‘And when I am only for myself...’: Ways of knowing, reflective practice, and passionate humility

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Ways of knowing, reflective practice, and passionate humility

Rector, Colleagues:

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
And when I am only for myself, who am I?
If not now, when?

– Pirkei Avot [Sayings of the Ancestors] 1:13

History is the best antidote to delusions of omnipotence and omniscience. Self-knowledge is the indispensable prelude to self-control, for the nation as well as for the individual, and history should forever remind us of the limits of our passing perspectives.


Oraties [inaugural addresses] in the US are rare; "strategic chairs" are even rarer. And so I have struggled over the last year and a half to understand what the expectations are in The Netherlands and at the Vrije Universiteit in particular for such a lecture. I have been told that customs and styles vary by university, and that here at the VU, an inaugural address should sketch out the scope of the Chair: its intellectual range, the fields of inquiry it encompasses, the research questions its incumbent engaging over the term of the Chair. This would mean laying out a five-year plan, as this is the term of a Strategic Chair.

But as I articulated a research program for this Chair prior to my appointment, and as this strategic plan is available to colleagues and members of
the public on the Faculty website, it seemed less than compelling to repeat that
exercise today. Moreover, having delivered one public lecture in my first year, at
the Dean’s invitation, in the 2006 Talma Lezing, where I spoke of *egels en vossen* –
hedgehogs and foxes – and an ethnographic sensibility, prevailing upon colleagues
to listen to a second one in the same year seemed a bit much, and so this address
comes midway through my second year. Were I to follow local custom, this would
mean presenting a five-year plan for the Chair with not much more than three
years remaining to implement it.

And so, my oratie today may follow a somewhat less than customary path.
My intention is to focus on a topic that I find crucial today to an engaged
organizational science: the role of passionate humility in our work. It is a subject
that comes centrally out of the mandate of my chair, the concern for "meaning and
method." I will begin by sketching out the contours of that chair and the
significance of its name and then turn to elucidate some of the areas of that work
on which passionate humility touches. My thinking has long been influenced by
feminist theories and theorizing, although I have rarely positioned my research
explicitly as such. Drawing on two arguments from that theorizing – the activist
statement that "the personal is the political" and its academic equivalent in
standpoint theory (Hartsock 1987) – I am going to start off with a discursive style
that may appear more personal and less formal than what is customary in a VU
oratie. That ties in with my subject matter, however, as I will explain shortly.
Meaning and method

As many of you know, I am here because my now-colleague Alfons van Marrewijk and I met while registering for a conference in December 2003, leading to an invitation from Heidi Dahles to present a paper on the occasion of her own oratie in December 2004. About two weeks after that, while sitting in a coast-side house in Israel where I had gone to teach a mid-career executive course, I opened an email from Heidi asking if I might be interested in a “Strategic Chair” in the Department of Culture, Organization, and Management. Before the next day dawned, I had sent her three enthusiastic replies, sketching out the scope of the chair as I saw it and giving it its name: “Meaning and Method.” What prompted that choice of designation?

To call it a choice dignifies the naming process with much more explicit rationality than it possessed. The name bubbled up out of my subconscious, reflecting the areas of work – of thought – in which I was engaged. It is firmly rooted in the constructivist-interpretive (or phenomenological-hermeneutic) challenge to the positivist search for certainty and its idea of progress that mark much of American social science, including public policy and organizational studies, the two fields in which my work is situated.

For most of those gathered here, there is, I think, no need to rehearse the arguments on behalf of the interpretive turn in the social sciences that has taken place over the last half of the preceding decade, drawing on early 20th century phenomenology, hermeneutics, and (some) critical theory from Europe and early to mid-20th century pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, and ethnmethodology in
the US, along with late-20th century cultural or symbolic anthropology. The
class challenges posed by these schools of thought are reflected in all of the ensuing
"turns": the linguistic turn (e.g., Rorty 1967; Van Maanen 1995), the narrative
turn (see Stone 1979), the rhetorical turn (e.g., McCloskey 1985), the
argumentative turn (Fischer and Forester 1993), the historic turn (McDonald 1996),
the metaphorical turn (Lorenz 1998), the cultural turn (Bonnell and Hunt 1999), the
practice turn (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, and Savigny 2001). (All this turning brings
to mind William Butler Yeats' verse, "Turning and turning in the widening gyre";
Yeats 1921).\footnote{I sincerely hope, however, that we are not turning toward the tumult he described there:
"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,/ ...The
best lack all convictions, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity."}

In brief, these challenges entail a shift in positioning human meaning, both
individual and collective, front and center in what we, as social scientists, attend to.
Such a shift found expression in organizational studies in the 1980s in interpretive
approaches to organizational culture (Yanow and Adams 1997), developing
subsequently into a broader range of studies, including metaphor analysis,
discourse analysis, organizational ethnography, and so on. In public policy studies,
it has found voice in a variety of approaches loosely subsumed under the heading
"interpretive policy analysis." Other social sciences have their own expressions of
the focus on meaning. Within the practice-oriented social sciences, this interpretive
turn has implications for all those issues of evidence and truth claims made by
researchers in studying them:
that it is impossible to separate ontology from epistemology: ontological constructivism and epistemological interpretivism are mutually constituted/constitutive and intertwined;

that it is impossible to separate methods from methodologies: methods enact a researcher’s ontological and epistemological presuppositions;

that it is impossible to separate interpretive analytic processes from interpretive research methods: “organizational diagnosis” and “policy analysis” designate professional or expert practices at the same time that they reference research methods used in those practices; “cultural” organizational diagnosis and interpretive policy analysis are inseparable from interpretive research methods.

