Hermeneutics and the Question of Transparency

Andrew Davison
Vassar College

The call for "evidentiary and logical" data-transparency standards[1] in the APSA's "Statement on Data Access and Research Transparency (DA-RT)" opens an important conversation about transparency in political inquiry. In what follows, I consider what transparency might mean in the context of the hermeneutical interpretation of texts, as an empirical and non-positivist mode of political inquiry.

Hermeneutics is itself a diverse tradition. I write primarily within the tradition of the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose insights I have sought to elaborate and illustrate for political explanation. Gadamerian hermeneutics offers what may be understood as guides for transparency. Yet understanding these guides requires delineating how hermeneutics constitutes the explanatory situation of political inquiry in terms very much at odds with the monolingual, empiricist-positivist, data- and method-driven emphases of the DA-RT Statement's vision of transparency. A monolanguage "tends ...to reduce language to the One, that is, to the hegemony of the homogenous."[2] Hermeneutics seriously challenges the idea that there can ever be a single, operational language for constituting anything; in the context of the DA-RT Statement, it parts with the idea that the Statement's empiricist-positivist, social scientific constitutive terms adequately characterize all forms of political inquiry. A brief elaboration of how DA-RT homogenizes all political inquiry in empiricist-positivist terms and thus erases important, alternative empirical and non-scientist ways of constituting political inquiry seems helpful to clarifying a different, contrasting vision of transparency available within hermeneutical political inquiry.

Essentially, the DA-RT Statement and its supporting literature assume that all political inquirers work in a world of inquiry that understands itself as a "science" of "knowledge" "production" and "transfer," in which researchers "gather," "extract," "collect," and "base conclusions" on "data" (or "evidence"/"information"), "using" different "methods." Indeed, the promulgation of the guidelines follows concerns in the APSA's Governing Council about problems of non-replicability and "multiple instances" in which scholars were unwilling or unable to "provide information" on "how they had derived a *particular conclusion from a specific set of data* or observations."[3] Making "data" available on which "inference and interpretations are based" ("data access"), explaining the gen-

esis of the data ("production transparency"), and demonstrating the data's use ("analytical transparency") are, for the supporters of DA-RT, indispensable for valid, rigorous, accurate, credible, and legitimate knowledge.[4]

The homogenization of political inquiry into data- and method-driven empiricism-positivism is happening in the context of otherwise welcome efforts to open the tent of political inquiry as wide as possible. Lupia and Elman underscore that DA-RT aims for "epistemically neutral" standards that respect the integrity of, apply across, and facilitate communication between diverse Political Science "research traditions" and "communities."[5]

> Political Science is a methodologically diverse discipline, and we are sometimes unable to appreciate how other social scientists generate their conclusions....Higher standards of data access and research transparency will make cross-border understanding more attainable.[6]

But the tent stretches only as far as the terms of data- and method-driven analysis reach. Non-quantitative research is generally categorized as "qualitative" and uniformly characterized in empiricist-positivist terms: "Transparency in any research tradition—whether qualitative or quantitative—requires that scholars show they followed the rules of data collection and analysis that guide the specific type of research in which they are engaged." "[Qualitative] research generally entails … producing thick, rich, and open-ended data;" "Qualitative scholars … gather their own data, rather than rely solely on a shared dataset;" They may not "share a commitment to replication [but] should value greater visibility of data and methods."[7] For Lupia and Elman, "our prescriptive methodologies"—they mention statistical analysis, mathematical modeling, seeking meaning in texts, ethnographic fieldwork, and laboratory experimentation—"all involve extracting information from the social world, analyzing the resulting data, and reaching a conclusion based on a combination of the evidence and its analysis."[8]

There are of course non-quantitative researchers who embrace qualitative empiricist-positivist practice—who have, to emphasize the point, "methodologies" that "extract" "information," "analyze" "resulting data," and "reach" "conclusion[s]" based on a combination of evidence and its analysis"—but not all of us engaged in political analysis do, and those of us who constitute our practices in hermeneutical terms do so from principled commitments other than those of empiricism-positivism, with its foundation in the unity of science, and its consequent commitment to methodologically governed sense-data observation, generalizable theorization, and deductive-nomological explanation. The idea of the unity of science suggests that the differences between the non-human natural (usually

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Andrew Davison is Professor of Political Science at Vassar College. He can be found online at andavison@vassar.edu and at https://politicalscience.vassar.edu/bios/andavison.html.

