how in <u>Truth and Method</u> Gadamer explicitly tied *phronesis* to his own vision of hermeneutics. *Phronesis* for Gadamer resembles the hermeneutics of the text insofar as neither is governed by the kind of strict subject/object division that characterizes more "scientific" approaches to understanding. For our present purposes in this chapter, however, our interest is less in the extent to which Gadamer makes use of Aristotle's ethics and more in the unique interpretation that Gadamer brings to these ethics. In other words, we are concerned with Gadamer's *reading* of Aristotle and the light that this reading can throw on Aristotle's ethics, not with Gadamer's *use* of Aristotle. In <u>Truth and Method</u> Gadamer uses *phronesis* as one example among others of a kind of non-scientific reasoning that is not well described by the positivistic methods of natural science. In his introduction to Gadamer's <u>The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy</u> P. Christopher Smith notes that <u>The Idea of the Good</u> moves beyond this more instrumental

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reading of *phronesis* to instead interrogate *phronesis* for its own sake and on its own terms, isolated from the argument about the natural sciences.[20] By focusing on the interpretation rather than the explicit use of Aristotle's texts, we are in a position to continue the project of taking Gadamer's reading of Aristotle in directions that Gadamer himself did not anticipate.

Gadamer's reading of Aristotle, in particular his reading of *phronesis*, has two aspects that are of special interest to us both in clearing up some of the ambiguities that Aristotle has bequeathed to us, and in moving forward to reconsider the role of *phronesis* in the human sciences. First and most obviously we have the very fact of Gadamer's Heideggerian recovery of *phronesis* as an element of Aristotle's ethics worth considering seriously. This aspect of Gadamer's reading makes it clear why *phronesis* was of particular interest to Gadamer rather than *episteme* or *sophia*, the preferred foci of philosophical treatments of Aristotle's ethics. Gadamer's particular reading of *phronesis* looks to the ambiguities in Aristotle's treatment not as shortcomings, but rather as signals of the unique status of *phronesis*. Second we have the peculiar proximity that Gadamer reads into the relationship between Aristotle and Plato, and how the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* captures an important point of connection between the two thinkers. On this point as well Gadamer eschews more traditional readings, not least of all by rejecting Jaeger's developmental thesis. Where the philosophical tradition tends to oppose the two

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[20] P. Christopher Smith, "Introduction," in Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy</u>, Translated by P. C. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press 1986), viii.

thinkers, Gadamer brings them together by seeking the subject matter that unites them—

the question of the Good.

Focus on Phronesis

Throughout the <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> Aristotle implores us to temper our

expectations for precision in ethical matters. "Our discussion will be adequate if it has as

much clearness as the subject-matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike

in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts."[21] He reiterates the

point in his discussion of the moral virtues, writing,

> …the whole account of matters of conduct must be given in outline and
> not precisely, as we said at the very beginning that the accounts we
> demand must be in accordance with the subject-matter; matters concerned
> with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more
> than matters of health.[22]

This lack of fixity and necessary imprecision lends an ambiguous air to Aristotle's entire

ethics, an ambiguity that introduces the kinds of difficulties we have observed. Nowhere

in the *Ethics* is this ambiguity more manifest than in the treatment of *phronesis*. If we

were to seek a reason why the analytical tradition has preferred Aristotle's treatment of

the more austere virtues of *episteme*, *nous*, and especially *sophia* to the discussion of

phronesis, we need look no further than this inherent *messiness*. In Gadamer's reading,

however, this lack of precision is not a mark of an analytic failure in Aristotle, but rather

illustrates the extent to which the philosopher truly grasps the nature of ethical action.

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[21] 1049b12.
[22] 1103b26ff.

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For Gadamer, following Aristotle, philosophical ethics must not "usurp the place of moral consciousness"—it <u>cannot</u> achieve a precision that would allow for prescriptive judgments in every case. Philosophical ethics can only work in outline—the balance must be filled in by a moral consciousness that is attuned to the situation. In Gadamer's reading the student of Aristotle, through both education and practice, "must himself already have developed a demeanor that he is constantly concerned to preserve in the concrete situations of his life and prove through right behavior."[23] This, then, fills out our understanding of how the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* works in tandem with the moral virtues. A careful balance of education in the intellectual virtues and a cultivation of the habits that define moral virtue constitute the ethical development of the individual. Practical wisdom does not substitute for moral consciousness—the demeanor preserved and proven through right behavior—but helps to provide an outline for moral action.

This perspective on Aristotle's ethics also helps to illuminate the role of *phronesis* in determining means and ends. Gadamer's reading of Aristotle eschews any false dichotomy or imposed choice between the two. *Phronesis* must concern itself with both. Practical wisdom implies both a facility in determining the appropriate means to reaching a given end *and* the careful identification and discrimination of the ends themselves. As was discussed above in Chapter III, Aristotle shows that "the basis of moral knowledge in man is *orexis*, striving, and its development into a fixed demeanor (*hexis*). The very

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[23] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), p.313.

name 'ethics' indicates that Aristotle bases *arête* on practice and 'ethos'."[24] This understanding of moral knowledge as a kind of striving, and the cultivation of this striving into a "fixed demeanor" has been discussed in terms of Aristotle's example of the archer aiming at and loosing arrows toward a target. In introducing his <u>Ethics</u>, Aristotle says of the good, "Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right?"[25] We learn later in the text that this aiming for a mark—what Aristotle likens to a kind of striving—is continuous, and perhaps better described as a state where the archer continually adjusts, correcting his aim in accordance with context and with the predispositions of the individual "archer". As the moral individual acts, just as when the archer fires his arrows one after the other, adjustments are made *in media res*. Over time, this state of perpetual adjustment becomes a "fixed demeanor," a facility. In his interpretation of Aristotle Gadamer is not indicating that, in this fixing, the work of *phronesis* stops—that the arrow is fired and hits the mark. Rather, our moral archer continues firing arrow upon arrow, always striving, having internalized aiming to the point that it has become his fixed demeanor, his way of being. Thus, on the role of *phronesis* in determining means and ends, Gadamer is explicit: "Practical reasonableness is displayed not only in knowing how to find the right means but also in holding to the right ends."[26]

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[24] Ibid, 312.
[25] 1049a20ff.
[26] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy</u>, Translated by P. C. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press 1986), 165. In fact, Gadamer reads Aristotle as specifically condemning the view that practical reason

Gadamer's reinterpretation of *phronesis* is not restricted to concerns about means and ends. Also implicit in Gadamer's Aristotle is a response to the view that ethical action is primarily about discerning and acting on an objective set of rules that are to be applied in particular circumstances.[27] In Gadamer's reading Aristotle "sees *ethos* as differing from *physis* in being a sphere in which the laws of nature do not operate, yet not a sphere of lawlessness but of human institutions and human modes of behavior which are mutable, and like rules only to a limited degree."[28] According to this reading Aristotle's lack of precision in his discussion of *phronesis* is not an artifact of Aristotle's uncertainty or confusion as to the role or nature of this intellectual virtue; rather it is an acknowledgment of the fact that the ethical sphere, unlike the physical world, is not rigidly rule-bound.

So as we have seen, Gadamer is attracted to *phronesis* in part because he sees in this intellectual virtue Aristotle's attempt to reconcile the need implicit in ethical action to balance the requirements of means and ends, and an acknowledgement of the mutual implication of ethical universals and the particular demands of ethical action. In this sense the ambiguity that we sensed in Aristotle is transformed by Gadamer into one of his greatest assets in thinking about ethical matters. Aristotle's refusal to simplify ethical

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applies exclusively to ends. This variety of calculative reason gives rise to a cunning Alcibiades, not a practically wise Pericles.

[27] Admittedly, this aspect of Gadamer's reading has more to do with Gadamer's own philosophical context than it has to do with Aristotle's. Gadamer seems to suggest that the very idea of an ethics based on rigid rules would have struck Aristotle as a crass absurdity. In this sense Gadamer's argument is his own response to contemporary crude neo-Kantianism.

[28] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u>, Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), p.312.

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action into a matter of applying set rules to particular situations is part and parcel of his insistence that "precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions." But Gadamer does more than merely transform an apparent weakness of Aristotle's into a strength. He also works to develop this insight by thinking through its consequences in light of the demands of practical philosophy. In other words, Gadamer sees in Aristotle's treatment of *phronesis* the outlines of a reconciliation between the life of contemplation and the life of practice. In order to better understand how Gadamer works to bridge the gap between contemplation and practice, it will be necessary to see how he bridges an even more impressive gap—that between Plato and Aristotle.

The Idea of the Good (Plato, Meet Aristotle)

If one were to seek out a perfect pictorial representation of the traditional antinomy between Plato and Aristotle one could do far worse than Raphael's fresco "The School of Athens" (1509-1510). The work depicts groups of individuals in classical dress busying themselves with the work of philosophy. The identities of many of the figures are hotly contested, but they are taken to represent the major philosophers (and philosophies) of Athens. The identities of two of the figures, however, are clear. Standing in the fresco's focal point are Plato, carrying his work <u>Timaeus</u>, and a younger (somewhat more fashionably dressed) Aristotle, himself armed with the <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u>. The gestures of the two men are telling, and go to the canonically sanctioned difference between the two. Plato's hand is raised, pointing clearly upward toward the heavens. Aristotle's hand is outstretched, palm down, gesturing toward the ground. And

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so we have represented Plato–the philosopher of the ideal forms, apart from and above ordinary human experience—and Aristotle—the first empirical philosopher of earthly things. Raphael's fresco is a work of art, not a work of philosophy, and yet it beautifully captures an opposition that has become accepted fact over the centuries, and that is arguably traceable to Aristotle himself. Aristotle in several of his most important surviving works appears to criticize Plato for precisely this reason—Aristotle advocates for attention to the world of particulars in opposition to Plato's insistence on the necessity of contemplating the Forms. In attempting to overcome this opposition, Gadamer interrogates the questions that inspired the works of the two philosophers, and finds compelling points of overlap.

Gadamer's first step in overcoming this knee-jerk opposition is to better understand the origins of the antinomy. Among the reasons for the persistence of this opposition are the philosophical lenses that have adopted this view in the furtherance of their own ideological agendas. Our understanding of Plato is powerfully influenced by the lens of neo-Kantian idealism, just as our grasp of Aristotle is colored by the influence of Thomist Catholicism. Likewise, the embrace of a kind of Platonic idealism by the Galilean tradition in the natural sciences in opposition to Aristotle's supposed "crude realism" has reinforced the perception of a fundamental split between the two authors.[29] Matters are not helped by the radically different modes of expression embraced by the two authors. Plato's analogical dialogues make extensive use of irony, hyperbole, and

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[29] Hans-Georg Gadamer, The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy, Translated by P. C. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press 1986), 2.

dramatic contrast in ways that put them at a considerable remove from the more austere remnants of Aristotle's prose.

This poses something of a methodological problem for Gadamer in interpreting the two thinkers, a challenge that Gadamer tackles by approaching the world that informs both thinkers, not necessarily the texts or authors themselves.[30] Gadamer's general approach to texts embraces the idea that the *meaning* of a text is not necessarily determined exclusively by the author's self-understanding of what he was up to in writing. Nor is meaning something that we anachronistically impose on a text from our own point of view. Rather meaning is determined in no small part by the question that a given text sets out to answer, a question that continues to inspire us today. With this view of the text in mind we are faced with an interesting fact: in negotiating the relationship between Plato and Aristotle it may be necessary to allow that the first thinker to misunderstand or at least to mis-state this relationship was…Aristotle.

In the course of his dialogues, Plato describes the relationship that holds between the Ideas and appearances variously as *methexis* (participation), *parousia* (presence), *symploke* (interweaving), *koinonia* (coupling), *mimesis* (imitation), and *mixis* (mixture),[31] settling eventually on *methexis*, or participation. In Gadamer's reading "Plato coins this new word…for the 'participation' of the particular in the universal" in order to bring out "the logical connection of the many to the one."[32] Plato's own treatment of the relationship between the Idea and particulars clearly embraces the idea of some kind of

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[30] Ibid, p.5-6.
[31] Ibid, p.10.
[32] Ibid, p.11.

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relationship between the two, though the nature of that relationship seems to vary. This facet of Plato's argument takes a back seat to Aristotle's oft-repeated critique of Plato, which centers on the idea of *chorismos*—the positing of a *separation* between the Platonic Ideas (which exist for themselves) and the world of appearance. Plato gives to the Ideas a privileged ontological status that Aristotle wants to challenge.

Gadamer is less interested in the ontological status of the Ideas than he is in the relationship between the world of ideas and the world of appearances, and on the question of this relationship he finds some common ground between Aristotle and Plato.

> The common problem, basic to both Plato's and Aristotle's investigations, is how the *logos ousias* (the statement of being, of what a thing is) is possible. For my part, I would assert that the locution *chorismos* [separation] was never intended to call into question that fact that what is encountered in appearances is always to be thought of in reference to what is invariant in it. The complete separation of a world of the ideas from the world of appearances would be a crass absurdity.[33]

The point that Gadamer is drawing out here is that behind the polemical attacks focused on the ontological status of *chorismos* there is an acknowledgement, common to both Plato and Aristotle, that the apparent particulars that are encountered in the phenomenal world are thought of in terms of what they share in common and what makes them distinct. This is especially the case when it comes to "the good." In a somewhat circuitous passage Gadamer comments that "It is still true that the good must be separated out of everything that appears good and seen in distinction from it. But it is in everything and is seen in distinction from everything only because it is in everything and shines forth

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[33] Ibid, p.16.

from it."[34] It is true that we can and must attempt to conceptually identify the common thread that unites everything that we call good in much the same way as we identify a common feature in everything that we describe as "white." But it is important to note that we are only able to identify this good because it exists in the apparent particulars that exist in the phenomenal world. The question of a separation between the idea of the good and good things is, to some extent, beside the point. The "two worlds" are in fact one world, united by *methexis* (participation).

