1   Introduction: new directions in social science

Bent Flyvbjerg, Todd Landman and Sanford Schram

There is ferment in the social sciences. After years of sustained effort to build a science of society modelled on the natural sciences, that project, long treated with suspicion by some, is now openly being rethought. A critical intervention in this period of reflection was *Making Social Science Matter* (MSSM) by Bent Flyvbjerg, published in 2001. In that book Flyvbjerg challenged the very idea of social science as a science modelled on the natural sciences. Flyvbjerg argued that, as the social sciences study human interactions that involve human consciousness, volition, power and reflexivity, attempts to build generalizable, predictive models such as those for the natural world are misplaced and even futile.

MSSM offered a pointed argument about what is wrong with the social sciences today, and enumerated examples of how what it saw as an alternative social science is possible and already happening. The book provided a thorough analysis of how its alternative social science is dedicated to enhancing a socially relevant form of knowledge, that is, 'phronesis' (practical wisdom on how to address and act on social problems in a particular context). Significantly, MSSM reinterpreted the Aristotelian concept of phronesis to include issues of power and explained that building on this new version of phronesis is the best bet for the relevance of the social sciences in society. Intelligent social action requires phronesis, to which the social sciences can best contribute and the natural sciences cannot with their emphasis on 'epistemé' (universal truth) and 'techné' (technical know-how). This Aristotelian tripartite distinction of 'intellectual virtues' was critical in MSSM for highlighting the comparative advantage of social science. Even in Aristotle's original interpretation, phronesis is seen as the most important of the intellectual virtues, because it is needed for the management of human affairs, including the management of epistemé and techné, which cannot manage themselves. Phronesis, in this sense, is knowledge that is sensitive to its application in specific settings and is therefore able to manage itself (and more), which is what gives it prominence in social thought and action.

MSSM argued that, given their subject matter, the natural sciences are better at testing hypotheses to demonstrate abstract principles and law-like relationships, while the social sciences are better at producing situated knowledge about how to understand and act in contextualized settings, based on deliberation about specific sets of values and interests. Such deliberation about values and interests is central to social, political and economic development in any society, and it is something to which the social sciences are particularly well suited while the natural sciences are not. The natural sciences excel at conducting decontextualized experiments to understand abstract and generalizable law-like relationships, while the social sciences can conduct contextualized studies involving field research that produces intimate knowledge of localized understandings of subjective human relationships, and especially in relationship to the values and interests that drive human relationships.

MSSM put the emphasis not on particular research methods or types of data (it emphasized that both qualitative and quantitative data and methods are pertinent to phronesis), but on producing research that can help develop phronesis by increasing understanding and effecting change in specific contexts rather than questing after the ghost of an abstract knowledge of law-like processes. MSSM called for social scientists to revise their standards for acceptable research methodologies, giving up fruitless attempts to emulate the natural sciences and instead reincorporating context-sensitive research, such as case studies, narratives, and datasets that help social actors learn to appreciate the complexities of social relations and practise various social crafts, including policy and change, more effectively.

MSSM emphasized that social sciences can distinctively produce the kind of knowledge that grows out of intimate familiarity with practice in contextualized settings. These are local knowledges, even tacit knowledges and skills, that cannot be taught *a priori* but that grow from the bottom up, emerging out of practice. Add a sense of praxis, seeking the ability to push for change, leaven it with an appreciation of the ineliminable presence of power, and this phronetic social science can help people involved in ongoing political struggle question the relationships of knowledge and power and thereby work to produce change.

MSSM was followed by a volume edited by Sanford Schram and Brian Caterino, *Making Political Science Matter* (2006), which explored the academic debate generated by MSSM, including a spirited dispute – the so-called 'Flyvbjerg Debate' – between Bent Flyvbjerg and Stanford University political science professor, David Laitin, over what phronesis is and can be in social and political science. Both books were mainly about

the theoretical and methodological issues involved in justifying and doing phronetic social science, with only two illustrative case studies of applied phronesis, one in each book (Flyvbjerg 2001: 141–61; Shdaimah and Stahl 2006). Yet in the intervening years, the advantages of the phronetic approach have been demonstrated in many specific studies. Commentators, including one of the co-editors of the current volume, Todd Landman (2008), have pointed out that compiling cases of the phronetic approach would be an important and much needed next step in the development in this alternative to mainstream social science.