[1] Lupia and Elman 2014, 20.
[2] Derrida 1998, 40.
[3] Lupia and Elman 2014, 20, emphasis added.

[4] DA-RT Ad Hoc Committee 2014, 25.
[5] Lupia and Elman 2014, 20–22.
[6] Lupia and Elman 2014, 22.
[7] DA-RT Ad Hoc Committee 2014, 27–28; see also Elman and Kapiszewski 2014.
[8] Lupia and Elman 2014, 20 and 22.

empiricist-positivist) sciences and the human-social sciences are a matter of degree—not fundamental—such that the governing terms and practices of the former, like "data and method," may be seamlessly replicated within the latter. The hermeneutic tradition begins elsewhere, viewing the differences between the two domains as fundamental, and, therefore, endorsing different explanatory terms and practices.

While this is not the place for an exhaustive account of Gadamerian hermeneutics, a delineation of its central presuppositions, along with some brief illustrations, may prove helpful for showing what transparency might mean for this research approach. For hermeneutics, social and political explanation presupposes that human beings are meaning-making creatures who constitute their actions, practices, relations, and institutions with purposes that must be accounted for in any compelling explanation. Rather than the scientific theorization of causality through stabilized operational terms, hermeneutics favors the analysis of the multiple and layered, subjective and inter-subjective meanings that constitute texts or text analogues (actions, practices, relations, and institutions). "Constitute" here means to mark the identity of, and distinguish from, other texts or text-analogues that appear similar based on the observation of sense-data alone—such that, where constitutive meanings differ, the text or text-analogues differ as well. Constitutive meanings are, in principle, accessible in and through open-ended actual or metaphorical (as in archival) conversation out of which the interpreter produces accounts or constellations of meanings. These constellations of meanings include both the meaningful horizons of the interpreter that have come to expression through the foregrounding—the bringing to conscious awareness and conversation—of the interpreter's prejudgments in relation to a perplexing question, and the horizons or meanings of the text or text-analogue that the interpreter receives in conversation.

Gadamer referred to this constellation as a *fusion of horizons* (often mistaken for uncritical agreement or affirmation).[9] The fusion entails coming to understand differently: an alteration of some kind in the content of the interpreter's fore-horizons or pre-conversational understanding. "It is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all."[10] Understanding in a different way can mean many things. The interpreter—and thus those with whom the interpreter is in explanatory exchange—may come to see the perplexing text or text analogue in either a slightly or radically different way, with a new set of critical concerns, or with a new awareness of the even more opaque quality of the initial perplexity (etc.). The key analytical guideline is to make and keep a conversation going in which some alteration in the interpreter's prior understanding occurs—so that one understands differently (perhaps so differently that while one may disagree with the constitutive meanings of a text, one's disagreement has become nearly impossible, not because one wishes to agree but because one has come to understand).

There is more to say, but already it is possible to identify

aspects of hermeneutical explanation that may be made transparent, that is, that may be made explicit for other interlocutors as part of conversational inquiry: the identification and expression of the initial perplexity or question that prompted the conversational engagement; the horizons of which the interpreter has become conscious and that have been foregrounded in ongoing conversation; the meanings the interpreter has received in conversation in their multiplicity and constitutively layered qualities; and how, having been in conversation, the interpreter has come to understand differently. The hermeneutical approach therefore constitutes the explanatory situation very differently than data and method-driven, empiricism-positivism.

The constitutive terms are not data and method, but constitutive meaning and conversation (or dialogue, or multilogue). There are no initial data; there are questions or perplexing ideas that reach an interpreter and that the interpreter receives because they have engaged curiosities or questions within the interpreter's fore-horizons. Hermeneutics is empirical (based on the conceptually receptive observation of constitutive meanings) without being empiricist (based on sensory observation, or instrumental sensory enhancement). Meaningfulness—not evidence—arrives, reaches one like a wave; prejudgments occur and reoccur. Hermeneutics envisions foregrounding and putting at play these prejudgments as inquiry. Putting at play means foregrounding for conversation the elements of the interpreter's fore-horizons of which the interpreter becomes, through conversation, conscious. Interpretation involves not collecting or extracting information, but resolute and considerate, conversational receptivity, an openness to receiving meaningfulness from the text—even where the perplexity is surprising or unsettling, and often especially then—and from within the conscious prejudgments that flash and emerge in the reception of the texts. The hermeneutical, conversational interpretation of texts offers access to the concepts meaningfully constitutive of the lives, practices, and relations that inquirers seek to understand or explain.