Now in this discussion of the idea of the good we seem to have strayed significantly from our concerns about the Aristotle's ethics and our particular interest in *phronesis*. We are not, however, as far from the intellectual virtues as we may seem. The opposition between the world of ideas and the world of appearances in Plato and Aristotle serves as a kind of cipher for the opposition between contemplation and practice. Contemplation deals with the invariant realm of pure Ideas while practice concerns itself with action in the world of appearance. Thus in interrogating the participation of particulars in Ideas, Gadamer also gives us a way in to better understanding the nature of the relationship between the life of contemplation and the practical life discussed in the Nicomachean Ethics. And on this point, too, Gadamer suggests that Plato and Aristotle are far closer than they may appear at first sight, further challenging traditional understandings of the two thinkers.

As we have seen above, Aristotle finds himself torn in the Nicomachean Ethics between the practical and the contemplative. "Aristotle, the creator of physics and

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[34] Ibid, p.116.

founder of practical philosophy, holds fast to the Socratic heritage in Plato: the good is the practically good. On the other hand, as the creator of physics, Aristotle also fulfills the demand made by Plato's Socrates, that is, that we understand the world starting with the experience of the good." Aristotle is both the practical philosopher concerned with the *anthropinon agathon* (human good), and the natural philosopher concerned with the *hou heneka* (for the sake of).[35] Gadamer argues that Aristotle, in his ethical treatises, finds himself pushed beyond his stated concerns with practical goods to consider the good itself. That is to say, Aristotle is forced to confront the relationship between *theoretical knowledge* of the good and the good *in practice*.[36]

This is a problem, of course, that was familiar to Plato. The entire educative apparatus developed in <u>Republic</u> VII can be read as an attempt to grapple with this precise subject. As their name implies, the philosopher-kings must be equally comfortable in the realms of theoretical knowledge and political practice. As Gadamer notes, "Is the paradox of the philosopher-king not also meant to give us the positive insight that both aiming at the good and knowing reality pertain to the political actions of the true statesman as well as to the true theoretical life?"[37] Both the philosopher (the apogee of the theoretical life) and the politician (the practical man par excellence) must

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[35] Ibid, p.128-9.

[36] We need to be somewhat careful here—the contemporary juxtaposition of "theory" and "practice" tends to follow from the model of technical rationality (what Aristotle called *techne*). In that case the relationship between theory and practice is defined by the correct execution of a theoretical plan in practical reality. It is in this realm that the statement "it may be true in theory, but does not hold in practice" originates. As we will see, such a statement no longer makes sense when we reconsider both theory and practice in Gadamer's Aristotelian framework.

[37] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy</u>, Translated by P. C. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press 1986), 71.

both aim at the highest good *and* know reality. In this light Gadamer reinterprets the famous analogy of the cave not as a fable of the superiority of the contemplative life, but instead as "intended to dispel the illusion that dedication to philosophy and the theoretical life is wholly irreconcilable with the demands of political practice in society and the state."[38] The theoretical life and the practical life are not opposed, they are complementary—in fact they presuppose one another. It is the man of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) who integrates both kinds of knowledge.

In Aristotle too we find the apparent antinomy between the contemplative life and the life of practice. In the final pages of the <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> Aristotle restates an argument that he has made throughout:

> If happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be that of the best thing in us. Whether it be reason or something else that is this element which is thought to be our natural ruler and guide and to take thought of things noble and divine, whether it be itself also divine or only the most divine element in us, the activity of this in accordance with its proper virtue will be perfect happiness. That this activity is contemplative we have already said.[39]

Aristotle notes that in comparison to the best life of contemplation, the life of practical wisdom is a second best.[40] A great deal turns on how we read this "second best." Are we really to believe that Aristotle considers the matter of the best life to come down to a decision between the contemplative and the practical life? Or are we rather to take this decision in the same spirit as the decision that Aristotle offers between democracy and oligarchy in the <u>Politics</u>, that is to say, a decision in which one may be preferable (the

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[38] Ibid, p.75.
[39] 1177a2ff.
[40] 1141a15ff; 1178a5

best of these two choices), but neither is best absolutely (the best of all possible choices). Could it be that the absolutely best life is not to be found in the choice between the contemplative and the practical life, but rather in a life at the intersection of the two—a life that draws elements from each? And if that is the case, what is the relationship between these two elements of the one best life? Is Aristotle's "*second* best" intended as (or can it be read as) an *other* best?

> Gadamer's reading of these passages suggests something along these lines:

> The priority of *theoria* is based on the ontological superiority of its objects, namely, beings that always are. In contrast, the world of *praxis* belongs to that reality or being that can be one way but also be another. Consequently, knowledge of what is to be done in practice must be placed second to *theoria*. Even so, both dispositions of knowing and reason are something supreme. Practical reasonableness, *phronesis*, as well as theoretical reasonableness are 'best-nesses' (*aretai*). That which is highest in human being—which Aristotle likes to call '*nous*' or 'the divine'—is actualized in both of them.[41]

Gadamer's reading puts *theoria* and *phronesis* on somewhat more equal footing. *Theoria* can rightly claim supremacy insofar as its objects are the unchanging beings that always are, but both *theoria* and *phronesis* as uses of human reason are "divine." But Gadamer's reading does far more than reinforce the idea that *theoria* and *phronesis* are akin as intellectual virtues. Gadamer also finds in Aristotle a deeper connection between the theoretical and the practical. Like Plato Aristotle does not imagine that the "philosopher" and the man of practical reason are distinct. In Gadamer's terms, "this situation of the metaphysician who dwells in the perception of the truth is simply not a human

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[41] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy</u>, Translated by P. C. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press 1986), 174-5.

situation—there is no such thing."[42]   Indeed, Aristotle says as much throughout the Nicomachean Ethics by insisting that the excellence of *theoria* is an excellence of the gods, not of men.[43]

But this is not to say the *theoria* and *phronesis* are entirely independent of one another. Just as in Plato the ascent from the cave serves as a kind of preparation for the philosopher-kings, so too are the lives of *theoria* and *phronesis* interdependent. Gadamer argues that "the theoretical and practical processes of reflection in human reason seem in the end to be indissociably intertwined."[44] To see the extent of the intertwining it may pay dividends to return to the idea of the good. Aristotle explicitly rejects as irrelevant for human practice any idea of the good that is characterized by *chorismos* or 'separation' from actually existing good things. Nonetheless, he acknowledges that particular good things may share or participate (*methexis*) in some common thing that allows them to alike be called "good." In each case the practically wise man attempts to steer each deed (*ergon*) toward that which he considers good. Gadamer notes "...the conduct of human life that is guided by practical reason also has the good in it insofar as the good is concretized in the actual doing of it, that is, in giving preference to one thing over another (*prohairesis*)."[45]

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[42] Hans-Georg Gadamer, A Century of Philosophy: Hans-Georg Gadamer in Conversation with Riccardo Dottori, Translated by R. Coltman with S. Koepke (New York: Continuum, 2004), 34.
[43] 1177b14ff.
[44] Hans-Georg Gadamer, The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy, Translated by P. C. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press 1986), 170.
[45] Ibid, p.121.

Here we seem to have arrived at a rather different understanding of *theoria* than that with which we started our inquiry. This is a *theoria* still understood as knowledge, but knowledge not of unchanging universals removed from human experience, but rather knowledge of the good as it is instantiated in human activity. Similarly this is not the understanding of theory that dominates the modern opposition between scientific theory and its practical application. This understanding of *theoria* as a practical wisdom recalls Plato's broader understanding of *phronesis* as something common to both theoretical and practical knowing and that transcends the distinction between them,[46] an understanding of *phronesis* that Gadamer sees carried through in Aristotle's ethics. Gadamer notes that "The definitive juxtaposition of theoretical and practical knowing, and hence of the theoretical and practical virtues of knowing, in no way infringes upon the unity of reason, which governs us in both these directions."[47] Reason as practical reasonableness unites the theoretical and the practical in the unity of the deed (*ergon*), in the discernment of the right thing to do (*to deon*) and the good we project as *hou heneka* (that for the sake of which). This is nothing more than to say with Aristotle that practical wisdom is concerned both with ends and with means—with sighting the target and with finding the appropriate correction to our aim. According to Gadamer's reading of Aristotle, "…in human actions the good we project as *hou heneka* (that for the sake of which) is concretized and defined only by our practical reason—in the *euboulia* (well-advisedness) of *phronesis*."[48]

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[46] Ibid, p.38.
[47] Ibid, p.171.
[48] Ibid, p.177.

It is important to note here that in the unity of the theoretical and the practical that is *phronesis* the good itself as an end or *telos* to be pursued through reason is not abandoned. In my reading Gadamer's Aristotle does not abandon *telos* to the infinitely differentiated realm of human activity. Aristotle's ethics, in its masterful unity of *logos* and *ergon*, presents us with the means to discover and rediscover the good as it relates to human activity; a good that exists neither as an abstract Idea characterized by a separation (*chorismos*) from human life, nor as a provisional end sought in a self-serving manner by the merely clever. The task that *phronesis* recalls us to is a task of discerning authority through justification and dialogue. Gadamer is insistent that knowledge is an ever-present element of the good life. Knowledge is what justifies us in choosing one path over another; in identifying one good as that worth pursuing. "Knowledge of the good is always with us in our practical life. Whenever we choose one thing in preference to another, we believe ourselves capable of justifying our choice, and hence knowledge of the good is always already involved."[49]

The appeal that Gadamer makes to justification, to the fact of accountability in one's moral deliberation, brings to light the extent to which the ethical world of Plato and Aristotle is still very much the world of Socrates. In the justificatory process of dialogue and discussion "we see how close the knowledge of the good sought by Socrates is to Aristotle's *phronesis*."[50] Practical wisdom is not a matter of applying abstract principles of right to practical questions of expediency:

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[49] Ibid, p.57.
[50] Ibid, p.33.

Here, in the question of the good, there is no body of knowledge at ones disposal. Nor can one person defer to the authority of another. One has to ask oneself, and in so doing, one necessarily finds oneself in discussion either with oneself or with others. For the task is to differentiate one thing from another, to give preference for one thing over another.[51]

This approach clarifies both the strengths of *phronesis* and the challenges that face the man of practical wisdom. The ethical actor can find no refuge in doctrine, or in deference to the authority of an other. Gadamer's reading also points us toward an understanding of ethical action that is fundamentally dialogical insofar as it emphasizes the necessity of discussion and justification. So, Aristotle's ethics is not an ethics without absolutes, but it is an ethics where absolutes must be debated and defended, where ultimate goods are brought to bear on questions of deed, and where *phronesis* finds its highest expression in the interaction between *logos* and *ergon*.

Phronetic Human Science?

Several recent studies have suggested that a revived understanding of Aristotelian *phronesis* can serve as a guide to a more reflective understanding of the human sciences.[52] I do not dispute this claim. Nonetheless the preceding discussion should serve to illustrate some of the difficulties that await any attempt to clearly formulate the stakes of an Aristotelian ethics, let alone an approach to human science writ large,

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[51] Ibid, p.41-42.

[52] See esp. Bent Flyvbjerg, <u>Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again,</u> Tranlated by Steven Sampson (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Kelvin Knight, <u>Aristotelian Philosophy: Ethics and Politics From Aristotle to MacIntyre,</u> (Polity Press, 2007); and formatively, Richard J. Bernstein, <u>Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis</u> (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

founded on the idea of *phronesis*. I would like to conclude this paper with some reflections on the nature of the task as viewed through the helpful lens of Gadamer's reading of *phronesis*, pointing in particular at the specifically *ethical* requirements imposed by this concept.

In an essay on Gadamer's approach to ancient philosophy Catherine Zuckert poses the following challenge:

> In his recently published 'Reflections on His Philosophical Journey,' Gadamer explains that he turned to hermeneutics, in general, and the study of ancient philosophy, in particular, in order to find a means of uniting the various sciences in a way that had not proved possible for those who used modern natural science as a model of knowledge. Plato and Aristotle were able to give a unified understanding of the world and the various kinds of knowledge human beings can acquire of it, because they saw both the whole and its parts in terms of ends, purpose, or the 'Good.' Modern natural science explicitly broke with this 'teleological' understanding. How then does Gadamer intend to bring it back within his general 'hermeneutic'? He himself never explicitly says.[53]

I would like to suggest that Zuckert, by tracing out the logic of Gadamer's return to the Greeks, has pointed in the direction of an answer to her own question. Teleology as an insistence on a universal, shared purpose or end for humanity was rejected not only by natural science, but also within the human sciences. But what of the "Good"? Perhaps not as an unchanging universal (as this chapter has shown even Aristotle and Plato seem to reject this understanding of the good), but read more hermeneutically as a dialectical mediation between a contingent universal[54] embodied by a tradition of interpretation on

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[53] Catherine Zuckert, "Hermeneutics in Practice: Gadamer on Ancient Philosophy," In <u>The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer</u>, edited by R.J. Dostal (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 220.

[54] David Lay Williams has embraced a similar notion, which he calls "indeterminate transcendent constraint" in his recent work drawing on T.K. Seung's

the one hand, and the particular goods of human action on the other? In other words, might we take from Gadamer's reinterpretation of *phronesis* a "good" that is dialectical, and that is arrived at through dialogue?