The current book responds with case studies demonstrating specific instances where researchers have actively worked to implement a phronetic social science, that is, phronesis used to deliberate and act in relation to substantive issues in social science and policy. In what follows, the book (1) presents a number of outstanding examples of applied phronesis at the nexus of social science and policy studies, (2) examines these examples in the context of the evolving theory and methodology of phronetic social science and (3) teases out the implications and next steps in this new field of policy-oriented social science research. The book is therefore the first systematic attempt to bring together a set of case studies exemplifying what phronetic social science actually looks like in practice.

Part I includes four chapters designed to provide context for the case studies. In Chapter 2, Sanford Schram provides a brief history of phronetic social science, its key concepts and distinguishing features, including how it contrasts practical versus theoretical knowledge, positivistic versus interpretivist methodologies, qualitative versus quantitative data collection efforts, phronetic research versus action research, and the various ways in which research can be of relevance to policy.

In Chapter 3, Todd Landman argues that narrative analysis provides a particularly apt set of methods for phronetic social science, since it allows for stories, intersubjective meanings and experiences with power to be uncovered and analysed in ways that other methods cannot. But narrative analysis is still very much a loose collection of methods ranging from the deep analysis and interpretation of single stories to more systematic approaches that deconstruct and compare different elements of multiple stories. The chapter defines and delineates narrative analysis, establishes its methodological links with phronetic social science and illustrates its main lines of argument with examples from empirical research on human rights, in particular research on the more than thirty 'truth commissions' around the world.

Arthur Frank in Chapter 4 provides an in-depth examination of the relation between phronesis in doing social science and what Frank calls 'everyday phronesis'. Frank accepts that a core topic of social

scientific study is the dependence of human action on phronesis, which he understands as people's practical wisdom in dealing with both routine decisions and unexpected contingencies. This practical wisdom seems to have three aspects: it is content, a quality of persons and a form of action. As content, phronesis is a resource – a stock of experiential knowledge. As a quality of persons, it is what enables acquisition and appropriate use of that knowledge – a capacity. And as action, phronesis necessarily involves doing something – a practice in which experiential knowledge is both used and gained. 'Having phronesis' is iteratively dependent on 'practising phronesis'. This chapter discusses social theories in which the study of everyday practical wisdom works to enhance their readers' capacity for phronesis. The chapter revisits the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault to show how, not only to describe, the human condition is dependent on phronesis. Frank shows that each theorist's texts are pedagogical in the sense of being written to equip the reader for what the texts require from him or her: doing the research each theorist recommends, but more generally, appreciating the limits of those recommendations, and, on that basis, taking a newly realized form of responsibility for one's life. Bourdieu and Foucault call on readers to learn what can only be implied, never specified as direct advice, about how to live. Frank argues that social science phronesis has to be more than a topic; it is what social scientific study requires from researchers and what social science seeks to enhance in its audience. *Real* social science is when studying the world has the effect of changing it, by means of what Machiavelli calls *verita effettuale* (effective truth). Real social science that contributes to phronesis grows out of experience and, in turn, contributes to that experience. It cannot be theorized *in toto* in advance.

Chapter 5, the last chapter in Part I, by Stewart Clegg and Tyrone Pitsis, clarifies how three key 'power questions' are handled in phronetic research: (1) how are the specific problematics of power enacted and constituted by the different agents engaged (and not engaged) in social (and non-social) relations in the substantive field studied?; (2) what are the mechanisms by which observers might analytically determine which of the different agents make claims about winning or losing and how they do it?; and (3) what are the social consequences of specific power relations and how can we determine desiderata for calculating them? Phronetic social science is often conducted in collaboration with partners from outside the academy, for example, from industry, government or civil society. The chapter argues that phronetic research views relations between academic researchers and outside partners, as well as relations between outside partners, as matters of power. Such a perspective begs

the question of how the phronetic researcher should act in the field of power in which they are themselves implicated. The chapter answers this question specifically and explores issues of power and phronesis in the act of doing research with a point of departure in the authors' own decade-long experience as researchers studying megaproject alliances.