In conversation, the interpreter aims to let the great variety of happenings of conversation happen: questioning, listening, suggesting, pausing, interrupting, comparing, criticizing, suspending, responding—and additional reflection, suggestion, etc. Conversation does not mean interview or short-lived, harmonious exchange; it entails patient exploration of crucial constitutive meanings. Criticism—to take the most controversial aspect—happens in conversation. (One could say that, in some interlocutive contexts, interlocutors make their strongest assertions in conversation; without such foregrounding there would be no conversation.) But conversation is neither a method nor a strategy; it is a rule of thumb that suggests an interpreter ought to proceed in ways that cannot be anticipated or stipulated in advance, to receive unanticipated, perplexing, novel, or even unsurprising qualities of a text. Not surveying but being led elsewhere in and through actual or metaphorical, reciprocal reflection—receiving/listening, rereceiving/relistening.

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[9] Gadamer 1989.
[10] Gadamer 1989, 297.

Hermeneutical engagement is, therefore, less about reaching a conclusion than immersion in the meaningfulness of difficult conversation. It seeks not to dismiss or to affirm a prior theoretical hunch or conceptual framework (though a new dismissal or *re*-affirmation may constitute a different understanding). Almost without seeking, it seeks a conversational alteration in the interpreter's fore-horizons, and those with whom the interpreter, as *theorist*, converses. As such, hermeneutics requires not concluding but *losing*—not in the sense of not winning, but in the sense of relinquishing or resituating a prior outlook, of allowing something else to happen in one's understanding. Hermeneutics encourages losing in the sense of altering the constitutive horizons of conversationally engaged practices of social and political theorization.

There is more to say abstractly about transparency within hermeneutics, but two all-too brief examples of what losing might mean in the context of explanatory practice may be helpful. Both are drawn from studies concerning the question of political modernity in Turkey, and both involve hermeneutical engagement with texts that express meanings constitutive of political practice. In this regard, these examples also help illustrate how the hermeneutical interpretation of texts relates to the explanation of political practices and power relations. In my studies of what is commonly described as "the secular state" in Turkey, I have suggested that to explain the constitutive vision and practices associated with "Turkey's secular state," inquirers must lose "secularism" for "laicism."[11] "Secularism" meaningfully connotes structural differentiation and separation of spheres and is a central analytical concept in the forehorizon of non-hermeneutical, aspirationally nomological, comparative-empiricist political analysis. "Laicism," derived in Turkey from the French *laïcisme* and brought to expression in Turkish as *laiklik*, connotes possible structural and interpretive integration. Laicism was, moreover and fundamentally, the expressed aim and meaningfully constitutive principle of the founding Kemalist reconfiguration in the 1920s of the prior Ottoman state-Islam relation—a reconfiguration that entailed aspects of separation within overarching constitutive emphases and practices of structural and interpretive integration, control, and official promotion. Hermeneutically speaking, authoritatively describing the founding power relations between state and religion in Turkey as "secular" (with its non- or sometimes anti-religious connotations) thus misses their definitive, constitutive laicist and laicizing (not secular or secularizing) qualities.

It further leads to uncompelling accounts of recent theopolitics in Turkey as radical departure, as opposed to consistent and serious intensification.[12]

A second example: In Mehmet Döşemici's hermeneutical analysis of the mid-twentieth century debate in Turkey over Turkey's application to the European Economic Community, Döşemici effectively suggests that to explain Turkey-Europe relations, inquirers must lose "Turks as not- or not-yet-European" for "Turks as fully European."[13] Hermeneutically engaging texts of profound existential debate between 1959 (Turkey's EEC application) and 1980 (when a military coup squelched the debate), Döşemici illuminates something—modernity in Turkey—that defies empiricist social scientific judgment about Turkey-Europe relations: Between 1959 and 1980, "Turks inquired into who they were and where they were going…. To the extent that this active, self-reflexive and self-defining experience of modernity is historically of European origin…Turkey had during these years, become fully European."[14] Just as to explain the power relations constitutive of Turkey's state, inquirers must lose secularism for laicism, to explain the Turkey-EEC relation as that relation was constituted—*made what it was in Turkey*—inquirers must lose "not/not yet modern/European" for "fully modern/European." Losing as social theoretical alteration—establishing momentarily a new horizon for continuing conversation and thought about secularity, *laïcité*, modernity, Europe, Turkey, Islam, East, West, borders, etc.—happens through hermeneutical engagement with the texts (archives, debates, etc.) expressive of the meanings constitutive of political practice.