Hence, the Strategic Chair in *Meaning and Methods*. Linking these two concepts together meant, to my way of thinking, not just a focus on meaning, but tying meaning to action. Let me sketch out briefly some of the play of these two terms in the research agenda of my Chair before turning to the central topic that concerns me today.

**Organizational studies.** These approaches in my own work in organizational studies include analyses of built spaces and other artifacts and their role in expressing and communicating organizational identities and other forms of meaning. Over the term of this Chair, I am looking at built space in particular:

- in corporate museums and their relationship with organizational identity,
- exploring their particular characteristics in The Netherlands by comparison with other countries (the US, England, Germany, Italy);
in science and technology museums, assessing whether their design elements play a role in the ways in which we have come to understand the meaning of "science": what it means to be "scientific" and to do science; and

in open or flexible office space re-designs, seeking to explain why these seem to be more successful in The Netherlands than in the US.

Interpretive policy analysis. My empirical research in interpretive policy analysis has focused recently on those policies that invoke demographic categories for "race-ethnic" characteristics. A meaning-focused approach investigates the work administrative categories do for public policy – that is, for identity at the state level – which serves as the broader context for the work they perform with respect to administrative practices and organizational identity formation. In The Netherlands, this might include such research questions as:

 Might the categories autochthon and allochthon be impeding the integratie or meedoen [roughly, "participation"] that present public policy claims as its goal?  

What work is accomplished in case law and policy documents by continuing to label third generation nederlanders as "Turk" or "Moroccan" when second

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2. These terms are Dutch categories used in reference to native-born Dutch of "Dutch" heritage (autochthonous) and those of "non-Dutch" heritage, regardless of birthplace (allochthonous). The terms derive from chthon = earth [Gr.]; autochthonous is used in geology to refer to rocks, minerals, etc. which are indigenous; the opposite is heterochthonous, not indigenous. In psychology autochthonous refers to thoughts coming from outside one's train of thought; in pathology, to origin and location of a disease, lesion, etc. Allochthonous, the more recent term (1910-15), is used in geography. (Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1), based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 2006; http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=allochthonous accessed 30 March 2007.)
generation children of English or Australian or French parentage are echt “Dutch” in the same documents?

$ In ‘othering’ certain demographic groups, do the categories in the *Sinterklaas* narrative sustain current organizational practices that work against integration in the workplace, thereby impeding both *integratie* and *meedoen*?

$ What are the cultural roots of the silences in public policy discourses on various kinds of race-ethnic ‘otherness’ and its categories?

**Interpretive methodologies and methods.** Analyses such as the foregoing are built upon grounded studies of what people in organizations and policy settings actually do. Here is the “re-turn to practice” in organizational studies (developing within other social sciences, as well), but rooted in organizational and political ethnographies and ethnographic methods. (I include here ethnomethodology, activity theory, science studies, actor network theory, and other methods for analyzing data that draw on ethnographic methods for generating those data.) The research projects under way include investigating:

$ how these methods are learned – an ethnography of knowing and learning: this ties in with understandings of science fostered by science and technology museums;

$ how these methods are presented and enacted in organizational and policy ethnographies: does the character of ethnographic research change when it is imported into these other areas of study?
“Meaning and method” means, then, studying not only how we, as researchers and scholars, generate knowledge about our subjects, but also how knowledge is developed in the everyday world of professional and other “expert” practices, including the expertise of non-university, non-professional local knowledge. It means an orientation toward, a concern for, ways of knowing.

Ways of knowing: Researcher reflexivity, science studies, evidence, and professional practice

What authorizes a way of knowing? What validates the knowledge it generates? At the heart of the phenomenological critique of positivist philosophy is a perception of the individual as her own authority on her own experience: appeals to church, monarchical or other forms and sources of tradition, or some other authority no longer compel in certain areas of practice, as Max Weber noted in advancing bureaucracy as the legal-rational form of legitimate authority in organizational contexts. But the individual draws on a collective repertoire: a hermeneutic phenomenology turns not to the bureaucracy per se but to a broader (and perhaps more finely drawn) sense of the collective in its search for authorizing knowledge claims; intersubjective knowing within a hermeneutic circle of interpretive practices leads to the development of epistemic-interpretive communities of local knowledge, discourse, and practice – whether this be those communities’ work practices in interpreting texts or in conducting disciplinary or other business to sustain the collective.