Part II of the book includes the case studies. Each chapter focuses on a specific instance of how the phronetic approach was applied in practice to a substantive problematic in social science as input to practice (policy, planning, management) in what we call 'applied phronesis'. Further, each chapter is a self-contained case study of the chosen problematic, that is, an in-depth analysis stressing developmental factors in relation to context. Each chapter also shows how four phronetic key questions, originally emphasized by MSSM, were asked and answered for the problematic at hand: (1) where are we going with this specific problematic?; (2) who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?; (3) is this development desirable?; and (4) what, if anything, should we do about it? Each chapter reflects on the phronetic dimension of the research being discussed.

Part II begins with the story of how Bent Flyvbjerg and his associates tried to change conventional megaproject policy and management by taking a phronetic approach to their work and working with mass media to increase impact, first in Denmark and later internationally. Megaprojects are big infrastructures, large ICT systems, megaevents, etc., each of which typically costs over a billion dollars and impacts millions of people. Chapter 6 systematically answers the four key questions of phronesis for megaproject policy and management. The first question – 'where are we going with megaprojects?' – is answered by documenting a dismal performance record for megaprojects in terms of systematically undelivered promises. A true paradox is uncovered: more and larger projects are being built at the same time as their poor performance is becoming increasingly clear. In answering the second phronetic question – 'who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?' – a Machiavellian formula for project approval is uncovered, which is widely used by promoters to construct a reality on paper that secures funding for their projects: (cost underestimation) + (revenue overestimation) + (overestimation of development effects) + (underestimation of environmental impacts) = funding. The third question – 'is this development desirable?' – is answered by a clear and easily justifiable 'No!'. Finally, the answer to the fourth phronetic question – 'what, if anything, should we do about it?' – is, first, we should problematize conventional megaproject development, including individual projects, to a degree where current practices become indefensible, and, second, we should

constructively help develop methods, incentives and legislation that will help to curb the fraud and error that are typical of megaproject development. The chapter shows how Flyvbjerg and his associates do this, with particular emphasis on how they work with mass media, and how it has changed policy and practice for megaprojects.

The second case study in Chapter 7, by Corey Shdaimah and Roland Stahl, focuses on power relations between researchers and advocates fighting for an affordable housing trust fund in Philadelphia. The production of social science knowledge is intimately related to issues of power. This is one of the core aspects of phronetic research, as Flyvbjerg has shown in MSSM. Power permeates all dimensions of the research process. Power issues are at the core of the production process of knowledge relating to everything from the alleged special standing of academic researchers in knowledge production to their relationship to their funders and other key institutional actors. Power perhaps most explicitly permeates the social sciences in their often important and visible role in the political arena. Another dimension of the research process that is suffused with power is the relationships among those who fund projects, those who conduct research and those who are the so-called subjects of social science research. In this chapter, the researchers analyse and theorize how power has played an integral role in the collaborative process between academic researchers and community advocates in a participatory action study they conducted in 2004 in Philadelphia. The researchers used data from retrospective interviews conducted with those involved with the project and participant observations to situate their findings in the broader literature of the collaborative research field. As have other authors before them, Shdaimah and Stahl argue that power has to be reflected and acted upon continuously during the entire research process. The authors find that phronesis provides a particularly effective framework for collaborative social science projects, because it puts power at the core of social science knowledge production. Phronesis is also based on a praxis-oriented epistemology, theory of science and methodology which makes it particularly effective in dealing with issues of power in collaborative work. This chapter shows how.

Chapter 8, by Leonie Sandercock and Giovanni Attili, provides an innovative focus on stories and storytelling. The authors see the focus on storytelling as part of an emergent, post-positivist paradigm of inquiry that goes by various names, including phronetic social science. New information and communication technologies today provide the opportunity to explore storytelling through multimedia, including video- and film-making as a form of digital ethnography. This chapter reports on a three-year, three-stage research project in which the authors