In such inquiry, replication of results is not impossible—one may read the texts of the aforementioned analyses and receive the same meaningfulness—but, for credible and legitimate conversation, is also not necessarily desired. There is awareness that any interpreter may see a text (or text-analogue) differently and thus may initiate and make conversation happen from within a different fore-horizon. The range of different interpretations may continually shift; conversation may always begin again and lead somewhere else. There is no final interpretation, not only because others see something entirely new but also because old questions palpitate differently. There is no closing the gates of interpretation around even the most settled question.

The reasons for this open-endedness relate in part to the interplay between subjective and intersubjective meanings, which has implications for transparency. Subjective meanings are purposes constitutive of individual action; intersubjective meanings are shared and contested understandings constitutive of relational endeavors (practices, etc.). For example, a subjective meaning constitutive of my work on *laiklik* is to understand possibilities for organizing the relationship between power and valued traditions; intersubjectively, this meaningfulness is itself constituted by my participation in inquiry (a practice) concerning the politics of secularism. Intersubjectively, none of the terms of my subjective meaning—"understand," "power," "secular," etc.—are "mine." They indicate my participation in a shared, and contested, language of inquiry. Subjectivity is always already intersubjectively constituted, and a full awareness of constitutive intersubjective content eludes the grasp of any interlocutor. Indeed, after Wittgenstein, Marx, Freud, Foucault, and Derrida, there is a compelling recognition that the linguistic, material, psychological, discur-

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[11] See Davison 1998; Davison 2003.
[12] Parla and Davison 2008.

[13] Döşemici 2013, 227.
[14] Döşemici 2013, 227.

sive, and *differánce* sources of meaning lie prior to or outside the conscious apprehension of interpreting subjects.-

While hermeneutics may therefore be significantly transparent about the happenings of conversation, it is also transparent about the impossibility of complete transparency. Aspects of the subjective and intersubjective meanings of laiklik, for example, may be received in the founding archives, but their constitutedness reaches deep into the lives of the main political actors, Ottoman archives, and those of the French Third Republic. Hermeneutical explanation thus always occurs within unsurpassable limits of subjective and intersubjective human comprehension. Something may always elude, remain ambiguous or opaque, and/or come to conversation for understanding differently—even for understanding hermeneutical understanding differently: My view is that, in favoring constitutive alteration and losing over knowledge accumulation, hermeneutics must be open to losing even its own governing characterization of the hermeneutical situation.

Hermeneutically raising the possibility of losing hermeneutics allows me to underscore what is most compelling about Gadamer's hermeneutics, namely its philosophical, not methodological, emphasis: it does not prescribe rules for interpretation *in order to* understand. Rather, it suggests that the interpretation of meaning happens as if it were a conversation—receiving perplexity, ceaselessly foregrounding fore-horizons, letting the meaningfulness of the perplexity come through, losing, understanding differently. In my work, I have tried to adapt this to inquiry with rules of thumb for interpretation, but the disposition needs no rules. The openness of hermeneutics lies in its not being a method. If one views social life as meaningfully constituted, then conversation is what happens when one understands. And in inquiry, this occurs with a variety of methodological (e.g., contextualist, presentist) and political philosophical (e.g., critical theoretical, conservative, etc.) fore-horizons. Rival interpretations of texts in the history of political thought—*The Prince* teaches evil[15] or a flexible disposition[16] or strategic aesthetic perspectival politics[17]—essentially indicate the putting at play of different pre-judgments in the reception of a perplexing text. Even an imposed, imperial reading may be reconstructed in conversational terms—as the foregrounding of fore-horizons. (Imposition can shut down conversation, but, in some interlocutive contexts, it can also stimulate it.)

From somewhere other than method, one may further say that hermeneutical analysis does not require hermeneutics. Hélène Cixous' "pirate reading" of *The Song of Roland*, which she "detested adored," resembles a conversational engagement:[18] She "abandons" "the idea of fidelity" that she had "inherited from my father" and had "valued above all." "I loved Roland and suddenly"—while struggling to see the face of her schoolgirl classmate, Zohra Drif—"I no longer saw any way to love him, I left him." But she could not "give up reading" and *loses* fidelity for "be[ing] touched on all sides." Conversation—"The song has no tears except on one side."—and she "understands" differently:

> I drew *The Song* toward me but who was I, I did several different readings at the same time when I rebelled with the Saracens. ... before the corpse of the one I could understand Roland's pain I could understand the pain of King Malcud before the other corpse, before each corpse the same pain ... . I could understand the color of the song when I saw that the song sees Count Roland as more and more white the others as more and more black and having only teeth that are white I can do nothing than throw the book across the room it falls under the chair. It's quite useless. I am touched on all sides ... I can no longer close my eyes I saw the other killed, all kill the others, all the others of the others kill the others all smother trust and pity, the spine of the gods split without possible recourse, pride and wrongdoing are on all sides. But the very subtle and passionate song pours all portions of tears over the one to whom it has sworn fidelity. All of a sudden I recognize its incense and fusional blandishment. How is evil beautiful, how beautiful evil is, and how seductive is dreadful pride, I am terrified. I have loved evil, pain, hurt, I hate it, all of a sudden I hatedloved it. The song seduced and abandoned me. No, I abandoned myself to the song. There is no greater treachery.[19]

"Rebelled with the Saracens," "the color of the song," "useless," "its incense," "I am terrified," "hateloved," … all original contributions to knowing *The Song of Roland*. Practicing/not practicing hermeneutics, one must be prepared to let, receive, foreground, converse, lose, and understand differently; and, to underscore, to be open to understanding even these terms (conversation, etc.) differently.[20] As noted above, these aspects of conversational inquiry—the identification of the interpretive perplexity; the letting, foregrounding, and reception of constitutive meaningfulness, both within an interpreter's forehorizons and within texts as they are received conversationally within those horizons; and understanding differently as losing and conceptual alteration—provide the basis for a kind of transparency that may be encouraged in conversation with the aspirations of the DA-RT Statement.

The hermeneutical rejection of the unity of science implies an unfortunate binary between data and meaning, especially insofar as both are situated in a common, and contested, project of social and political explanation. Cross-border work between data- and meaning-governed analyses occurs, and one can be interested in both, in various ways. Yet, within the Gadamerian tradition, among other non-empiricist and non-positivist approaches to political inquiry, the distinction has meaning, and the terms constitutive of one world (e.g., data) are not always meaningful in others. Let's be transparent: to speak as the DA-RT Statement does, in data and method terms,

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[15] Strauss 1952.
[16] Skinner 1981.
[17] Dietz 1986.
[18] Cixous 2009.

[19] Cixous 2009, 65–67.
[20] Davison 2014.

is to speak a very particular language. Political inquiry is multilingual. The customary tendency at the disciplinary-administrative level is for the standardizing terms of empiricism-positivism to dominate conversation and for hermeneutics not to be read with the relevance to explanation that it understands itself as having.

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Reflections on Analytic Transparency in Process Tracing Research

Tasha Fairfield
London School of Economics and Political Science

While the aims of APSA's Data Access and Research Transparency (DA-RT) initiative are incontrovertible, it is not yet clear how to best operationalize the task force's recommendations in the context of process tracing research. In this essay, I link the question of how to improve analytic transparency to current debates in the methodological literature on how to establish process tracing as a rigorous analytical tool. There are tremendous gaps between recommendations and actual practice when it comes to improving and elucidating causal inferences and facilitating accumulation of knowledge. In order to narrow these gaps, we need to carefully consider the challenges inherent in these recommendations alongside the potential benefits. We must also take into account feasibility constraints so that we do not inadvertently create strong disincentives for conducting process tracing.

Process tracing would certainly benefit from greater analytic transparency. As others have noted,[1] practitioners do not always clearly present the evidence that substantiates their arguments or adequately explain the reasoning through which they reached casual inferences. These shortcomings can make it very difficult for scholars to interpret and evaluate an author's conclusions. At worst, such narratives may read as little more than potentially plausible hypothetical accounts.

Researchers can make significant strides toward improving analytic transparency and the overall quality of process tracing by (a) showcasing evidence in the main text as much as possible, including quotations from interviews and documents wherever relevant, (b) identifying and discussing background information that plays a central role in how we interpret evidence, (c) illustrating causal mechanisms, (d) assessing salient alternative explanations, and (e) including enough description of context and case details beyond our key pieces of evidence for readers to evaluate additional alternative hypotheses that may not have occurred to the author. Wood's research on democratization from below is a frequently lauded example that illustrates many of these virtues.[2] Wood clearly articulates the causal process through which mobilization by poor and working-class groups led to democratization in El

[1] Elman and Kapiszewski 2014; Moravcsik 2014.

[2] Wood 2000; Wood 2001.