One of the central hallmarks of interpretive research methodologies and methods today is the call for reflexivity on the part of researchers – attention to the
ways in which the researcher’s positionality can affect access to a research site, to people or to other sources of data, as well as the kinds of data generated, along with the impossibility of knowing how one’s presence might affect either the research or participants’ lives.\textsuperscript{3} It derives its philosophical mandate from, among others, feminist studies, cultural studies, intersectionality, and subaltern studies – those “standpoint” approaches to knowing that argue not only against the possibility of an Archimedean point from which to generate knowledge, but also against a single, unified subjective point. This is a hermeneutic phenomenological stance toward the multiplicities of experience and, hence, interpretation. It is increasingly being applied not only to individual researchers, but to the practices of disciplinary ways of knowing and the truth claims they generate.

Here is the analytic domain of science studies: the social (or sociological) study of science as a practice. It has largely taken as its focus to date practices in physical and natural sciences (e.g., Latour 1987, 1990, 1999, Latour and Woolgar 1988, 1990, Lynch 1990, Lynch and Woolgar 1990, Traweek 1988), but scholars are beginning to extend the approach to the study of political science, especially international relations, and organizational studies (see, e.g., Büger and Gadinger 2006, Friese 2001, Lapid 2002, Oren 2003, Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2002, Wæver 1998, Yanow 2005), and perhaps to other social sciences as well.

\textsuperscript{3} The methodological literature on reflexivity is extensive. Two recent articles are brilliant exemplars of the role of reflexivity in research: Shehata (2006), which emphasizes identity and knowledge production, and Pachirat (2007), which explores a more locational notion of positionality and the sight it enables.
Philosophers and social scientists are not the only ones asking about knowledge practices and truth claims. Over the last 10 years or so, calls for various practices to be grounded in evidence, and for that evidentiary grounding to be explicit and transparent, have been growing across the full spectrum of applied diagnostic sciences, from evidence-based medicine, the movement’s source, to evidence-based social work, psychotherapy, education, and so on, and most recently, evidence-based social statistics and even management (see, e.g., Academy of Management Learning and Education 6 (1) [March 2007], special issue). The reflectivity called into practice in these areas has, however, been of a different stripe: implicitly and unreflectively equating “evidence” with objectively determined facts, the movement has restricted its ways of knowing to experimental science, effectively eliminating experience-near field data not derived from control groups and randomized trials. 

The meaning-focused perspective of the various turns and their underlying philosophies requires a different approach to professional practices and their evidentiary underpinnings, as well as to theorizing about these. It calls for serious revisions in, among other things, our thinking about management practices, as well as the implementation of public policies and their analysis and evaluation ranging

4. A goodly number of recent US and UK evening television programs have also been concerned with questions of evidence. No longer “mystery” shows in the tradition of Agatha Christie’s Mrs. Marple or Hercule Poirot putting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, the several Law & Order series in the US and Inspector Lynley and other series in the UK have been joined by shows featuring pathologists and other scientists (e.g., Crossing Jordan, Waking the Dead, Silent Witness, The Eleventh Hour), and even the “ordinary” physician lead on the eponymous House is portrayed, with his team, in forensic fashion. What to make of this public preoccupation with evidence, truth claims, and ways of knowing, alongside our academic one? I’m not yet sure.
from welfare and non-formal educational policies to those shaping how we deal with and perceive "race-ethnic" groups. Specifically, these turns require a shift from thinking about the world of practice, including the people in it, as a value-free, technical-rational world to one marked by various modes of expressive action (of which instrumental rationality may be one).

Among other things, these ideas challenge the conceptualization of "expertise" built into the practices of management and administration, planning, policy-making, social work, community organizing, education, design – the so-called "minor professions" (Glazer 1974; see also Etzioni 1969), all those areas of specialization developed over the last century under the influence of the concept of "professionalization," along with their attendant academic curricula. Within organizational studies we find such an examination of ways of knowing in the subfield focused on reflective practice and reflective practitioners. Thanks to the work of Donald Schön (1983, 1985, 1987, 1991; Argyris and Schön 1974, 1978; see also Schmidt 2000), the idea of a "reflective" practitioner has taken hold not only in academic circles, but in various professional practices themselves, including managing, planning, and teaching.

Focusing attention on the details of professional practice – the kind of thinking professionals engage in that underlie the ways they go about doing their thinking and their work – Schön emphasized the need for what he called "reflection-in-action." What precisely it means to reflect in action, in the midst of doing one's professional work, rather than on action, looking back at what one has done, is not entirely clear in his work (Yanow and Tsoukas 2007). Another problematic in that
work concerns what it is that might incline a practitioner to engage in reflective practice. Here is where passionate humility, my central theme, comes in; and I will explore it in three areas: research methods, professional practices, and policy analysis.

**On passionate humility**

Kevin has his view.  
I have mine.  
His is wrong.

This headline appeared a few years ago in the *San Jose (CA) Mercury News*, quoting the then-city manager talking about an application for a city permit made by a business owner (“Kevin”) for some aspect of his business (a nightclub). It encapsulates precisely the opposite orientation toward management practice from what I wish to explore here: passionate humility. Elsewhere, I have defined this as the conviction that we are right, wedded to the acknowledgement of the possibility that we might be wrong (Yanow 1997; see also Yanow and Willmott 1999, 2000). In the rest of this essay, I wish to expand upon this definition by adding the *willingness to consider such a possibility* as a requisite condition for developing passionate humility and to ask what circumstances or predilections might predispose someone toward such willingness. Let me first discuss what passionate humility might mean.