Such an idea of the good need not embroil us in controversies of false universalism or value ontology—both of which are attempts to naturalize and generalize a particular ethical doctrine under the guise of a universal good. Instead, Gadamer's reading of *phronesis*, his integral understanding of a theory of the good and the practice of the good life, directs us toward a unique understanding of the ethical that refuses to throw the idea of the good out with the universalist bathwater. This is *telos* without teleology, an idea of the good without The Idea of the Good. In the fusion of theory and practice that Gadamer effects through his analysis of Aristotelian *phronesis* we see a vision of theory that is far removed from the natural scientific model of theory formation and testing, and that is equally far from the image of an impractical, stargazing Thales stepping into a well. Likewise in Gadamer's reading of *phronesis* we see a vision of practice that transcends the mere application of a universal rule to a particular case, and that moves beyond the perception of the unreflective warrior politician Pericles. These images are replaced by the image of the *phronemos* (the practitioner of *phronesis*, practical wisdom)—the man who has reflected on the good and who instantiates it in his every action. An ethical actor who concretizes an ethical bearing in action. Thales down the well not out of carelessness, but so as to better observe the stars in the absence of

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interpretation of Plato. See his "Political Ontology and Institutional Design in Montesquieu and Rousseau" in <u>American Journal of Political Science</u> Vol. 52, No. 2 (2010): 525-542.

distracting ambient light; Pericles on the battlefield not out of unreflective patriotism, but as a living, acting embodiment of an ethical order.

And this order need not—indeed in my reading of Gadamer's Aristotle offered here it *must* not—be conceived in terms of the unchanging universal, separate from human experience and practice.[55] Rather, *phronesis* implies holding to a good that is the considered product of dialogue. Reasonableness dictates that courses of action must be chosen and justified—the identification of an end requires a reckoning, and this can only come through dialogue with oneself and with others. This, Gadamer suggests, may be the spirit in which Aristotle offers books VIII and IX of the Nicomachean Ethics. Why has Aristotle included a study of friendship in a text on ethics? If dialogue, both with oneself and with others, is a path to and necessary justification of the ends that are identified, distinguished, and chosen as goods, then careful consideration of those who will be our interlocutors makes perfect sense. Similarly, this reading of the value of *phronesis* and of the ethical life generally further highlights the inherent connection between Aristotle's ethics and his politics. Aristotle identifies humanity as *zoon politikon*[56] not simply because of our gregarious nature—we share this with the bees—but specifically because only human beings can discuss the good. We concern ourselves not only with matters of utility or expediency, but also with debates over what is the best life to live. And it is only within the *polis* that such dialogue can be realized.

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[55] It is on this point that Gadamer's reading of Aristotle diverges most decisively from that offered by some versions of Thomist Scholasticism informed by Catholicism.
[56] 1253a2.

These observations go directly to the heart of the philosophy and practice of the human sciences, and this in two senses. First, as Gadamer's Aristotle has shown us that theoretical ethics and practical ethics are intimately intertwined, we must likewise acknowledge that the philosophy of human science is not readily separable from the practice of the human sciences. *Phronesis* is not only an ethical virtue *examined by* Aristotle, in the ethics, it is also a virtue *exercised by* Aristotle in that text. Second, Aristotle's ethics when viewed through the lens that Gadamer provides, serve to reemphasize the human aspect of the human sciences. In conclusion I would like to address each of these points briefly.

The preceding argument has gone to show that a firm division between theory and practice is untenable within Aristotelian ethics. Gadamer's reading of Aristotle brings out the extent to which Aristotle describes for us a theoretical practice and a practical theory of ethical action. In this sense, *phronesis* is the object of Aristotle's study, as that intellectual virtue that serves to connect the theoretical with the practical in the life of the reasonable ethical actor. Beyond this treatment of *phronesis* as an object of analysis, it is worth considering the extent to which Aristotle, in his discussions of ethics and politics, shows himself to be a *phronemos*—a man of practical wisdom. Aristotle displays in his analysis precisely the combination of theoretical acumen and practical experience that we see praised in Gadamer's reading of *phronesis*. Aristotle proceeds dialogically through the opinions of the many, and discerns what truth may lie therein; likewise he illuminates for us the ways in which general principles express themselves in particular ethical actions—how a theory of the good is concretized in a good deed. "Let us not fail to

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notice…that there is a difference between arguments from and those to the first principles,"[57] Aristotle admonishes us early in the Nicomachean Ethics, and seems to imply throughout that text that the examination of the ethical entails both movements.

Similarly, the work of the philosophy of the human sciences must practice care in not establishing too sharp a divide between the theory and the practice of the human sciences. It certainly matters whether we are moving from practice to theory or vice versa, but we should not forget that this is a dialectical movement where theory and practice speak to each other intimately and necessarily. In the same way that the *phronesis* of the ethical actor is exhibited in the concretization of theory in action, and that these actions inform the further differentiation and specification of a theory of the good, so too a philosophy of human science is implicated in every *act* of human science. Considered in this light it seems somewhat redundant to specify or advocate for a specifically *phronetic* human science—all human science *qua* human science is already *phronetic*. Rather, the call should be to attend to how well the practices that are our human sciences reflect or concretize the good that we hope they can accomplish, the end toward which they strive.

And this brings us again to the connection between Gadamer's reading of Aristotle and the human sciences, and to a final point that I would like to speculatively draw out. Gadamer's interpretation of *phronesis* breathes new life into a somewhat unfashionable element of Aristotelian philosophy—an element that I would like to recommend to the human sciences. The idea of a functional good, understood as *telos*

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[57] 1095a.

(goal) or *hou heneka* (that for the sake of which) is indispensable to Aristotelian ethics, to the practice of *phronesis*, and, I would like to suggest, to the human sciences. Put rather too simplistically but in the spirit of speculative engagement, the human sciences and in turn the philosophy of the human sciences must remain *human*. For Aristotle both in Gadamer's reading and our own, it is the good that directs human action, and it is the light of the good that can illuminate the purposes of that action. Recall that Gadamer's reading of Aristotle understands this idea of the good not in terms of an absolute outside of and separate from experience and practice, but rather as fixed upon through dialogue. If the human sciences—and it should now be clear that we take this to mean the philosophy and practice of the human sciences—are to understand something of human action, they must partake of the dialogue through which this good is discovered and enacted, not attempt or pretend to stand apart from the human practice that they hope to understand and describe.

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From "Phronetic Social Science" to the "Master Science of the Good"

Up to this point I have restricted myself to gesturing towards the connections between a Gadamerian reading of *phronesis* and a re-envisioned approach to the human sciences. In this concluding chapter I will move beyond suggestion by bringing the frame of the Gadamer/Aristotle nexus to bear on the practices of the human sciences, with special emphasis on the case of contemporary debates within political science. Political science provides an ideal terrain for this intervention for a couple of reasons. In the first place, political science has experienced traumatic disciplinary challenges in the course of the past decade, challenges that have inspired some commentators to embrace Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* in search of a way forward. This debate, captured in the controversy initiated by "Mr. Perestroika," raises questions of method that are particularly amenable to investigation from the perspective developed in the preceding chapters. Gadamer's interpretation of *phronesis* together with my further extension of this analysis into the human sciences can be brought fruitfully to bear on these debates. Additionally, and apart from the context of these intra-disciplinary methodological feuds, political science as a human science has constituted (and can constitute again) a terrain of contestation within which questions of human goods have been vigorously debated. In this debate as in the methodological rivalries surrounding Perestroika the shadow of Aristotle is long. The Gadamer/Aristotle nexus that I have been exploring can provide valuable insight into these debates about the role and nature of human goods in the study of politics.

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For the purposes of this chapter I will engage with these two currents in political science by way of texts that embody the appropriation of Aristotle in these contexts. In the first case—the methodological feuds characterizing post-Perestroikan political science—I will examine the influential work of Bent Flyvbjerg, whose <u>Making Social Science Matter</u> has generated tremendous interest and a fair amount of controversy among Perestroika partisans for its argument in favor of a "phronetic social science." In the second case—the value-oriented concern within political science as a terrain of contestation within which questions of human goods have been vigorously debated—I will engage with Alasdair MacIntyre's virtue ethics, particularly as expressed in his classic <u>After Virtue</u>, and as engaged by Kelvin Knight's <u>Aristotelian Philosophy: Ethics and Politics from Aristotle to MacIntyre</u> where the move from ethics to an ethical argument for social and political change is made explicit. Each of these texts provides opportunities to further specify my own reading of the Gadamer/Aristotle nexus and to bring this analysis to bear on issues of contemporary interest in political science.

Perestroika and Phronetic Political Science

The Perestroikan challenge to hegemonic visions of political science has roots that go back to the debate within the philosophy of the social sciences between positivist visions of science and more interpretive approaches that I sketched in Chapter I. These tensions found clear expression in debates within political science surrounding behavioralism. Behavioralism emerged in force in political science in the 1950s as a broader neo-positivist current within the social sciences found expression in politics and

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government departments in the form of calls for a more scientific approach to politics. The contributions to the war effort made by the natural sciences (physics most obviously and in particular) ignited within these departments the feeling that the route to political significance lies through the aspiration to science. In his history of the movement, Farr traces out the affinities that united otherwise diverse scholars under the revolutionary banner of behavioralism, focusing on "(1) a research focus on political behavior, (2) a methodological plea for science, and (3) a political message about liberal pluralism."[1]

Behavioralism had its backlash, most clearly seen in the Caucus for a New Political Science formed in 1967, but as Farr notes, "Postbehavioralism neither inspired the allegiance nor provoked the challenges that its namesake had."[2] In the era after behavioralism the discipline settled into a fraught status quo where no single approach could claim the broad support that behavioralism enjoyed in its heyday, and the scholars of a fractured discipline oriented themselves around "separate tables"[3] according to methodological, ideological, and political affinities. Thus behavioralism's rise to establishment doctrine was followed closely by a period of renewed criticism of this new establishment, and a settling in to a status quo where "the revolution's more ambitious promises could be laid aside as the unattainable ends of an otherwise successful protest. A postrevolutionary consciousness would settle in for quite some time, including a

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[1] James Farr, "Remembering the Revolution: Behavioralism in American Political Science" in Farr, Dryzek, and Leonard eds. Political Science in History: Research Programs and Political Traditions (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 202.
  [2] Ibid, 219.
  [3] Gabriel Almond, A Discipline Divided: Schools and Sects in Political Science, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990).

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certain sense of longing for the purposiveness that the revolution had inspired."[4] Absent a purposive and coherent opposition, adherents of a loose behavioralism characterized by a preference for quantitative methodologies began to calcify into an institutional hegemony over the discipline less by design than by default.

The same tensions that gripped the discipline in the wake of the behavioral revolution re-emerged in the context of the Perestroika movement, albeit with different expressions and consequences. While the liberal pluralist politics of the behavioral movement had been eroded significantly by political reality in the intervening years, by the turn of the century there was a growing dissatisfaction within the discipline with the perceived continued hegemony of broadly positivist, behavior-oriented research at the highest levels of the discipline. In contrast to the immediate post-behavioralist era with its lack of ambition and focus, Caterino and Schram argue that "The current state of political science…can be better characterized as a constrained pluralism or a partial hegemony that limits methodological diversity. The current situation finds methodological pluralism itself a highly contestible issue."[5] Critics noted among other things the preponderance of articles utilizing formal theory or statistical methods in the discipline's flagship journal as evidence of an unholy quantitative alliance structuring the discipline.

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[4] James Farr, "Remembering the Revolution: Behavioralism in American Political Science" in Farr, Dryzek, and Leonard eds. Political Science in History: Research Programs and Political Traditions (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 199.

[5] Brian Caterino and Sanford Schram, Making Political Science Matter: Debating Method, Knowledge, Research, and Method, (New York University Press, 2006), 4.

In his review of several texts at the vanguard of the Perestroika movement, Stephen K. White isolates a "hierarchy of assumptions" that informs the emergent hegemony in political science:

> (1) political science exists to help promote understanding of the truth about politics; (2) political science research contributes to this quest by adding to the accumulation of an expanding base of objective knowledge about politics; (3) the growth of this knowledge base is contingent upon the building of theory that offers explanations of politics; (4) the building of theory is dependent on the development of universal generalizations regarding the behavior of political actors; (5) the development of a growing body of generalizations occurs by testing falsifiable, causal hypotheses that demonstrate their success in making predictions; (6) the accumulation of a growing body of predictions about political behavior comes from the study of variables in samples involving large numbers of cases; and (7) this growing body of objective, causal knowledge can be put in service of society, particularly by influencing public policy makers and the stewards of the state.[6]

It was in this context that the anonymous person or people known as Mr. Perestroika fired off a message attacking the American Political Science Association for a perceived institutional bias toward quantitatively oriented scholarship based on the assumptions identified by White.[7]

The message struck a nerve and a remarkably diverse coalition of scholars coalesced under the banner of Perestroika. Comparativists, case study specialists, historians of political thought and institutions, area studies scholars, theorists and others united around little more than a shared opposition to the hegemony of formal theory and

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[6] Stephen K. White, "Return to Politics: Perestroika and Postparadigmatic Political Science," In <u>Political Theory: An International Journal of Political Philosophy</u>, Vol. 31 No. 6, 836.

[7] The text of Mr. Perestroika's message is widely available, including in Kristen Renwick Monroe, <u>Perestroika! The Raucous Rebellion in Political Science</u>, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

statistical modeling. While it may be tempting to class Perestroika as an incoherent opposition to an equally incoherent hegemony, there are significant factors uniting Perestroikans on one side and hegemonic political science on the other. In her analysis of the movement "Perestroika and its Other," Susanne Hoeber Rudolph identifies a scientific mode of inquiry embraced by hegemonic political science and an interpretive mode of inquiry embraced by Perestroikans, each characterized by one of a pair of emphases: certainty vs. skepticism/contingency; parsimony vs. thick description; causality vs. meaning; singularity vs. multiplicity of truth; and objective vs. subjective knowledge.[8]

The demands of Mr. Perestroika and of the movement that embraced his moniker included (among other things) calls for greater methodological pluralism within the discipline (with publishing opportunities for interpretivist scholars standing as a measure), calls for a restructuring of the leadership selection criteria within the discipline's flagship association, and a greater emphasis on "problem-driven" rather than "methodologically-driven" research within political science.[9] As successful as the initial surge of the Perestroika movement was at raising these issues, there was an apparent lack of coherence to the movement explainable largely by the unexpected nature of its

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[8] Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, "Perestroika and its Other," in <u>Perestroika! The Raucous Rebellion in Political Science</u>, ed. Kristen Renwick Monroe, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).15.