experimented with the use of film as a mode of inquiry, a form of mean-
ing making, a way of knowing and a way of provoking public dialogue
around planning and policy issues (in this case, the question of the eco-
nomic and social development of Canada's First Nations and the bridging
of the cultural divide between Native and non-Native Canadians). The
site of the research is the north-central interior of the province of British
Columbia, Canada's westernmost province, and the last to be colonized.
The focus is on two subtribes of the Carrier Nation: the Burns Lake
Band and the Cheslatta Carrier Nation. The authors see the struggle
there as a microcosm of a much bigger problem that exists right across
Canada. The authors explore the expressive as well as the analytical pos-
sibilities of film in conducting social research and provoking community
engagement and dialogue, taking advantage of the aesthetic and involving
dimensions of film as narrative. The research question of this chapter is a
sociopolitical one: given the historic and ongoing conflict between First
Nations and the European colonizers who dispossessed them, is there a
way forward that can both provide justice for Native people and begin
to bridge the 'two solitudes', the cultural distance that is the legacy of
racism and oppression? The chapter concludes with critical reflections
on the successes and limitations of the first part of the project, which is
still a work in progress.

Chapter 9, by Steven Griggs and David Howarth, is a case study of the
'wicked issues' thrown up by UK aviation policy and especially the plan
to build a third runway at London's Heathrow airport. 'Wicked issues'
in policy-making are informed by competing problematizations, where
each problematization articulates rival and often irreducible demands
that privilege different 'scientific' facts and evidence. Such endemic
conflict around competing demands presents particular challenges for
policy-makers seeking to construct policy 'solutions' that can respond
adequately to various social demands and claims voiced across policy
sectors. Indeed, appeals to evidence, to science and to technical cost–
benefit analysis often backfire in the face of such ambiguity, and the
competing values and practical judgements made by stakeholders. This
chapter demonstrates how a 'phronetic' approach in social science, cou-
pled with post-structuralist discourse theory, offers an alternative under-
standing of critical policy analysis, especially with respect to the way in
which policy-makers and practitioners can begin to address such 'wicked
issues'. The chapter pursues a phronetic approach to emphasize power
practices implicit in policy analytical techniques, highlighting their impli-
cations for constructing identities associated with urban boosterism in
the case of an airport expansion conflict. This particular empirical case
study explores the way in which successive Labour governments in the

United Kingdom have sought to address the 'wicked problem' of avi-ation expansion, where the dominant logic has been accompanied by increasing dislocation and political contestation, as different groups have articulated competing demands and problematizations to tackle the issue as they conceive it. The problem of aviation expansion in the UK context constitutes an exemplary case for exploring the growing clash between the logics and values of economic growth, on the one hand, and envi-ronmental sustainability on the other. Particular emphasis is placed on the recent decision by the UK government to approve the building of a third runway at Heathrow airport. The chapter concludes by estab-lishing how such an approach leads us to a different understanding and evaluation of 'wicked issues' like aviation policy, while also addressing the clash between the values of economic growth and environmental sustainability.

Chapter 10, by Tricia Olsen, Leigh Payne and Andrew Reiter, describes as an instance of phronesis research that helps transitional countries and policy-makers promote strategies that reduce human rights violations and improve democracy. The term 'justice cascade' is employed in transitional justice scholarship to describe the existence of an international justice norm that has diffused throughout the world. International non-governmental organizations, it is argued, promote the norm; international treaties, covenants and laws institutionalize it; and international and national courts enforce it. The justice cascade sug-gests that, today, few countries can transition from authoritarian rule or civil war without putting perpetrators of human rights violations or war crimes on trial. The argument further contends that the implemen-tation of domestic and international justice deters future human rights violations. The justice cascade, however, poses a particular problem for the authors of this chapter. While the authors are sympathetic to the idea behind the justice cascade – seeking justice for past violations and deterring future ones – their research in the end challenges the justice cascade as practised. It questions its existence both methodologically and empirically. The chapter brings new evidence to the discussion. It finds, for example, that countries emerging from authoritarian rule and civil war continue to use amnesties, not trials, to deal with the violent past. Further, evidence shows that a combination of trials and amnesties are more likely than trials alone to bring improvements in democracy and human rights. The chapter builds these findings on the construction of a Transitional Justice Database that includes all countries of the world and focuses (for the justice cascade) on ninety-one transitions from 1970 to 2007. The chapter shows that careful empirical work can often con-tradict scholars, scholarship and normative approaches that may have

influenced previous work. It includes considerations on how to use research that contradicts other's findings, while still working towards the same political goals. By utilizing a cross-national database, the authors aim to help transitional countries and policy-makers to deliberate phronetically about and to promote the strategies that will reduce human rights violations and improve democracy in specific contexts most effectively. In that process, the analysis traverses a fraught, normative terrain in ways that conventional research is less likely to do.