The city manager in my example is long on passionate conviction in the rightness of his position. He appears (from the accompanying newspaper story) to assume that his understanding and assessment of the situation is self-evident
common sense, shared by all reasonable people. He seems to lack the ability to see the situation from another’s point of view. Moreover, he appears also to lack an inclination to try to do this: he neither sees the need to put himself in Kevin’s shoes nor has the inquiry mechanisms that would enable him to do so. The same orientation is exemplified in a story about Ben and Jerry’s, the ice cream manufacturing company. About Ben’s management style, Lager, the story’s author, wrote: “Ben was usually so single-mindedly convinced that he was right about something that he often didn’t even acknowledge the legitimacy of alternative points of view.” His own “management style was at odds with how he wanted the company to treat its employees” (quoted in Henriques 1994). What is missing from such a posture of impassioned certitude is a smidgen of doubt that one might not have all the answers, that “Kevin” and his counterparts might have a considered reason for taking a different position, that there might be another way of looking at the problem at hand. It is not just that the city manager seems not to acknowledge the possible validity of another view; he seems to lack that characteristic that might incline or lead him to reflect on his evidence, his findings, and his truth claims. One facet of this characteristic is humility.

Accounts of humility are more commonly found in the context of religious studies (e.g., Diamond 2006a) or even political philosophy (e.g., Button 2005, Diamond 2006b) than they are in organizational studies or other social sciences (but see Jasanoff 2003). The Jewish and Christian traditions on which these draw

5. My thanks to Victor Toom for bringing Jasanoff’s essay to my attention. Monroe’s (1996) work on altruism in the context of political science comes close; and perhaps humility, or
I am unaware of Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim or other sources – appear to treat humility as a necessary correction to excess pride and other manifestations of ego, although Diamond (2006a) points to sources (Maimonides, e.g.) that are careful to distinguish between extreme forms of self-effacement and more moderate expressions. I am, however, seeking less to explore the contours of humility per se, as a virtue in the abstract, than to articulate its manifestations conjoined with passionate conviction, specifically in scientific work and the areas of its particular application that are of concern to me: researching, practicing, and analyzing.

It is looking at humility in the context of such practices that adds a dimension seemingly not of concern to the theologians: what it might look like for someone in a decision-making capacity to enact humility while at the same time being "decisive." As this is not the customary way of thinking about professional practice, theorizing it must engage another question: what might (pre-)dispose a researcher, manager or policy analyst – the three cases I wish to engage here – to adopt a posture of humility together with her passionate conviction? Examining the way in which passionate humility is enacted in researching sheds some light on what it might look like in other arenas.

**Researching: How would you know if you were wrong?**

Organizational and political ethnography and other interpretive research methods, and ideas about science

He is quick, thinking in clear images;  
I am slow, thinking in broken images.

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even passionate humility as I am using it here, is a constituent of altruism, maybe even requisite for it, or at least for the kind of altruism she discusses.
He becomes dull, trusting his clear images;  
I become sharp, mistrusting my broken images.

Trusting his images, he assumes their relevance;  
Mistrusting my images, I question their relevance.

Assuming their relevance, he assumes the fact;  
Questioning their relevance, I question the fact.

When the fact fails him, he questions his senses;  
When the fact fails me, I approve my senses.

He continues quick and dull in his clear images;  
I continue slow and sharp in my broken images.

He in a new confusion of his understanding;  
I in a new understanding of my confusion.

– Robert Graves (1929; emphases added)

We have many ways of understanding,  
of which science is only one.  
– Freeman J. Dyson (2006)

Scientific writing addresses two questions, not only “What do you know?” but also “How do you know what you [claim to] know?” Embedded in research and writing processes is yet a third question, “How would you know if you were wrong?”

Underlying these questions is a concern with what authorizes an interpretation of evidence – a truth claim – and what elevates one interpretation over another. In extra-scientific realms of human life, classic stage theories of human cognitive development (Piaget 1955, Kohlberg 1971, Perry 1970) poked a major hole in assumptions that pragmatic, actionable knowledge is unitary, explaining differences instead as age- and/or life phase-related. Still, these

6. My thanks to Peri Schwartz-Shea for bringing this poem to my attention.
presumed a uniformity of age-based or other experience for all humans. Gilligan's work (1982; see also Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule 1986) challenged this uniformity on the basis of gender; but it, too, along with the initial formulation of standpoint theory (Hartsock 1987), presumed an experiential uniformity within that category. An expansion of phenomenological viewpoints, compassing race-ethnicity, class, physical ability, sexuality, and other varieties of human experience, has made ample argument for not considering that "everyone" sees the world the same way I do.