[9] While this last point was not specifically enumerated in Mr. Perestroika's email, prominent scholars in the Perestroika movement put this formulation forward as a way to respond to one of Mr. Perestroika's apparent desires: to make political science better speak to contemporary political problems of interest to broader audience. See especially Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, and Tarek E. Masoud eds. <u>Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics</u>, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005).

emergence—even its adherents seemed to have been caught off guard. Critics noted this gap and observed that while Perestroika leveled more than its fair share of criticisms, the movement was short on positive recommendations as to how and with what the quantitative hegemony was to be replaced. Mr. Perestroika's message asked questions, but did not offer answers.

This state of affairs appeared to change with the publication in 2001 of Bent Flyvbjerg's <u>Making Social Science Matter</u>. Flyvbjerg was not engaged with the Perestroika movement as he wrote his book—he is an urban planner by profession and was not initially a partisan in this uniquely political science movement—but the text was quickly taken up by Perestroikans. As Laitin notes in his otherwise tone deaf reading of Flyvbjerg, "While there is no intellectual manifesto that lays down the gauntlet, a recently published book by Bent Flyvbjerg captures many of the core themes in Mr. Perestroika's insurgency."[10] In political science as in politics it is not wise to allow ones enemies to define the terms of one's movement, but on this point Perestroika partisans agree with Laitin. A 2006 volume edited by Sanford Schram and Brian Caterino takes its title from a modification of Flyvbjerg's book—<u>Making Social Science Matter</u> becomes <u>Making *Political* Science Matter</u>—and contributors include both Laitin and a number of prominent Perestroikans engaging with Flyvbjerg's work, as well as an essay by Flyvbjerg himself responding to some of the more glaring errors in Laitin's treatment of his book.

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[10] David D. Laitin, "The Perestroikan Challenge to Social Science" in Schram and Caterino eds. <u>Making Political Science Matter: Debating Knowledge, Research, and Method</u>, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 33.

In the context of the Perestroika movement, Flyvbjerg's invocation of *phronesis* resonated with factions within the political science community who sought to challenge the institutional dominance of statistical methodologies and formal modeling in favor of more broadly interpretive, qualitative, historical, and/or case study methodologies. If a cornerstone of the Perestroika movement—and of debates within the discipline in the post-Perestroika era—has centered in large part around calls for greater methodological pluralism, then Flyvbjerg's approach offered Perestroikans an alternative methodological approach that could be held up as an example of a potential methodology for political science that is not beholden to statistical or formal modeling, and that appears to address some of the more fundamental flaws of these approaches. Given this resonance and the broad coalition of scholars who felt compelled to throw their lot in with this vision of a "*phronetic* social science," Flyvbjerg's study and its particular use of the Aristotelian intellectual virtues demands closer scrutiny. The Gadamerian approach to *phronesis* developed in the preceding chapters provides an ideal perspective for carrying out such an examination.

Flyvbjerg's Aristotle: A Phronetic Method

Flyvbjerg's approach to bringing Aristotelian insights to bear on the problems of the social sciences begins with a shot fired across the bow of dominant trends in social scientific study. His book begins from the premise that social science has failed "as science," and the first half of the book is devoted to interrogating why this is the case. Flyvbjerg draws on a diverse set of thinkers including (in addition to Aristotle) Richard

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Rorty, Anthony Giddens, Harold Garfinkel, Michel Foucault, Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus, and Pierre Bourdieu, in developing his core argument. The approaches of these thinkers seem to converge on the point that in the social sciences "human activity cannot be reduced to a set of rules, and without rules there can be no theory."[11] In short, in the absence of abstract, context-independent concepts upon which general theory can be built; the situational, self-interpretive quality of human action; and the historical contingency of both the objects and the subjects of social inquiry; theory of social action of the type envisioned by hegemonic political science is apparently unattainable.[12]

Aristotle gives Flyvbjerg some leverage in making this argument. Flyvbjerg draws on Aristotle's studies of the intellectual virtues to draw a distinction between what he calls epistemic social science and phronetic social science. The invocation of the terms "epistemic" and "phronetic" in this context is worth examining. Flyvbjerg's use of the terms incorporates elements of Aristotelianism, and links up directly with the concerns of the Perestroika movement described above. I have touched on the intellectual virtues in earlier chapters, but a revisiting and refining of that material is in order in light of the use Flyvbjerg makes of *episteme* and *phronesis* in playing the two off of one another in service to his argument about the social sciences.

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[11] Bent Flyvbjerg, <u>Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again</u>, Translated by Steven Sampson (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 46.

[12] Throughout his study Flyvbjerg hedges on this point, being careful to note that "one cannot *prove* that social science cannot become scientific in the sense of normal science." Nonetheless, Flyvbjerg's analysis compels him to conclude that "it is difficult, and perhaps misguided, to believe that this will actually come to pass" (46-47).

As noted in the preceding chapter, Aristotle makes a preliminary determination in Nicomachean Ethics VI, 1, distinguishing two kinds of intellectual virtue—"one by which we contemplate the kind of thing whose originative causes are invariable, and one by which we contemplate variable things." Aristotle classes *episteme* (demonstrative science), *nous* (intuitive reason), and *sophia* (philosophic wisdom) among the former class of virtue, and *techne* (the arts and crafts) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom) among the latter. Aristotle argues that *episteme*, or demonstrative science, deduces necessary conclusions from first principles, that is to say, it deals with invariables.[13] The work of *episteme* is essentially deductive, and is concerned with the logical necessity linking sets of premises—the most ultimate of which are the first principles—with conclusions. *Episteme* is thus the most austere and severely rigorous of the intellectual virtues, and mathematics stood (and, to a certain extent, stands still) as the preeminent example of this type of demonstrative science—the conclusions of mathematics are, in this understanding, literally indisputable. They could not be otherwise. Of the natural sciences physics hews most closely to this vision of science, dealing with the necessity of the invariable.

In diagnosing "why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again" Flyvbjerg finds his answer to the first question in the tendency of the social sciences to participate in a kind of "physics envy" whereby the austere contours of episteme, now ensconced in "epistemic science", are embraced by practitioners of sciences ill-suited to the virtues of *episteme*. In countering this tendency within the social sciences Flyvbjerg notes that "it

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[13] Nicomachean Ethics VI, 3. Much of what follows paraphrases Aristotle's work in this chapter.

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is not in their role as *episteme* that one can argue for the value of the social sciences. In the domain where the natural sciences have been the strongest—production of theories that can explain and predict accurately—the social sciences have been the weakest."[14] While it is debatable whether the criteria of explanation and prediction are sufficient to qualify even the natural sciences as *episteme* in the Aristotelian sense, Flyvbjerg's point is convincing—the social sciences are poorly understood if out metric for science is *episteme*. To allow this point is not to denigrate the social sciences qua science, but rather to acknowledge that science comes in a variety of flavors, if you will, and *episteme*, while (arguably) appropriate as a standard for the natural sciences, is patently inappropriate as a standard for the social sciences.

If this were the extent of Flyvbjerg's Aristotelian argument the book would remain an illuminating examination of the folly of measuring the social sciences by a standard that is alien to them. As it stands, Flyvbjerg goes beyond noting the insufficiency of *episteme* as a measure for the scientific credentials of social science:

> The oft-seen image of impotent social sciences versus potent natural sciences derives from their being compared in terms of their epistemic qualities. Yet such a comparison is misleading, for the two types of science have their respective strengths and weaknesses along fundamentally different dimensions. In their role as *phronesis*, the social sciences are strongest where the natural sciences are weakest.[15]

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[14] Bent Flyvbjerg, <u>Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again</u>, Translated by Steven Sampson (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 61.
[15] Ibid.

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By offering *phronesis* (and *techne*[16]) as an alternative role within which the social sciences can be evaluated, Flyvbjerg moves from a critical project that highlights the inadequacy of traditional social scientific self-understanding in terms of its epistemic qualities to a more constructive (or "emancipatory") project in which he puts forward an alternative understanding of the social sciences.

At first blush *phronesis* and *techne* seem likely and fitting candidates as standards for a more suitable understanding of social science. As noted in previous chapters both *phronesis* and *techne* are concerned with things that could be otherwise—with choice and decision. This puts both in stark contrast to *episteme* with its emphasis on absolutes and the necessary, and recommends each as a more suitable standard for the social sciences which are likewise concerned not with necessity but rather with choice. Considering *phronesis* and political science specifically, Aristotle himself comments on the intimate relationship between the two at several points throughout the <u>Politics</u> and the <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u>.[17] Indeed, if one is searching for a kind of standard which to measure social sciences, one could do far worse than the standard of practical wisdom as developed by Aristotle, and as discussed at length in the preceding chapters. As Flyvbjerg makes clear in the second half of his book, however, he has a different set of aspirations for *phronesis*, aspirations that move beyond evaluating the practical wisdom of disparate practices of social science toward advocating for a particular vision of the appropriate approach to social science. The path toward this further move on Flyvbjerg's part is paved by his particular reading of the intellectual virtues.

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[16] Ibid, 162.
[17] See especially <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> VI, 12-13.

While Flyvbjerg is careful to acknowledge that *phronesis* and *techne* are distinct categories—that *phronesis* is essentially concerned with value judgments while *techne* is concerned with the production of things[18]—Flyvbjerg's assertion that "social science can also contribute to social development as *techne* in grappling with social, cultural, demographic, and administrative problems"[19] seems to lead him to elide important distinctions between the two. This tendency is most apparent in Flyvbjerg's attempt to formulate a set of methodological guidelines for his phronetic social science. Just as something is lost in the translation from the intellectual virtue of *episteme* to the practices of epistemic science,[20] so, too, is something lost in Flyvbjerg's move from *phronesis* as a standard of evaluation to phronetic social science.

Flyvbjerg professes a methodological pluralism in keeping with his assertion that *phronesis* can and should be used as a kind of standard by which social science can be measured. When he makes an argument in favor or a phronetic social science complete with methodological guidelines, however, his argument goes beyond offering a standard toward advocating for a method. The contours of Flyvbjerg's phronetic method include elements drawn more or less directly from his reading of Aristotle and additional elements that Flyvbjerg introduces in an attempt to "update" Aristotle in light of

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[18] Bent Flyvbjerg, <u>Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again</u>, Translated by Steven Sampson (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 58.

[19] Ibid, 62.

[20] What Flyvbjerg understands as epistemic science—the natural sciences—frequently has little or nothing to do with *episteme* in the Aristotelian sense of demonstrative (as opposed to applied) science.

contemporary concerns, particularly the contemporary concern with power.[21] In particular Flyvbjerg develops an approach to power that combines "the best of a Nietzschean-Foucauldian interpretation of power with the best of a Weberian-Dahlian one," and comes up with six features that characterize this approach:

1. Power is seen as productive and positive, and not only as restrictive and negative.

2. Power is viewed as a dense net of omnipresent relations and not only as being localized in "centers" and institutions or as an entity one cam "'possess."

3. The concept of power is seen as ultradynamic; power is not merely something one appropriates; it is also something one reapporpriates and exercises in a constant back-and-forth movement within the relationships of strength, tactics, and strategies inside which one exists.

4. Knowledge and power, truth and power, rationality and power are analytically inseparable from each other; power produces knowledge, and knowledge produces power.

5. The central question is *how* power is exercised, and not merely *who* has power and *why* they have it; the focus in on process in addition to structure.

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[21] Flyvbjerg claims "Aristotle never elaborated his conception of *phronesis* to include explicit considerations of power. Has-Georg Gadamer's (1974) authoritative and contemporary conception of *phronesis* also overlooks issues of power." Bent Flyvbjerg, "A Perestroikan Straw Man Answers Back: David Laitin and Phronetic Political Science," in Sanford F. Schram and Brian Caterino, eds. <u>Making Political Science Matter: Debating Knowledge, Research, and Method</u>, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 74.

6. Power is studied with a point of departure is small questions, "flat and empirical," not only, nor even primarily, with a point of departure in "big questions" (Foucault 1982, 217). God is in the detail, as far as power is concerned.[22]

There is little remarkable about this conception of power that Flyvbjerg develops apart from its generality and scope. One may justifiably inquire whether Flyvbjerg's understanding of power is so inclusive as to exclude nothing at all. Be that as it may, Flyvbjerg's concern is with power, and he believes that in *phronesis* he has found a method by which to uncover and interrogate the workings of power in social phenomena.

In outlining this method Flyvbjerg sets out certain "ground rules for any social or political inquiry" including (in addition to the focus on power), in his own terms, focusing on values; getting close to reality; emphasizing little things; looking at practice before discourse; studying cases and contexts; asking "How?" doing narrative; joining agency and structure; and dialoguing with a polyphony of voices.[23] In practice these ground rules are best observed by asking a core set of question in the course of study. "The point of departure for contemporary phronetic research can be summarized in the following four value-rational questions, which must be answered for specific, substantive problematics:

1. Where are we going?

2. Who wins and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?

3. Is this development desirable?

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[22] Ibid, 75-76.
[23] Bent Flyvbjerg, <u>Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again</u>, Translated by Steven Sampson (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 130-140.

4. What, if anything, should we do about it?"[24]

In responding to David Latin's criticisms of this approach Flyvbjerg argues that his guidelines and the value-rational questions that arise from these guidelines are not exclusive of quantitative, large-n methodologies or of game theoretic approaches to the social sciences. In fact he claims to advocate for a plurality of methods used in concert, just so long as social scientific research is problem-driven and responsive to the guidelines that he outlines. "Phronetic social science is problem-driven and not methodology-driven, in the sense that it employs those methods which for a given problematic best help answer the four value-rational questions."[25]

Flyvbjerg hedges in presenting his "methodological guidelines for a reformed social science" by noting that his guidelines "should not be seen as methodological imperatives; at most they are cautionary indicators of direction", and that "the most important issue is not the individual methodology involved, even if methodological questions may have some significance."[26] Nonetheless, it is clear that Flyvbjerg wants to see his phronetic method embraced as one of a plurality of methodological approaches uniquely suited to the social sciences. The key elements of Flyvbjerg's positive project, then, seem to be: 1) a call for "problem-based" social science research that takes power as

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[24] Bent Flyvbjerg, "A Perestroikan Straw Man Answers Back: David Laitin and Phronetic Political Science," in Sanford F. Schram and Brian Caterino, eds. Making Political Science Matter: Debating Knowledge, Research, and Method, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 76.