Virginia Eubanks provides Chapter 11. The chapter is framed to address one aspect of phronetic social science that has been largely overlooked, that is, its close links to feminist epistemology and methodology. These links were mentioned in MSSM (Flyvbjerg 2006: 104–7, 163–4), but had been lying dormant until Eubanks' treatment. This chapter gives an overview of how to undertake situated practical reasoning in the real world, highlighting the contributions that feminist thinking and action can make to phronetic social science. The chapter suggests that a uniquely feminist phronesis would follow five precepts: (1) begin by grounding your analysis in the subjectivities and everyday/everynight experience of the people being studied (Dorothy Smith's sociology for people); (2) recognize that different individuals and groups inhabit different social locations in relationship to the phenomena being studied, locations shaped by their relationship to power along the lines of race, class, gender, sex, ability and nationality (Kimberlée Crenshaw's intersectional analysis); (3) uncover how this social location shapes how individuals and groups understand the world, developing different 'situated knowledges' (Donna Haraway's feminist epistemology); (4) put these specific situated knowledges in conversation with each other in the context of collaborative, action-oriented practice in order to develop better accounts of the world, accounts that are both more true and more just (Sandra Harding's strong objectivity); and (5) therefore, produce knowledge that is useful for praxis and social movement. Feminist phronesis is explored through two case studies, based on eight years of work with the grassroots organizing groups, Women at the YWCA Making Social Movements (WYMSM) and Our Knowledge, Our Power: Surviving Welfare (OKOP), both of which attempted to contribute to a high-tech equity agenda that protected the economic human rights of women struggling to meet their basic needs in the Capital Region of New York.

Chapter 12, by William Paul Simmons, asks us to imagine that Bent Flyvbjerg in his quest for a model for teaching phronetic social science turned to Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed instead of Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus' stage theory of skill acquisition. Flyvbjerg would have been confronted with a much more radical and nuanced theory of power

than Foucault's, one that would call for a different kind of phronetic social science, perhaps tentatively labelled anti-hegemonic phronetics. Phronesis – grounded in praxis – would still be privileged over techné and epistemé and it would still require a deep understanding of context and power, but it would stress a host of new questions such as: who is *aneu logou* (without a voice in Aristotle's words) in the political community?; what does it mean to speak for the Other?; and are attempts at empowerment actually perpetuating hegemonic discourses? Teaching phronetic social science would also be expanded from producing virtuoso social actors proficient in understanding sociopolitical contexts and adept at marshalling political power to include working with marginalized populations to develop anti-hegemonic discourses based on indigenous knowledges. Virtuoso teachers and practitioners of phronesis would now be those who can learn to learn from below through what Gayatari Spivak (2004: 207–8) has called a 'no holds barred self-suspending leap into the other's sea'. This chapter first briefly develops the need to expand our understanding of phronetic social science and then considers two case studies of teaching anti-hegemonic 'phronetics' in relation to current controversial issues at the United States–Mexico border. First, the chapter discusses the author's use of problem-based learning in working with victims' families in seeking innovative legal remedies for the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. It discusses the teaching of action research in a new Masters programme in Social Justice and Human Rights especially studying the sexual victimization of migrant women crossing the United States–Mexico border. In each case, the students and instructors rely on phronetics in the sense of working with affected communities to achieve empowerment.

The last case study, by Ranu Basu (Chapter 13), provides a work in spatial phronesis. It examines the role of research in confronting the challenges in the wake of rapidly deteriorating conditions of Ontario schools. The Learning Opportunities Grant was established in 2006 to provide funding for schools in dire need. In Toronto, similar reports such as the *Poverty by Postal Code* and *Model Inner City School Initiative* have become guiding doctrines for poverty recognition and alleviation. Localized spaces of poverty and marginality in such documents are efficiently identified and labelled as 'at risk' and 'priority areas' where resources and opportunities to support the needs of the most vulnerable populations should be directed. With its progressive and pragmatic discourse, attention is strategically diverted from underlying structural factors and the neoliberal strategies that had originally led to problems in the first place. Instead, attention is focused on measuring and labelling communities that have failed, and to the further sifting and sorting of