Cultural anthropology has been particularly sensitive to issues in the production of knowledge by anthropologists concerning those they study. External validity, internal validity, construct validity, reliability, and other concerns about truth claims have been debated vociferously, and at length, in political science, sociology, urban studies, organizational studies, and so on, as they have sought to establish scientific standing on par with their view of the natural-physical sciences. By contrast, cultural anthropology has embraced its status as a human science (Polkinghorne 1983) and, looking at its own practices, has asked after the sources and character of its truth claims (see, e.g., Geertz 1973, 1983). This inquiry has taken place, in particular, in two areas of anthropological work: the writing of monographs about the cultures they study (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Geertz 1988, Van Maanen 1986; see also Golden-Biddle and Locke 1993, 1997); and the "writing" of culture(s) in the form of curating and exhibiting practices in museums (Baxandall 1991, Clifford 1997, Karp and Lavine 1991). It is out of this willingness
to look at their own collective, disciplinary practices concerning the production of knowledge that the concern with reflexivity has grown, entailing both a positional reflexivity (the kind of argument advanced by embodied, experience-oriented, phenomenological, stage and standpoint theories) and an epistemic reflexivity (the sort of argument advanced by hermeneutic theories about knowledge production processes). Such arguments provide the rationale for a personal voice in writing, from accounting for the sources of one's inquiry in one's own life experiences to the use of the first person narrator (as in the opening of my text). Reflexivity enacts one of the hallmarks of the doing of science – an attitude of doubt, of questioning, of "testability," as distinct from taking things on "faith" or because a pronouncement is issued from a position of authority (let alone power), extended not only to methods procedures themselves but to the person of the researcher as an integral part of those procedures. As Latour (2004) notes, this "production of doubt" through various "distancing procedures" might well be challenged by common sense. 

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7. Latour (2004) uses these phrases with respect to law, drawing a distinction with science which seeks, in his view, to produce "knowledge" rather than doubt: he sees the Conseil d'Etat as exerting efforts to "sustain doubt for as long as possible" (p. 94), whereas in the scientific lab, "every effort is made to reach certainty," leaving it to others – colleagues, reviewers of manuscripts for journal publication, etc. – to "decide on the truth value of what is said": "Having accumulated their proofs of modesty and distance, the judges abruptly, and with the greatest arrogance, take on the wrath of sovereignty: they decide the issue. Scientists, having exercised all the passions of knowledge and every pretension to certainty, suddenly become modest and humbly defer to others" (p. 95). It seems to me, however, that the interesting distinction he draws has more to do with the point in each practice at which doubt and certainty are turned into the other: as he notes, both practices are concerned with legitimating the knowledge they produce and managing doubts about that authorizing process.
It is perhaps within the conduct of science that we have the strongest impulse to turn a reflective eye on what we are doing and to inquire into our assumptions. Reflexivity is a mode of inquiry – a willingness not just to ask (about the world, about evidence), but to ask about oneself, one’s own knowledge, one’s own role in producing evidence that then serves as the basis for one’s knowledge claims. It presupposes a mental (and perhaps even emotional) attitude that one may not have all the answers, a willingness to ask not only “How do I know?” – what is the basis for my truth claims? – but also, “How would I know if I were wrong?” This is one face of humility.8

Humility, then, might be a prerequisite for the very conduct of interpretive research, given its focus on others’ meanings. It may also be requisite for enacting reflective practice in the professions, including management.

8. What elevates one interpretation over another is either a consensus built across interpretive communities or the exercise of power on the part of one of them to subjugate the others, found, for example, in the “othering” of persons and views that treats “difference” as being “lesser” (see Minow 1990).

And yet, arguments within science – claims to knowledge – are fought fiercely, and largely on methodological grounds. Some might be willing to concede other than scientific ways of knowing; but within science, it has been rare to encounter those who would accept multiple ways of understanding. This has been particularly the case among those who are persuaded of the superiority of quantitative methods and the universal and generalizable laws they are argued to produce, with respect to those arguing on behalf of situated, grounded, local knowledge of a phenomenological-hermeneutic sort. In US political science, the hegemonic position of the former (in departmental positions and curricula, among journal editors and their boards, and in other key decision-making positions) led to the increasing departure of those of the latter persuasion from the ranks of the national professional association (the American Political Science Association), until the so-called Perestroika movement brought them back (see the essays in Monroe 2005). Sociology and organizational studies have been similarly marked by such tensions.
Managing: *Reflective practice*

If you know that you are not sure, you have a chance to improve the situation.⁹

Had the city manager been more of a reflective practitioner, he might have asked himself what lay behind what he perceived to be Kevin’s bizarre request concerning the nightclub permit. Even better, he might have asked Kevin himself, directly, to explain his thinking, and then he might have explained his, and perhaps – not necessarily, but perhaps – they would have together worked out a mutually acceptable solution.

Schön (1983) postulated that reflective practice entails entering into conversation with one’s materials and especially with their “backtalk.”¹⁰ How can we train ourselves, as well as others, to be open to backtalk from our inanimate – and I would add human – “materials”? Schön treated such backtalk as an unexpected “surprise” that interrupts the flow of work, but he seems not to have problematized the fact that not everyone sees such interruptions as opportunities for inquiry. The first step in reflective practice, then, seems to be the ability (or

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⁹. The whole passage is: “The freedom to doubt is an important matter in the sciences and, I believe, in other fields. It was born of a struggle. It was a struggle to be permitted to doubt, to be unsure. And I do not want us to forget the importance of the struggle and, by default, to let the thing fall away. I feel a responsibility as a scientist who knows the great value of a satisfactory philosophy of ignorance, and the progress made possible by such a philosophy, progress which is the fruit of freedom of thought....If you know you are not sure, you have a chance to improve the situation. I want to demand this freedom for future generations.”