[25] Bent Flyvbjerg, Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again, Translated by Steven Sampson (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 196. Flyvbjerg continues, "More often than not, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods will do the task and do it best." Similar points are made throughout Flyvbjerg (2006) as well. See esp. pp. 68, 77, 129.

[26] Ibid, 129.

a major element of analysis; 2) an appeal to methodological pluralism; and 3) an argument in favor of his phronetic method as preeminent among the plurality of methods that take considerations of power seriously. The Gadamerian analysis of *phronesis* developed in the preceding chapters provides us with a lens with which to analyze these elements both in terms of the appropriateness of their appeals to *phronesis* and in terms of their larger claims vis-à-vis human science.

Responding to Flyvbjerg

With respect to each of the three key elements of Flyvbjerg's positive project, the Gadamer/Aristotle nexus that I have developed in the course of the last two chapters provides a rejoinder that calls into question the claim to be presenting a truly *phronetic* social science. The call for "problem-based" social science, the appeal to methodological pluralism, and the ultimate promotion of a phronetic method all come up against serious challenges founded on a Gadamerian reading of *phronesis*. From this perspective the entire preoccupation with method—even in the guise of "methodism" used as a foil by which to advocate problem-based research—is misconceived. This is the critical side of the Gadamerian reading of *phronesis* as it is brought to bear on the social sciences.

To begin with the furthest development of Flyvbjerg's case, a Gadamerian analysis of *phronesis* casts serious doubt on any aspirations toward a phronetic method of social science of the sort advocated in <u>Making Social Science Matter</u> and re-presented in <u>Making Political Science Matter</u>. This doubt goes beyond merely calling into question the aptness of Flyvbjerg's invocation of *phronesis* in naming his particular approach, and

challenges the more fundamental notion that the pathologies of the social sciences identified in the first half of <u>Making Social Science Matter</u> can be best addressed by appealing to method—phronetic or otherwise. Flyvbjerg's intuition to hedge any such aspiration to founding a new methodological approach is well conceived but ill followed. In spite of his claims to not offer a phronetic method, Flyvbjerg explicitly seeks to replace "epistemic" methods founded on scientific skepticism and the search for predictive, cumulative theory with "phronetic" methods that "focus on issues of context, values, and power."[27] That this move to supplant naturalist methods with more humanist approaches has been embraced by the Perestroika community within political science lends further import to the fashioning of a response to this trend.

The argument presented in the second chapter of this project speaks directly to this impulse to approach the apparent conflict between naturalism and humanism by way of the formulation of a new set of methods for the social sciences. This, in fact, was precisely the approach embraced by Wilhelm Dilthey's epistemology of the human sciences. As noted in that chapter, Dilthey "takes up romantic hermeneutics and expands it into a historical method—indeed into an epistemology of the human sciences."[28] The danger apparent in Flyvbjerg's approach—a danger to which Flyvbjerg himself seems to be sensitive—is that *phronesis* may be embraced by contemporary social scientists in

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[27] Bent Flyvbjerg, "A Perestroikan Straw Man Answers Back: David Laitin and Phronetic Political Science," in Sanford F. Schram and Brian Caterino, eds. <u>Making Political Science Matter: Debating Knowledge, Research, and Method</u>, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 84.

[28] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 198.

much the same way as romantic hermeneutics were embraced by Dilthey. That is to say, *phronesis* may be reduced to nothing more than a method among methods. Just as Gadamer's ontological approach to the human sciences sought to move beyond the epistemological concerns of Dilthey, so too does Gadamer's understanding of *phronesis* provide a richer, more fundamental critique of contemporary social science than any mere method could manage. Gadamer's thought, as I have presented it in the preceding pages, concerns itself with understanding in a way that is more fundamental than method. Gadamer does not present a method of the human sciences because he is concerned instead with the processes of human understanding that underlie all epistemology. *Phronesis*, as we have seen, shares something of the structure of understanding as Gadamer conceptualizes it. The task of "application," which Gadamer identifies as the central problem of hermeneutics and which constitutes his major contribution to our understanding *of* understanding, is shared by *phronesis*.

The extent of this sharing was examined in Chapter III where I analyzed Gadamer's treatment of *phronesis* and *techne* vis-à-vis the hermeneutical task of application. The lessons learned there regarding the interrelationship of *phronesis* and hermeneutic application can be brought to bear on the Perestroikan call for a phronetic method and the embrace of methodological pluralism as an end in itself. In that chapter I outlined three distinct elements that distinguish *phronesis* from *techne* and that establish a connection between *phronesis* and hermeneutic application. Those elements included the fact that neither *phronesis* nor hermeneutic application are taught nor can they be forgotten; both *phronesis* and application are characterized by a mutual implication of

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means and ends; and both *phronesis* and application require *sunesis*—the sympathetic understanding that establishes an action or understanding as *mattering to* the actor. Taken together these three elements mark *phronesis* off as a concept that is ill-understood in methodological terms, and further suggest that a proliferation of methods may not be the surest route to "making social science matter."

Insofar as either Flyvbjerg or those in favor of Perestroikan political science seek to find a new method in *phronesis*, understanding of the above elements puts us in a position to refute the wisdom of such an appropriation. Such a move mistakes *phronesis*—practical wisdom— for a *techne*—an art or craft. The language of method as a "toolbox" so frequently utilized in these debates points to this association of method with *techne*. The first of the Gadamerian contrasts between *phronesis* and *techne* is illustrative here. Gadamer notes that in Aristotle's ethics *phronesis*, unlike *techne*, cannot be learned or forgotten.[29] And yet to reduce *phronesis* to a method among methods presumes to make *phronesis* precisely such a thing as can be learned and forgotten: an additional bit of kit in the toolbox of the social sciences acquired as a part of graduate training and utilized as needed when suitable problems arise. Flyvbjerg seems to find this possibility repugnant, thus the repeated insistence that his "guidelines for a phronetic social science" do not constitute a specific methodology. And yet, as described above, this is precisely what *phronesis* becomes in the development of Flyvbjerg's

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[29] Nicomachean Ethics II,1; Gadamer Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 317.

approach and in the hands of the Perestroika movement—a rival methodology set up against large-n statistical analysis and game theoretic modeling.

These two elements of my Gadamerian approach—the emphasis on ontology in lieu of epistemology and the distinction between *phronesis* and *techne* on the basis of learning and forgetting—can be applied to any purely methodological response to the perceived faults of the social sciences. This includes the more modest call for methodological pluralism so widely embraced within the Perestroika movement. By bringing the standard of *phronesis* understood in terms of hermeneutic application to bear on the social sciences it becomes clear that any approach to the social sciences that relies primarily on method is bound to fall short. Calls for methodological pluralism share this fault with Flyvbjerg's phronetic method. One cannot remedy an insufficiently reflective approach to the practices of the social sciences by simply widening the field of acceptable methodologies. As the arguments on the preceding pages make clear, the pathologies of the social sciences are not tied to a particular method, but are rather endemic to the entire methodological focus that has consumed contemporary social science.

To reinforce this point by way of *phronesis*, we may note that again unlike *techne*, *phronesis* is characterized by a mutual implication of means and ends.[30] This similarly mediates against reading *phronesis* as a method or of proposing methodological pluralism as a suitably *phronetic* response to perceived shortcomings in "epistemic" social science. The discussion of means and ends that occupied significant portions of Chapters III and

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[30] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 320-324.

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IV in this project is relevant here. In those chapters I established a parallel between Aristotle's understanding of the mutual implication of means and ends in *phronesis* with a similar relationship between the practices of the social sciences on the one hand and theory of the social sciences on the other. Aristotle's ambivalent understanding of *phronesis* in its relationship to means and ends permeates his ethical treatises. Aristotle identifies *phronesis* as being concerned with deliberating well as to "what sorts of things conduce to the good life in general," that is to say, with knowledge of the means necessary to secure the good life;[31] with truly apprehending the end of deliberation;[32] and, then again, with ensuring the rightness of the means chosen in pursuit of an end that has been properly identified by moral virtue.[33] So, at various points in the text Aristotle indicates that *phronesis* is concerned with means, ends, or both. The Gadamerian reading of this ambivalence that I presented in the preceding chapter illustrates that this ambivalence is not the result of confusion on Aristotle's part, but rather is an acknowledgement of the mutual implication of means and ends.

In light of this relation the focus of calls for methodological pluralism appears as exclusively focused on the means of social scientific practice with little attendant attention to ends. The hermeneutic reading of *phronesis* suggests that any exclusive focus on methods as means in the social sciences with inevitably imply a set of ends that

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[31] 1140a25-28

[32] 1142b33

[33] 1144a7-9. For an admirable attempt to reconcile these and other accounts of *phronesis* in Aristotle's ethics, see John E. Sisko "Phronesis" in <u>Encyclopedia of Ethics</u>, 2nd Edition, eds. Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker, (Routledge, 2001), 1314-1316. We will see below what sense Gadamer can make of these apparent inconsistencies.

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are implicit to such means. The focus on method does not escape the necessity of this relationship between means and ends, but rather presents us with a situation where the preference for a given method or for a variety of methods inevitably brings with it a poorly theorized, at best vaguely understood set of implicit ends. With these elements in mind, my argument suggests that an approach to social science informed by *phronesis* must throw doubt on any purely methodological response to the pathologies of the social sciences, including calls for methodological pluralism. While methodological pluralism may make sense from an epistemological perspective—where the sole concern is with effective means for discovering information—this is not the perspective of *phronesis* understood in conjunction with hermeneutic application, where the mutual implication of means and ends requires a more reflective approach to the social sciences, one that is sensitive not only to the means instantiated in various methodologies of the social sciences but also to the under-theorized ends of social scientific research implicit in these means.

The Perestroika movement offers one potential solution to this question of ends—the call for problem-based research. Rather than focusing on method, several advocates of Perestroikan social science advocate for a renewed focus on the problems that define social and political life. These scholars—typified in varying forms by Ian Shapiro, Sanford Schram, and Rogers Smith—correctly, I think, identify a complex of problems with method-driven social science research that mirror those I have offered above. In Chapter III I offered the following as a reasonable summary of the debate over method-v. problem-driven social science:

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Those who advocate "problem-driven" work claim that it is most important to start with a substantive question thrown up in the political world and then seek out appropriate methods to answer it. These scholars contend that only a problem-driven political science is likely to contribute much of practical importance to the broader communities in which we work. Critics charge that the practitioners of this approach still have little if anything to offer that is more rigorous than the best writings of journalists and historians. The first imperative today, they contend, must be to make political science more of a science. Consequently, they argue that, for now, political scientists must focus on developing more rigorous methods, restricting the terrain of study to topics to which these methods can fruitfully be applied.[34]

This raises the interesting question of whether such problem-based approaches to the social sciences may address the mutual implication of means and ends that my Gadamerian reading of *phronesis* suggests, and that method-based approaches so clearly miss. In that earlier chapter I suggested that the mutual implication between means and ends might lead us to question such a neat division between methods and problems in the social sciences, that problem-driven social science may be more methodological than it assumes.

The work of Chapter IV puts us in a position to appreciate how it is that Gadamer's reading of *phronesis* gives us insight into the call for "problem-based" social science as an alternative to "method-based" social science as put forward by advocates of the Perestroika movement and by Flyvbjerg. We can make use of one of the preferred metaphors of problem-based social science research to see how this might be the case. In arguing against the effectiveness and appropriateness of method-based research, advocates of problem-based research are fond of noting that "if the only tool at hand is a

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[34] Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, and Tarek E. Masoud, eds. <u>Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics</u>, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-2.

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hammer, then everything will start to look like a nail."[35] The implication being that the exclusive focus on the development and refinement of a particular methodological approach inevitably results in a situation where researchers are unable to respond to or even conceptualize problems in social phenomena that are not amenable to analysis by way of this particular method. This metaphor is routinely invoked against advocates of quantitative methods in the social sciences, with the justification that such methods require a level of training in their acquisition that is inconsistent with the development of capacities with either rival methodological approaches or a more subtle, wide-ranging view of social phenomena generally. In such situations, the argument goes, the myopic quantoid is unable to see beyond the narrow confines of the social world as viewable by statistical or formal analysis, and is ill-equipped to respond meaningfully to a broad assortment of social problems.

One could conceive of an advocate of method-based social scientific research responding in kind, noting that problem-based researchers will face the contrapositive problem. If research becomes exclusively focused on social problems, social scientific researchers may find themselves in a position where they lack the professional competencies necessary to effectively research the problems at hand. In short, rather than hammers looking for nails, researchers may find themselves confronted with a nail, but without the capacity to effectively wield a hammer. This metaphor of hammer and nail is illustrative as far as it goes, not least in showing that no coherent position in the social sciences can consistently embrace one or the other extreme. But the question that needs

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[35] Ibid, 19. Also Green and Shapiro 1994; 1996….

to be asked, and which seems to be of so little concern to advocates for both method-based and problem-based research, is what precisely all of these hammers and nails are building. In more Aristotelian language, we may ask whether the consideration of the *means* of problem-identification and method-acquisition taken collectively have foreclosed or at least neglected the equally fundamental question of the *ends* pursued by social inquiry. This is a question that Aristotle grappled with consistently, and the Gadamerian reinterpretation of Aristotle that I have developed here positions us to take up this problem anew in the context of contemporary social science.