¹⁰. Parts of this section draw on Yanow and Tsoukas (2007). The quotes from Dr. T draw on research for a course paper by Jamal Granick, and some of my analysis of his words and actions benefitted from discussions with Jamal.
willingness) to recognize an interruption, to see a surprise as "surprising" – as something out of the ordinary, as non-routine. That this does not happen automatically is evident in Klemola and Norros's observation from empirical research with anaesthesiologists: "Without recognition of the inherent uncertainty of the process, the situation was experienced as predictable..." (2001: 462). Surprises do not appear as surprises unless one has a framework for anticipating other than routine action.

Jerome Groopman describes a similar process among physicians, including himself, which he calls "diagnosis momentum": "Once a diagnosis is made, it is passed on to other doctors with ever-increasing conviction. Contradictory evidence is brushed aside.... 'When all the pieces of the clinical puzzle did not fit tightly together,' he writes, 'I moved some of those that didn't to the side. I made faulty assumptions, seeking to make an undefined condition conform to a well-defined prototype, in order to offer a familiar treatment" (Crichton 2007). "Diagnosis momentum" leads, in other words, to what Mary Hawkesworth (2006) has called "evidence blindness," the inability "to accept evidence that impugns [one's] beliefs," despite its compelling character (p. 10).

Recognizing the surprising character of the surprise requires moving from a posture of certainty to a posture of inquiry – that is, to reflect on the surprise. Schön's notion of reflective practice (Schön 1983, 1985, 1987, 1991) and the "double-loop learning" he and Chris Argyris (Argyris and Schön 1974, 1978) described seek to develop such inquiry mechanisms. But I find in their work little engagement with what might lead someone to inquire in such a fashion, perhaps
because both concepts, as their theorizing treats them, assume a self-improvement motivation that comes with the "learning" setting.\footnote{Theory in practice (Argyris and Schön 1974) draws its case material from students in their classes and the students' extra-curricular experiences, and it is clear that the students are in this class to learn how to be more effective interventionists. The practitioners in the cases are either consultants or managers who also want to be better at what they do – meaning that they, too, are in a learning situation. Organizational learning (Argyris and Schön 1978) moves the theory of action developed in the first book into an organizational setting. Not only is the theorizing grounded on the learning orientation of the earlier work; much of its theoretical argument treats individuals as agents learning for the organization.} What might lead to a posture of inquiry, it seems to me, is humility.

"It takes time to be reflective," as Dr. T, a psychotherapist and psychology professor, put it (Yanow and Tsoukas 2007).\footnote{Part of what takes time is listening: "‘How a doctor thinks can first be discerned by how he speaks and how he listens,’ Dr. Groopman writes, noting that studies have shown that physicians, on average, interrupt patients less than 18 seconds after they have begun telling their story" (Grimes 2007, quoting Jerome Groopman).} Certainly, that is one requirement. But it also takes something else: a willingness to appear, in one's role as professional or "expert," visibly and publicly not-knowing. Reflection in the midst of action rests on a reciprocal relationship with other parties to that action: in-process course adjustments draw on a conscious awareness in the moment that entails both a self-observing and an observing of other(s). It requires making the self "more permeable," as Dr. T also observed – making one's inquiry accessible to oneself and to other parties. As Dr. T remarked in the midst of his own reflective practice, "I don't usually do this, but..." And this requires relinquishing (or being willing to relinquish) the sense of control over the situation and/or over others (although one need not lose control over oneself). It means living with one's own possible anxieties induced by not-knowing, as well as with whatever anxieties might be
aroused by being perceived, publicly, as not-knowing. The willingness to do this seems to require an other-regardingness that also entails a setting aside of one’s ego, allowing someone else to share center stage. Here, once again, is humility.

Having recognized the surprise, reflective practice then requires the willingness to engage that surprise. Being open to surprise and willing to engage it may run against the grain of what most would consider to be “expertise.” Many experts, including “leaders,” are not willing to “allow the unpredictable to happen,” to use Dr. T’s words again. They may well see backtalk from their materials not as an opportunity to enter into reflective conversation, but as a challenge to their authority or position – misunderstanding leadership to mean omniscience, as well as omnipotence. This is what would lead them to respond with all manner of defensive behaviors intended to protect their self-perceptions, as Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978) noted so well.

Allowing the unpredictable to happen moves us out of the realm of “business as usual”: we might need to break old habits in order to become more reflective. Klemola and Norros (2001: 461) found two distinct professional practices among the anaesthesiologists they studied, each associated with a different epistemic orientation: one, a “reactive” habit of action, linked to belief in a predictable world, with an “underlying quest for certainty and detachment” characteristic of the

13. Although I do not find these themes sounded in Schön’s treatments of reflective practice – as noted above, he attends to “surprise” and “backtalk” but not to what would bring someone to become cognizant of the surprise, etc. – it seems to me that they are taken up to some extent in the discussions of Model II (Argyris and Schön 1974). The focus there seems to be on fear, however, and its role in prompting defensive behaviors. While I do not rule fear out as a major motivator preventing inquiry and reflection, I suspect that there is more going on in the enactment of expertise than can be explained by fear alone.
technical rational view dominant in medical thinking, in which "observation is identified with passive reception of sensory images yielding a secure basis for knowledge"; the other, an interpretive habit of action linked to a belief in an unpredictable world, leading to "the development of reflective and critical capacities."