The absence of sustained reflection on this question is evident in the organs of the discipline of political science that are most devoted to the continued project of Perestroika, and that are most in line with the thinking attributed to Flyvbjerg above. Perspectives on Politics: A Political Science Public Sphere is a disciplinary journal that owes its very existence to the Perestroika movement. Perspectives was founded by the American Political Science Association in 2002,[36] and the mission statement of the journal made its lineage in the contentious debates over method in political science clear: in contrast to the American Political Science Review, which Perestroikans had attacked for its emphasis on quantitative and game theoretic approaches, Perspectives was to be a journal that would welcome a plurality of methodological approaches. The present Editor, Jeffrey Isaac, endorses this approach, and an attendant focus on so-called "problem-based" political science. Isaac's introduction to the first volume of his editorship affirms the commitment to "bridging diverse subfields and approaches in the

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[36] Vol. 1 No. 1 was published in March 2003 under the editorship of Jennifer Hochschild.

discipline, and to promoting a broader, more integrative, and more thematic or 'problem-centered' approach to political science research."[37] Indeed, at points Isaac seems to be attentive to precisely the kinds of questions that I raise above, namely the difficulty of uncovering what lies behind or beyond the "problems" we take up as social scientists:

> We aim to continue this problem-centered orientation, with one crucial caveat—that what counts as a "problem" is itself a deeply political question, and one great promise of political science is its capacity to illuminate how what counts as a "problem" has come to so count, and how this can itself be rendered *problematic*, through scholarly analysis and critique and/or through political contestation.[38]

In this Isaac seems to be acknowledging that "problem-centric" political science does not adequately respond to some of the deeper problematic at play in the social sciences, and that political contestation may be a way to further problematize the "problems" of political science.

Indeed, Isaac's "Statement of Editorial Philosophy" offers several such promises, but at least as many instances of these pledges being poorly followed in practice. At several points throughout the text of his editorial philosophy, Isaac—apparently against his own best intentions—makes it clear that his ecumenical stance is serving to reify certain shared assumptions and bases of inquiry within political science. Immediately following the passage quoted at length above, Isaac goes on to offer five bullet-pointed examples of how the "ideal Perspectives article" ought to be put together, noting that what defines such an ideal is less a matter of topic choice and more a matter of "framing"

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[37] Isaac, Jeffrey C. "Editor's Introduction." Perspectives on Politics: A Political Science Public Sphere Vol. 8, No. 1 (2010): 1.

[38] Isaac, Jeffrey C. "Perspectives on Politics: A Political Science Public Sphere [Statement of Editorial philosophy]." Perspectives on Politics: A Political Science Public Sphere Vol. 8, No. 1 (2010): 8.

chosen topics.[39] The Gadamer-Aristotle nexus that I have elaborated above puts us in a position to question whether such discipline-approved framing techniques may constitute nothing other than the shared, uninterrogated belief structures that constitute the ground of a particular mode of understanding. Isaac seems to confirm this suspicion when he quite directly *lists* a series of "orienting questions" that must be kept in focus "in order for political science to thrive and grow as a form of scholarly inquiry".[40] The Perestroikan focus on bridging or setting aside methodological differences on the basis of "what we have in common" leads to an insufficiently reflective embrace of these very commonalities.[41] As was evident in Flyvbjerg's failure to follow through on the promise to not attempt to formulate a rival methodology to challenge epistemic social science, we can see here a good impulse on Isaac's part poorly followed in practice.

Rather than chasing the chimera of a method particular to the social sciences—a pursuit that consumed the latter Dilthey—or pursuing an agenda premised narrowly on the identification of and engagement with particular problems, my approach, drawing on both Gadamer and Aristotle, suggests looking in a rather different direction. In examining Flyvbjerg's "phronetic social science" from a perspective informed by the relationship between Gadamer's vision of hermeneutic application and Aristotle's notion

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[39] Ibid, 8-9.

[40] Ibid, 7. In this sense, while Perspectives is self-styled as "a political science public sphere," there is reason to suspect that this public sphere is rather systematically constrained. Likewise, the explicit focus on establishing the relevance of the journal by way of academy/society linkages raises the question of whether this public sphere may be rather too constrained by the norms of the society to which it hopes to be relevant.

[41] It is also worth noting that while Isaac makes a number of references to stepping outside of one's "comfort zones" in considering the problems discussed in Perspectives, it is clear that the "comfort zones" that he is referring to are figured in purely methodological terms.

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of *phronesis* I've exploited a fundamental parallel that aligns social scientific practice as an interpretive endeavor on the one hand and Aristotelian practical philosophy on the other. This parallel is evident on the basis of the ethical entanglement between the actor and her practices that characterizes both social scientific practice and practical philosophy. The work of this chapter up to this point—bringing *phronesis*/application to bear on Flyvbjerg's work—has illustrated the critical value of this formulation. But Flyvbjerg's work is certainly not the first to engage Aristotle's ethics in general and *phronesis* in particular in the study of politics. An earlier formulation is provided by Alasdair MacIntyre's virtue ethics, an approach to the study of human phenomena that has recently been extended and applied by Kelvin Knight in his Aristotelian Philosophy: Ethics and Politics from Aristotle to MacIntyre. If engagement with Flyvbjerg draws out the critical potential of the *phronesis*/application parallel then engaging with MacIntyre illustrates a more forward-looking aspect of this configuration—a way to move beyond the impasse of method- and problem-based social science by embracing a re-imagined understanding of teleology.

Virtue Ethics and Political Teleology

Waiting for St. Benedict: Virtue Ethics[42] and MacIntyre's Aristotelianism

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[42] For the purposes of this discussion I will be bracketing the more ahistorical, analytic tradition of virtue ethics explicitly disavowed by MacIntyre in After Virtue. For a comprehensive treatment of this tradition that situates virtue ethics vis-à-vis Kantian and consequentialist ethics see Baron, Pettit, and Sloate Three Methods of Ethics (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997).

In many not insubstantial ways, Alasdair MacIntyre's <u>After Virtue</u> mirrors central elements of Gadamer's own hermeneutic philosophy. In terms of their fundamental orientations towards the history of philosophy, both thinkers exhibit a willingness to learn from past thinkers (particularly the Attic Greek tradition) without seeking to in any way idealize this past. Gadamer's preferred language for writing about this tradition describes our relationship to the past in terms of a conversation regarding a shared human experience, stating his "conviction that philosophy is a human experience that remains the same and that characterizes human beings as such, and that there is no progress in it, but only participation."[43] MacIntyre, for his part, sees value in observing the problems of our own society from a perspective external to that society, in this case the perspective offered by Athens. He notes "it is only from the standpoint of a very different tradition, one whose beliefs and presuppositions were articulated in their classical form by Aristotle, that we can understand both the genesis and the predicament of modern morality."[44] And while he sees the value of the Heroic tradition of Athenian society, MacIntyre does not delude himself so far as to believe that Homer's description of the deeds of the Greeks actually capture the daily life of the Peloponnesus.[45]

While both thinkers are comfortable looking back in order to gain insight into the present (whether through conversation or by embracing a unique perspective), Gadamer and MacIntyre also share a common criticism of the particular moment in philosophical

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[43] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy</u>, Translated by P. C. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press 1986), 6.
[44] Alasdair MacIntyre, <u>After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory</u>, 3d ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), x.
[45] Ibid, 121-145.

tradition characterized by the Enlightenment turn to individualism and rationalism. MacIntyre states his case forcefully with regard to the double failure of the Enlightenment with regard to public morality and philosophical ethics:

> The project of providing a rational vindication for morality had decisively failed; and from henceforward the morality of our predecessor culture—and subsequently of our own—lacked any public, shared rationale or justification. In a world of secular rationality religion could no longer provide such a shared background and foundation for moral discourse and action; and the failure of philosophy to provide what religion could no longer furnish was an important cause of philosophy losing its central cultural role and becoming a marginal, narrowly academic subject.[46]

This sentiment—the reaction against the Enlightenment hostility toward tradition—is shared by Gadamer, if with a somewhat less definite outcome. In Gadamer's estimation, the failure of the Enlightenment was not its displacement of tradition and its problematic triumph over prejudice, but rather its *presumed* success and *actual* failure at accomplishing this displacement. The difficulty with the philosophy of the Enlightenment for Gadamer is that it countenances an ideology—that tradition is escapable by way of rational individualism—that turns out to be fundamentally untenable. Enlightenment has not replaced tradition and prejudice; it has merely covered tradition over in an attempt to discredit it.[47]

This point regarding the status of the Enlightenment illustrates well that the most telling superficial similarities between Gadamer and MacIntyre may very well be those that point to fundamental distinctions between the two thinkers. Of this latter class the

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[46] Ibid, 50.

[47] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 265-76.

most relevant to our purpose is Gadamer's and MacIntyre's shared rejection of a "dichotomous" reading of Aristotle on the intellectual and practical virtues. In Chapters III and IV of this project I reflected on the key role played by the interrelation of means and ends in Gadamer's reading of *phronesis,* and how this interrelation reflects on our understanding of the similar interrelation between theory and practice. MacIntyre makes a similar point, noting that "there are sufficient grounds for rejecting any dichotomous reading of Aristotle that makes the practical reasoning [*phronesis*] of agents in particular situations one thing and a theoretical knowledge of the human good quite another, so that the latter cannot enter into the former, so that reflective reasoning about the human good cannot itself become practically and immediately relevant."[48] For both thinkers practical and theoretical wisdom in Aristotle are clearly interrelated, and any attempt to steadfastly maintain a separation (the supposed Platonic *chorismos* discussed in Chapter IV) is misguided. But as was the case with their mutual rejection of the Enlightenment project against tradition, this similarity too masks a fundamental difference, a difference that will be of tremendous importance to the present project. In this case the distinction turns on the difference between MacIntyre's understanding of the nature of theoretical reflection on the Good and my own Gadamerian/Aristotelian understanding of the Idea of the Good.

MacIntyre's approach to a theory of the Good is deeply influenced by his argument about the faults of the Enlightenment and his rejection of dichotomous readings of Aristotle. For MacIntyre, part of what was lost in the Enlightenment's jettisoning of tradition was the Aristotelian notion of teleology understood in terms of an end towards

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[48] Alasdair MacIntyre, <u>Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays</u>, Volume 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25.

which a human life lived in accordance with virtue must tend. As MacIntyre's stance on dichotomous readings of Aristotle makes clear, MacIntyre believes that this theoretical understanding of an end or *telos* is fundamental to the lived practice of human beings, and that practical wisdom (*phronesis*) here is balanced with theoretical wisdom of the Good. The Early-Modern discrediting and jettisoning of Aristotle's biological teleology was accompanied by a similar rejection in the field of ethics, and "ever since belief in Aristotelian teleology was discredited moral philosophers have attempted to provide some alternative, rational secular account of the nature and status of morality, but…these attempts, various and variously impressive as they have been, have in fact failed.…"[49] While MacIntyre's judgment on the Enlightenment rejection of all teleology is forcefully critical, his understanding of how this rejection is to be remedied is less straight forward. If the rejection of Aristotelian teleology was so tragically misguided, how can this wrong be put right? In what sense can and should contemporary philosophy and moral practice bring the idea of *telos* or the Good to bear on society? What species of teleology is appropriate to the contemporary situation?

Here MacIntyre anticipates his later Thomism. In his treatment of MacIntyre's Aristotelianism Kelvin Knight convincingly argues that in his earlier works MacIntyre "repudiated Hegel's functionalist version of teleological explanation according to which society is unified and history progresses in accordance with a rationality that is

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[49] Alasdair MacIntyre, <u>After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory</u>, 3d ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 256.

impersonal and universal."[50] Nonetheless Knight notices in MacIntyre's later writings (indeed, in his later editions of <u>After Virtue</u>) an increasing tendency to specify particular goods as *teloi* of human action. Indeed, in a response to Gadamer MacIntyre notes "an Aristotelian ethics requires an Aristotelian metaphysics."[51] With this and similar moves "MacIntyre has moved away from 1977's denunciation of anything but a metaphorical *telos*, and even from <u>After Virtue</u>'s 'provisional conclusion' that the good life is one spent in pursuit of some ever elusive, grail-like conception of the human good."[52] This shift toward a more definitive vision of the human good has led Sarah Broadie to accuse MacIntyre of subscribing to a pernicious and unnecessarily limiting "Grand End interpretation" of Aristotle.[53]

My purpose here is not to condemn MacIntyre on this basis nor is it to defend him against these charges. MacIntyre himself has attempted such a defense[54] and Dr. Knight has already given this topic a far more nuanced and able treatment than my knowledge, abilities, and available space allow. Rather, this treatment of MacIntyre serves the purpose of opening up a space for the positive component of my Gadamerian intervention to complement the critical component utilized above in my critique of the Perestroika

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[50] Kelvin Knight, <u>Aristotelian Philosophy: Ethics and Politics from Aristotle to MacIntyre</u>, (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 190.

[51] Alasdair MacIntyre, "On Not Having the Last Word: Thoughts on our Debts to Gadamer," in <u>Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer</u>, Edited by J. Malpas et. al. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 169.

[52] Kelvin Knight, <u>Aristotelian Philosophy: Ethics and Politics from Aristotle to MacIntyre</u>, (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 203

[53] Sarah Broadie, <u>Ethics with Aristotle</u>, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[54] See especially "Rival Aristotles: Aristotle against some modern Aristotelians" in Alasdair MacIntyre <u>Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays</u>, Volume 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25.

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movement. The moment for this intervention is provided by MacIntyre's somewhat grim and quite eschatological conclusions in <u>After Virtue</u>.

At that point MacIntyre's teleological instincts paired with his grim assessment of the state of modern virtue ethics lead him to embrace a pessimistic outlook where concern for personal virtue is in dire need of preservation while society at large writes off such concerns, the baby of Aristotelian ethics having been thrown out with the bathwater of Aristotelian natural science. In this vein MacIntyre concludes the closing chapter of <u>After Virtue</u> with a note of expectation for those who may preserve virtue in a post-Enlightenment age. In this forward-looking moment he invokes the memory of Saint Benedict, whose monasticism saved and preserved the intellectual heritage of the West through the Dark Ages following the fall of Rome:

> What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—Saint Benedict.[55]

The version of Thomism that MacIntyre embraced in his later work is less evident here, and the questions of what such "local forms of community" might look like and what the content of their preservations may be remains somewhat open. The Gadamerian approach that I have developed accepts the premise of much of what MacIntyre argues— the notion that, having abandoned traditional modes of moral reasoning, post-

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[55] Alasdair MacIntyre, <u>After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory</u>, 3d ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 263.

Enlightenment ethical theory has found itself adrift—and seeks to further contribute to the solution of the problems left tantalizingly open by MacIntyre. Later disciples of MacIntyre, most notably Dr. Knight, have sought to further develop the political implications of MacIntyre's own responses to these questions. In contrast to Gadamer, Knight argues, MacIntyre offers the potential for a truly political Aristotelian philosophy that makes the most of the inherent link between ethics and politics envisioned by Aristotle.

This raises the question whether the Gadamerian approach that I have developed in the preceding chapters can respond to the criticisms of Knight and others who assert that Gadamer offers us little by way of political insight—that his hermeneutics are as apolitical as the man himself claimed to be.[56] In my concluding remarks I would like to respond to this point by drawing explicitly on the relationship I have developed between *phronesis* and hermeneutic application. Just as Gadamer's hermeneutics cast Aristotle's ethics in a new interpretive light, so too can Aristotle's ethics illuminate a distinctly ethical and, hence, *political* facet of Gadamerian hermeneutics.

Towards a Political Teleology

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[56] In this spirit I cannot help but recall the sentimental irony implicit in MacIntyre's choice of titles for his essay written in memory of Hans-Georg Gadamer. In calling his essay "On Not Having the Last Word" MacIntyre acknowledges that his dialogue with Gadamer has not ended. The sentiment is perfectly Gadamerian. Gadamer, or rather Gadamerian hermeneutics, cannot be denied a rejoinder merely on the basis of the fact that the author himself is no longer with us. It is in that spirit that I take up these concluding reflections.

In an interview with Riccardo Dottori Gadamer memorably characterizes his relationship with Jürgen Habermas, saying

> I think the tremendous thing about the experience that I had with Habermas is that our attempt at a conversation has shown us both that we must learn from each other and that the arguments that we brought into the discussion weren't pushed further simply because they came from the other person, but, rather, we gave as good as we got. He was unable to make a political person out of me; I was unable to make a philosophical person out of him—he remained a political thinker.[57]

This is not a condemnation or a confession for Gadamer; rather he offers it as a direct appraisal of the relative strengths of Habermas and himself as he sees them. Given Gadamer's own estimation of his work as apolitical, it should come as no surprise when latter thinkers subscribe to the same view.

And yet, particularly if we embrace Gadamer's own hermeneutic theory, there is no reason why we should assume that Gadamer's own estimation of the political significance of his work ought to be determinative. It is an essential theme in Gadamer's hermeneutics that the meaning of a text escapes the intentions of the author, and this is as much the case with Gadamer's own text as it is with the texts Gadamer chose to examine. In fact the Gadamerian approach that I have developed here, particularly in its relation to Aristotelian ethical theory, is inherently political, as I hope to make clear in this concluding section. The political significance of this approach emerges as we transition between the critical elements of this project—specifically the critique of attempts to formulate a *phronetic* method of social science in response to the perceived shortcomings

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[57] Gadamer. "Ethics and Politics," in <u>A Century of Philosophy: Hans-Georg Gadamer in Conversation with Riccardo Dottori</u>, trans. Rod Coltman with Sigrid Koepke (New York: Continuum, 2003), 92.

of contemporary social scientific practice—to the consideration of the positive elements of this project—bringing a more coherent interpretation of *phronesis* to bear on the social sciences. The preceding discussion of Alasdair MacIntyre's virtue ethics provides an ideal opening for this intervention, for it is MacIntyre's appeal to a new St. Benedict that my development of the Gadamer/Aristotle nexus can begin to answer.

In my response to the Perestroikan advocacy for a problem-based social science I raised the possibility that the debate over method- v. problem-based social science may in fact be missing the point, and importantly missing an opportunity to bring an enriched notion of *phronesis* more effectively to bear on the problems of the social sciences. In the language of the preferred metaphor of advocates for problem-driven social science, the focus has been too narrowly drawn to questions of hammers and nails rather than to the more fundamental concern of what precisely it is that these hammers and nails are being used to build. Drawing on Gadamer's reading of *phronesis* the problem can be reinterpreted as an issue of means and ends. While it is possible to read the emphasis on problems rather than methods as an appropriate switch from a focus on means (methods) to a focus on ends (problems) I would like to suggest that a more fruitful interpretation is to consider problem-solving itself (including the conscious application of any number of methods) as a means-oriented activity. Careful consideration of the Gadamerian approach to *phronesis* makes it clear why this is the case.

In Chapters III and IV I argued that the mutual implication of means and ends in the Gadamerian reading of *phronesis* could be extended to encompass a similar interconnectedness between practice and theory. In this interpretation the conscious

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practices of the social sciences—both in the development of methods and in the approach to particular problems—are revealed to be concerned with means toward larger ends that are insufficiently theorized and, as a result, poorly understood. In bringing *phronesis* to bear on the social sciences in this more fundamental sense, it becomes clear that both the taking up of particular methods *and the identification of particular problems as being worthy of study/in need of solutions* are both conditioned by and dependent on a larger vision of the appropriate ends of social scientific research. Indeed, the consideration of social science as a practice that ought to concern itself with the solution of social problems is not merely the application of a set of means to a naturally determined end, but rather suggests a deeper commitment to a particular set of historically conditioned and frequently ill-examined *teleology*—a distinct if under-theorized notion of the appropriate ends of social research and, ultimately, of human life.

We can recall here Gadamer's notion of hermeneutic application, the concept that spurred his turn to Aristotelian *phronesis* as an exemplar. Hermeneutic application refers not to the self-conscious application of a method to a given problem. Rather, and as becomes clear in considering hermeneutic application in light of the parallel with *phronesis*, application in this sense refers to the way in which anything that we can be said to understand is taken to *matter to* us in some fundamental, not necessarily conscious way. As hermeneutic application bears on the understanding of a text, it refers to the set of meanings and prior understandings in light of which a given text is taken to be meaningful, and to have something to say to the reader. My work in the previous chapters illustrates how this notion of understanding can be expanded to the social world

by way of the parallel with *phronesis*. Practical wisdom, that intellectual virtue that is concerned with decision and deliberation as to means and ends, is hermeneutic in precisely this sense. The understanding that informs such decisions and deliberations rests on a set of prior understandings and interpretations that render one's social condition as both intelligible and meaningful. But the relationship here between these prior meanings and interpretations on the one hand and the texts or practices that are rendered understandable on the other is not unidirectional. Rather, as we see with Aristotle's notion of *phronesis*, the two are mutually constitutive—prior meanings render new experiences coherent and new experiences go on to contribute to this set of prior meanings.

Bringing these insights to bear on the practices of the social sciences reveals an interesting and provocative parallel. Social scientific practice, too, rests on sets of shared understandings and beliefs about the social world and the role of social inquiry within this world. These beliefs and understandings, our study of Aristotelian *phronesis* has shown us, are particularly significant insofar as they deal with our understandings of the ends, the *teloi* of our practices. This is a significant point. I am suggesting that the content of prior beliefs and understandings in a given realm of inquiry concerns not only the appropriate practices for that field but also and more significantly beliefs about the ends towards which such practices strive. In short, in the practices of the social sciences as in the actions of the individual, tradition dictates our ends. This turn to tradition is made apparent by the Gadamer/Aristotle nexus, but is evident in the theories of each. Gadamer explicitly theorizes the important role of tradition in understanding, and the

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sense in which the tradition within which we find ourselves dictates what we take to be meaningful. Likewise Aristotle notes that our cultivation of moral virtue—the development of habits overseen by practical wisdom—relies significantly on the emulation of past models of conduct.[58]

This relationship between tradition and *telos* helps us to respond to an essential question—what is (or are) the good(s) toward which the social sciences strive? In more practical terms, what is the nature of such goods and how are they apprehended? It is on this point that my own approach differs significantly from that of Alasdair MacIntyre. It has been noted that MacIntyre has been accused of adhering to a "Grand End interpretation" of Aristotle[59] which envisions a single, coherent, vision of the good for man that is, in principle, graspable by theoretical reflection. One possible implication of such a view, when considered in light of the connection between tradition and *telos*, might be to argue that tradition passes along to us a given end toward which we strive, seeking to make our practices as consonant as possible with this end. MacIntyre's defense against this accusation takes the form of a denial that he embraces such a clear-cut distinction between theory and practice, noting (as I have done above) that such a separation is not tenable in Aristotle.[60] Rather, MacIntyre notes that theoretical

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[58] Book II of the <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> is particularly concerned with the acquisition of moral virtue, and the role of *phronesis* in developing the virtue as a habit. If one becomes courageous by acting courageously, one must have models of courage from which to work. Once the individual has moved beyond imitation to the point where she chooses virtuous action for its own sake, then the virtue in question has risen to the point of *ethos* and is a true virtue. See especially Book II, Chapter 4.

[59] Sarah Broadie, <u>Ethics with Aristotle</u>, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[60] Alasdair MacIntyre <u>Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays</u>, Volume 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25-26.

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knowledge as to the nature of the good clearly enters into the practical reasoning of individuals acting in particular situations. While this is a plausible and, I believe, convincing argument against the "dichotomous reading" of Aristotle, MacIntyre's response evinces two major flaws according to my reading; 1) it posits a simple one-way relation between theoretical and practical reasoning; and 2) it does not address the question of the status or nature of the good grasped by theoretical reflection.

On the first point, Gadamer's critique of Thomism is germane.[61] In discussing Thomas's understanding of the divine Word, Gadamer notes that, contra Thomas, the distinction between the divine Word and human words is not well conceived as that between a unitary original and a multiplicity of imperfect reflections. Indeed, "[t]he difference between the unity of the divine Word and the multiplicity of human words does not exhaust the matter. Rather, unity and multiplicity are fundamentally in a dialectical relationship to one another…. Even the divine Word is not free of the idea of multiplicity."[62] Even in the case of the Word, a simple monologic understanding does not suffice. The Word finds its expression only in words, and these words speak a multiplicity of meanings. The relationship is dialectical, and the same idea holds for the idea of the good and the practices that aim toward that good. The heart of the criticism of

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[61] The relevance of this critique to MacIntyre's argument is compounded not only by the significance of Thomism 's Christianized version of Aristotle, but also by MacIntyre's own insistence that his own Thomism played a significant part in his latter revisions of and expansions upon the arguments of After Virtue. See Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 3d ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), x-xiv.

[62] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 427.

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any "Grand end interpretation" is not that it is dichotomous, but that it posits a single, univocal end. The relation between meaning and a history of interpretation borne by tradition that is so essential to philosophical hermeneutics has the effect of taking a seemingly unitary phenomenon—the Word or the good—and casting it in terms of a dialectical relationship with plural particulars in which an ostensible unity is shown to allow for considerable plurality.[63]

This approach has important consequences for the second question of the status or nature of the good grasped by theoretical reflection. MacIntyre's Thomist view envisions a good that is unitary and apparently at some remove from human theoretical refection. While said reflection is relevant to practical philosophy and can serve as standards of appeal, MacIntyre seems to suggest that the good itself is transcendent in the sense of being beyond historical context. MacIntyre's reflections on Gadamer are worth quoting in this context:

> I shall argue that, when we have understood our relationship to some past philosophical texts that belong to different historical contexts from our own and to that about which those texts speak to us, we will find that we have reached conclusions that presuppose an appeal to standards of

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[63] A parallel situation is apparent in legal theory. The distinction between a divine law on the one hand and human law on the other is apparent in Cicero's de Legibus, Augustine's City of God, Aquinas's legal and political writings, and any number of other legal texts. This distinction has similarly been invoked or exploited by any number of political actors as diverse as the inquisitors on the one extreme and Dr, M.L. King on the other. The contribution of a Gadamerian analysis in keeping with the approach developed here would begin with pointing out the interrelation between our understanding of divine law and or practice of human law. In a sense law is a more particular case of the general approach I am developing here with respect to the Good.

rationality and truth that do in some measure transcend the limitations of historically bounded contexts.[64]

This move to appeal to "standards of rationality and truth" that "transcend the limitations of historically bounded contexts" is suggestive of MacIntyre's larger approach to a transcendent good, an approach that my own view, drawing on a Gadamerian reading of Aristotle, rejects.

In his dialogue with Gadamer MacIntyre suggests that Gadamer would deny any role for theoretical reflection in his understanding of *phronesis*.[65] As my discussion in Chapter IV makes clear, this is not the case. Rather, a Gadamerian approach denies theoretical reflection the distinction of being outside of history and context. Rather, the interrelation of theory and practice that I have elucidated here suggests that theoretical reflection of the good is in fact conditioned by historical context, particularly by tradition. Tradition stands as something that is neither entirely independent of history—tradition is certainly effected by history and the flux of historical contexts that define it—nor is it entirely at the whim of particular historical contexts. This peculiar and valuable element of tradition is captured well by Gadamer, who argues that "tradition there is always an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced,

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[64] Alasdair MacIntyre, "On Not Having the Last Word: Thoughts on our Debts to Gadamer," in Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Edited by J. Malpas et. al. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 158.

[65] Ibid, 168-9.