In order to acquire that interpretive habit of reflexivity, one has first to be willing and open to considering the possibility that there might be something on which one has to, or ought to, reflect. This means admitting of the possibility that one's passionately held convictions might be wrong - that one may not have "all" the answers; that there may be other sources of knowledge that one has not considered, or other views or ways of seeing. Humility is, I think, a prerequisite for asking such questions of oneself, which is what reflection entails (although is not limited to). This, too, can be, or become, a habit - and it is one of the challenges, I think, that a hermeneutic-phenomenology puts to us through both interpretive methodology and reflective practice: cultivating the habit of stopping and looking at our decisions, our judgments, our diagnoses, to examine them, sometimes even before we take action. Reflective practice takes place not only after the fact; it can be enacted also in the midst of action.

What is at play here, then, is as much a reconceptualization of the character of expertise as it is a change in other aspects of practice. Passionate humility repositions the reflective practitioner as expert in processes of inquiry, and especially self- and mutual inquiry, as much as (if not more than) in subject-matter
expertise. She is willing to accord legitimacy to others’ local knowledge, whether of situations or of themselves. This is also one of the features of interpretive policy analysis, which, in its various forms, requires reflexivity in both methods and practice.

**Analyzing: Interpretive policy analysis**

We need...to see policy analysis as a process of inquiry that seeks to ask questions, rather than as a collection of tools and techniques designed to provide the right answers. The ‘right answers’ approach begins from the assumption that the perception of the problem is accurate, whereas the ‘inquiry’ approach problematizes the very definition of the problem.

- Yanow (1996: 15)

[Traditional policy analysis] is a language of certainty rather than a language of inquiry.

- Stein (2004: 140)

The language of certainty draws on passion; the language of inquiry, on reflection. Shifting from the one to the other enacts passionate humility, and this is embodied in interpretive policy analysis. First and foremost, such an approach accords legitimacy to local knowledge: “expertise” is seen not only as having the quality of technical-rational, university-based knowledge which is the (sole) property of policy analysts, but also as being the knowledge held by those for
whom policies are being design, based on their lived experiences of their own circumstances.14

Equally as important, interpretive policy analysis calls on practitioners to focus as much, if not more, on the framing of policy problems as it does on the "rightness" of the proposed solutions, seeing the latter as emerging more from the metaphors and other language forms of policy discourse than from any essence inhering in the policy issue.15 Interestingly, Jasanoff (2003) calls for a similar rethinking of the relationship among "policy-makers, experts, and citizens" in the context of science and technology policy, which leads her to call for "technologies of humility": "institutionalized habits of thought that try to come to grips with the ragged fringes of human understanding – the unknown, the uncertain, the ambiguous, and the uncontrollable" (227). Acknowledging the limits of prediction and control," she writes, technologies of humility confront "the normative implications of our lack of perfect foresight" (idem.), counteracting the "technologies of hubris" that privilege assumptions of objectivity, rigor, and complete knowledge.

In the context of race-ethnic policies, for example, and the demographic categories they assume and use, interpretive policy analysis encourages us to problematize the "natural" and "self-evident" character of those categories. We

14. For a treatment of the differences between these two, see Yanow (2004); see also Hummel (2001).

15. This literature is growing. For foundational works, see Rein (1976), Hawkesworth (1988), and Schön (1979). For more recent work, see Fischer (2003), Hajer and Wagenaar (2003), Schön and Rein (1994), and Yanow (1996, 2000).
might ponder whether, in fact, we need such categories for all public policy questions: what is the state’s interest in knowing whether an individual is *allochthoon* or *authochthoon*, Surinamese or American, Kashmiri or Bengali? And for how long: how far back do “origins” go? What more is added to our store of policy knowledge and understanding if a person is classed as “Moroccan” or as “Berber”? The approach is useful not just for the domestic social problems that have historically been central to the field of public policy analysis – welfare, housing, education, criminal justice, and so on – but also for international relations policies, such as development aid, and to a growing set of what might be called “post-9/11 issue arenas”: security studies and newer forms of refugee, migration, and integration policies.