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cultivated."[66] Tradition does "transcend the limitations of historically bounded contexts" in the sense that it perseveres and preserves. Theoretical reflection has a role here, but theoretical reflection itself is never outside of this tradition. Tradition, as an object of theoretical reflection, provides the standards of conduct, shared understandings, and value orientations that constitute a *telos*. Nonetheless this is a *telos* that is neither transcendent nor entirely independent of practice. It is "affirmed, embraced, cultivated" and, to continue Gadamer's reflection, it "is active in all historical change."[67]

The teleology to which I refer here, then, is of a particular kind. It is implicit in tradition understood as both the grounds for all action and reflection and the basis for all historical change. It is not abstract and transcendental, but rather as an element of tradition it is sensitive to our practices and subject to renewal and change as well as preservation. It is a notion of the good toward which our practices strive, but about which our theoretical reflection remains vague. I have chosen to call it a *political* teleology so as to highlight its contestability in opposition to the vision of the good embraced by MacIntyre and the Thomist tradition. MacIntyre is correct, I think, in highlighting the importance of theoretical reflection on the good for practical philosophy, as he is also correct to emphasize the extent to which this good, this *telos*, is insufficiently subject to scrutiny in the contemporary world. Rather this *telos*, like the tradition of which it is a part, guides our practices without itself becoming a matter of conscious inquiry and contestation. I would like to suggest in closing that a renewed vision of the

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[66] Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u> , Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. Second, revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 281.
[67] Ibid.

social sciences take this as its starting point. A social science that reflects critically on the shared assumptions, beliefs, and ends implicit in its practices will necessarily be a field of contestation where these unstated assumptions become the subject of reflection and debate, and where the ends of the social sciences as *human* sciences take on a new importance.
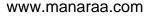
And with this we return to the concerns of the Perestroika movement, but with important modifications. Rather than advocating for a *methodological* pluralism within which a pre-ordained "phronetic method" finds its place, our engagement with MacIntyre illustrates the need for a true *intellectual* pluralism. A collection of methods, even presuming that those methods are subordinated to specific worthwhile "problems" is an insufficient rejoinder to the challenges posed to political scientists in light of the relation to notions of the good illuminated by a close reading of *phronesis* by way of hermeneutic application. The social sciences, more so that other fields of inquiry, are uniquely positioned to renew reflection on the good. This would mark a return to an Aristotelian framework where the work of political science rises to the level of the "master science of the good," but with the important hermeneutic addendum that this "good" is itself a matter for reflection and debate. If we take seriously, as I do, Aristotle's assertion that political community finds its highest realization in the extent to which it fosters the uniquely human capacity to reflect on the good for man, then the work of a truly political social science must take reflection on the good as a key task. This is a *political teleology* that weds a fundamentally Aristotelian understanding of human goods to a uniquely Gadamerian view of the limits and nature of human understanding. The union of the two

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constitutes a view of political science as a sphere of contestation where questions of the appropriate ends for human beings in political association are taken as basic and necessary to the practices of social inquiry. A political science that considers methods and problems both in the context of a broader reflection on human goods. Such a political science is, indeed, a *human* science.

The precise contours of such a political science cannot be worked out in advance through theoretical reflection alone, nor can we expect perfection either in our grasp of the ends toward which political science may be oriented or in the particular practices best suited to attaining these ends. On both points Aristotle is illuminating. Excellence would require correct action in keeping with perfect knowledge of an end apprehended by practical wisdom,[68] but Aristotle specifically notes that "there is no such thing as excellence in practical wisdom [*phronesis*]."[69] The implication here is that perfection in the apprehension of an end for the social sciences, of a good toward which they strive, can be aspired to but never accomplished. This understanding is consistent with Gadamer's thoughts on prejudice and tradition. One's stance with regard to the tradition of which one is a part—the prejudices that support understanding and the beliefs regarding the ends embraced by that tradition—are both obscure to the individual and prone to change in light of changing histories of interpretation. The same is undoubtedly true in the case of the social sciences generally and political science specifically—as social scientists we have only imperfect understanding of the ends that inform our study,

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[68] Nicomachean Ethics 1143b30
[69] Ibid, 1140b22

and these ends are ceaselessly open to modification as social scientific practice inevitably augments and reshapes our understanding of the social and political world. What is left for the social sciences is the task of seeking to better, if imperfectly, articulate our own understandings of societal ends and to concretize these understandings in social scientific practice. The seemingly Sisyphean nature of the work—the sense of forever aiming at a moving target that our shafts will never perfectly reach—must not discourage us. Just as the ethical actor is never in a position of not deliberating about what is the best course of action for herself, so too must the social sciences seek to be continually reflective of their status as human sciences, concerned with human goods.

Epilogue

The Contemporary Problems of the Political Animal

To be a contemporary Aristotelian with regard to ethical concerns—to take seriously the mandate that the highest perfection of man consists in his capacity to aspire beyond mere life to the good life—requires grave soul searching with regard to aspects of Aristotle's own exclusionary politics. Aristotle considered his Ethics and Politics to be continuous, and not simply in the sense that I have taken them to be linked here—that man is a political animal insofar as he is capable of deliberating about the good life. Aristotle was a more practical man than that. His Ethics, for him, implied a specific mode of political organization. The life of reflection that Aristotle praised as most conducive to the best life—the life of true *eudaimonia* or human flourishing—rested on a foundation laid by the Athenian *polis*. Within the *polis* the citizen was free to engage in politics and theoretical reflection by virtue of the fact that he was supported in "necessary life" by women, slaves, and others deemed unfit for this highest life.

Aristotle's exclusionary politics rest on three related foundational assumptions. First, Aristotle embraces an ontology that posits the existence of a naturally ruling element and a naturally ruled element. This ontology pervades his understanding of physics, metaphysics and, ultimately, ethics/politics. Second, Aristotle understands citizenship in terms of ruling and being ruled in turn. Political participation is a prerequisite to citizenship, and Aristotle means this in a very real, literal sense. Finally, the best life, the life of theoretical reflection on the good, requires leisure. If man is to reflect on the highest goods, he cannot be encumbered by mere practical concerns.

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The offshoot of these assumptions is a vision of politics based on a pseudo-aristocratic order. Free men, those who constitute the "ruling element" in society are freed from practical concerns by the labors of women, slaves, and a class of free laborers. They use their leisure in pursuit of politics—ruling and being ruled in turn—and devote time to theoretical reflection, that highest of goods. This is a social order that has been roundly rejected in the contemporary West, and this rejection raises a fundamental question. Can the edifice of Aristotelian ethics survive the rejection of this specific vision of Aristotelian politics? This question lies in the background of the preceding pages, with their clear reliance on Aristotle's ethics, and would require at least as many pages again to adequately answer. Nonetheless the problem is acute enough to require at least a tentative reply.

This reading of Aristotle's politics shares a good deal with the conclusions of a longstanding tradition of Aristotle interpretation. Some contemporary approaches to Aristotle have sought to challenge this reading on any number of points. Of the three foundational assumptions for Aristotle's politics offered above, the first has been appropriately rejected by philosophy and social theory alike. The notion that one man, one sex or gender, or one race is naturally suited to rule while another is suited to servitude is repugnant to modern sensibilities. This assumption of natural inequality constitutes the "bathwater" of Aristotelian politics, the element that can be cast aside with little loss and even less regret. The rejection of this element of Aristotelian physics from the ethics and politics removes a major impediment to a modern Aristotelian politics—it broadens the scope of politics by undercutting the rationale for its more exclusionary

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elements. Contemporary scholars who have worked to undercut this element of the formerly dominant reading of Aristotle have done so in any number of ways. Jill Frank, in her treatment of Aristotle's view of citizenship, draws on a nuanced reading of Aristotle's theory of nature to challenge the assumption that Aristotle endorses a view of the natural order where hierarchy is sanctioned by pre-political nature. In Frank's reading, Aristotle treats nature as fundamentally changeable and shaped by politics, thus deeply challenging any assumption of a natural distinction between the free, male, Greek citizen on the one hand and the slave, female, foreigner on the other.[1]

This reading is supported by Stephen R. L. Clark's earlier work that similarly argues that in the Aristotelian worldview man's defining characteristics are not to be found in immutable nature, but rather in choice and action.[2] While Clark's treatment of gender difference in Aristotle is importantly different from Frank's, the fundamental point of challenging an overly deterministic understanding of nature in Aristotle. Similarly Charlotte Witt's reading of Aristotle's Metaphysics supports these reflections by emphasizing the role of potentiality over actuality in Aristotle's thought. The hierarchy of value evident in Aristotle's texts is complicated by the more fundamental ranking of form over matter in Aristotle's metaphysics. In Witt's reading Aristotle's functional notion of form—where all human beings share a form characterized by potentiality that can be actualized in activity—serves to de-legitimize arguments for

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[1] Jill Frank, "Citizens, Slaves, and Foreigners: Aristotle on Human Nature," American Political Science Review Vol. 98, No. 1 (2004): 91-104.
[2] Stephen R. L. Clark, Aristotle's Man: Speculations on Aristotelian Anthropology, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

political hierarchy based on apparent material difference.[3] Witt, Clark and Frank are two of an impressive number of contemporary scholars who are unified in the rejection of the first premise outlined above, not purely on the basis of modern preferences in politics, but by virtue of careful analysis of Aristotle's texts.

The second assumption mentioned above—that Aristotle understands citizenship in terms of ruling and being ruled in turn—can be argued to form the basis of any democratic model of governance. The notion that true citizenship involves participation, "ruling and being ruled in turn," can be embraced by contemporary politics with little difficulty. The unique problems of mass democracy—matters of representation, dangers of political apathy, etc.—pose both practical and theoretical challenges, but do not conflict in principle with Aristotelian political ideals. Nonetheless, this Aristotelian tenet, too, is rather too restrictive. I had the opportunity above to reflect on the unnecessarily narrow understanding of power offered in texts by contemporary Aristotelians like Bent Flyvbjerg and, to a certain extent, Kelvin Knight. This understanding of action and participation in terms of rulership is similarly narrow, and literal in a sense that may bear further scrutiny. In fact much of the work cited above—in its advocacy for an approach to human action that emphasizes potentiality and capacity for actualization over more simplistic readings of fundamental nature—can be similarly applied to questions of power. If power is understood less as an end to be possessed and exercised in rulership and more as a potentiality to be actualized in activity, then the Aristotelian notion of

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[3] Charlotte Witt, Ways of Being: Potentiality and Actuality in Aristotle's Metaphysics, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003). See especially Witt's chapter "Ontological Hierarchy, Normativity, and Gender."

citizenship as ruling and being ruled in turn can be interpreted in a more expansive light to include manifestations of political activity beyond the narrow "power politics" of political office-holding.

The third and final Aristotelian assumption—the necessity of leisure and its contribution to reflection on the good life—remains a formidable challenge. This element of Aristotelian politics, unlike the ontology of form and substance, is essential and cannot be jettisoned without compromising key features of Aristotle's understanding of the good life. Political organization exists for a higher purpose than mere necessity, and if politics loses this higher purpose it devolves into mere administration and the absorption with matters of necessity. But this element of Aristotelian political life seems to justify the exclusion of many. Rather than being excluded from political life on the basis of a flawed natural ontology, women, laborers, and innumerable others will be excluded on the basis of their preoccupation with "mere" necessity. A lack of leisure is a condemnation to a non-political life. This fact provides the basis for a kind of neo-Aristotelian critique of contemporary social organization, but does not illuminate a specific plan of action. And while the hope for a society where all have the leisure required for an Aristotelian good life may be quixotic, the arguments of the last chapter may suggest a kind of practical, institutional response.

In short, the role that I have envisioned for the human sciences in my final chapter—where reflection and deliberation on the goods embraced by society constitute an element of social theory alongside the refinement of methods and identification of problems—can be seen as situating the academy to work as a kind of organ of reflection

in the contemporary body politic. While such an institution could not hope to replace an individual's reflection on the life of virtue, the academy as a center of reflection on societal goods would be a valuable component of a contemporary political body envisioned on Aristotelian lines, a political body arranged in such a way as to make the cultivation of personal virtue possible. The idea here is not to envision the academy as a body for social control—this fantasy is long past its expiration date in the social sciences—but rather as a conscience to society. The advantages of such an approach include the removal of an exclusionary element from the world of politics and the maintenance of a focus on societal goods. Politics, still envisioned in terms of ruling and being ruled in turn, would not of necessity be restricted to those living lives of leisure, and the consideration of societal goods that is so essential to Aristotelian life would be maintained, albeit in a re-imagined institutional capacity.

The obvious rejoinder to this hopeful picture would point out that one form of exclusion (from political life) is being replaced by another (from the academy), and that such "compartmentalization" of reflection on social goods might result in an academy that is at best exclusionary and at worst insular, irrelevant, and removed from the world at large. In short, this is a vision of the academy as Saint Benedict's monastery—cloistered, exclusive, and doomed to bear a torch on behalf of a society that it has abandoned. A response to this dilemma can be proposed in similar terms: we should take our orders not from a Saint Benedict, as MacIntyre argues, but rather from a Saint Francis. The academy must not be separate from society, but must speak to society, and actively draw

from all elements of society. Not cloistered away in the desert, but walking among the people.

For my own part, I am inclined to believe that the traditional reading of Aristotle holds closer to Aristotle's own beliefs about politics than many of the contemporary readings discussed above. This, however, says precious little about the *meaning* of Aristotle's thought. As Gadamer has taught us, the meaning of a work exceeds the intentions of the author, and in this sense the many modern interpreters of Aristotle can show us something of the truth of Aristotle's thought. Thus the response to the contemporary problems of the political animal that I outline here differs from those offered by scholars like Frank, Witt, Salkever, Clark and others in its approach to the problem. My approach emphasizes the meaning of Aristotle's arguments as they are borne to us in the texts themselves and in the history of interpretation of those texts, seeking to come to terms with Aristotle in the full sense offered by philosophical hermeneutics—as understanding, interpretation, and application—rather than focusing on ways to interpret and understand Aristotle himself. In short, I am more interested in what Aristotle *means* than I am in what Aristotle *meant*.

Whether it makes sense to continue speaking of such meaning or of such an arrangement between the academy and society as outlined above as "Aristotelian" is in some measure beside the point. In a Gadamerian spirit we may respond that while it may not be precisely what Aristotle had in mind, the meaning of Aristotle's texts and the power of his ideas lie beyond his own intentions.

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