That there is still more certainty than inquiry in such policies is evident in various analyses of governmental assistance to developing countries (e.g., Pischchikova 2006). The most recent manifestation of such an approach in public policy is the “evidence-based” policy movement. There has been a series of calls in recent years for evidence-based practices – in medicine, initially, in the UK and later in the US; in mental health, education, welfare, and criminal justice; and most recently in management. It is as if “the underlying motive were simplification until professional thinking could be replaced with a few rules” which create “measurable properties,” both of which lead to “a systematic blindness to pertinent features of professional behaviour” (Klemola and Norros 2001: 455). The best defense against such bureaucratic imperatives, these authors note, is “an insistence on qualities such as judgement and experience” (*idem.*) – and judgment is the exercise of
reflection and assessment. Yet, as Jasanoff (2003: 239) notes, the claims of objectivity entailed in the concept of evidence “hide the exercise of judgment, so that normative presuppositions are not subjected to general debate.” More reflective inquiry in a posture of passionate humility might lead to a greater examination of prior assumptions, as it opens the door to a greater accountability of policy analysts and policy-makers to members of the public.

**Concluding thoughts**

Those who are confident of their faith are not threatened but enlarged by the different faiths of others. …There are, surely, many ways of arriving at this generosity of spirit and each faith may need to find its own.

– Sir Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth
(quoted in Cahill 2006)

“Passionate humility” puts a name to a tension experienced in various areas of practice: how both to be committed to a course of action and to remain open to alternatives. The exercise of passionate humility enacts the phenomenological principle articulated by Martin Buber and developed by Carl Rogers (1951) of engaging with others as persons, not as objects. It also calls for keeping a certain indeterminacy in mind – an avoidance of the "rush to closure" (or "rush to diagnosis") that psychotherapists seek to follow – in face of the impossibility of knowing that all the factors of the situation in question have been recognized and appreciated. Administrators and others are often faced with pressures to act, often in the face of missing data, missing information, missing or silenced stories. Passionate humility would suggest continuing to keep the dialogue open as much
and as long as possible. Cultivating humility and openness about existing procedures and programs is one way of dealing with the "1491 problem" — that we never know what we might understand tomorrow that might change the values and practices in which we passionately believe today. It is an effort to push back against the certainty built in to the office-oriented rationality of Weberian bureaucracy, to minimize its needlessly irrational and destructive effects, in favor of a more humanistic, phenomenological-hermeneutic practice.

To many passionate humility seems an utter oxymoron. Several individuals, both classroom-based academics and office-based practitioners, have asked me, "How is it possible to do both?" I credit the difficulty of conceiving of the marriage of these two concepts at least in part to the increasing scientization of our society, as embodied in our emphasis on increasing task specialization, university education, and expertise. This has led, in both organizational and policy worlds, to an attitude that denies constituents and subordinates both intelligence and agency. The city manager's comment on Kevin's permit application is an example of this par excellence. It has its equivalent in the classroom, ranging from the open classroom of the early 1970s — in which a more flexible structure and teaching-learning processes, promoted as a benefit to student learning, were in fact parents' projections of what they would have wished for themselves in their own education years before — to contemporary teaching styles that remain oblivious to the wide range of students' ways of learning. A more student-centered teaching, drawing on Rogers' client-centered therapy, addresses such conceptualizations; but, as with research methods, reflective practice, and interpretive policy analysis, it challenges
the traditional understandings of expertise – and some of us are loathe to relinquish that understanding of our roles.

The question remains how one might acquire humility. The acquisition and development of passion and conviction appears to me less problematic conceptually (although depressive states often constrain their exercise). Perhaps, in the end, an openness to the kind of humility I am calling for requires a less paternalistic image of interpersonal relations, family structure, organizational hierarchies, and professional authority. Perhaps the practice of passionate humility does, in the end, come down to moral attitudes – to a valuing of otherness that sees difference not so much as a threat to one’s customary way of being, but as potentially enlarging it.

It seems fitting, given our geographical location, to turn to Spinoza in the end. Goldstein describes him as understanding that each of us has a “powerful tendency...toward developing a view of the truth that favors the circumstances into which we happened to have been born” (2006a; see also 2006b); and she notes, “Self-aggrandizement can be the invisible scaffolding of religion, politics or ideology” (Goldstein 2006a). Yet much as passion need not become self-aggrandizement, it would be wrong to understand that humility is equivalent to self-doubt. There is a tension here: paradoxically, humility requires self-confidence – the presence of mind, and of self, that enables one not just to take time, but to make time – time to listen, to reflect. I think the ancient verse (the opening epigraph), like some Zen koan, had it just right: I need to be for myself,
we must be for ourselves, but not only for myself or ourselves; and if we do not take action on this now, when shall we begin?

Postscript: If I have seen farther....

I find the practice of extending personal thanks at the end of an oratie to be itself an act of passionate humility. It recognizes that despite our work practices in researching and writing being largely solo endeavors, that work also has a large social component – even if many of the giants’ shoulders we stand on (Merton 1965) belong to scholars we meet and converse with "virtually," through the pages of their books and articles, rather than personally.

In my case, I extend personal thanks:
- to Alfons van Marrewijk, for recognizing a surprise in our meeting and being willing to act on it, and to Heidi Dahles, for moving that action a huge step further;
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My one regret is that my mother, Helen Vogel Yanow, who was my staunchest supporter, most active research assistant, and sharpest reader, did not live to see me become a kennismigrant or kenniswerker [the Immigration and Naturalization Service’s new (in 2005) designation for knowledge migrant or knowledge worker]. Given my work on state categories and culture and organizational learning, I think she would have shared my amusement at falling into such a category designation.
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