Policy in Question: From Problem Solving to Problematology

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Abstract

Since the postpositivist critique of the policy sciences, policy theory has come into question. More particularly, the ‘problem orientation’ upon which Lasswell defined the policy sciences has come into question because policy making does not conform to his problem solving logic. That logic is inadequate. I argue that we must reconsider the problem orientation at a philosophical level to reconstruct it upon a more appropriate foundation. This thesis does not depict how we should conduct policy making but deals with foundational concepts and issues. I draw on Michel Meyer’s new philosophy of questioning, problematology, to consider policy theory in terms of questioning and to reconstruct the problem orientation on problematological grounds.

The thesis is in two parts. Part I reviews and critiques past policy theory in terms of questioning, commencing from the problem solving basis of Dewey’s philosophy and Lasswell’s ‘policy sciences’. I criticise this basis and outline how it made politics and argumentation residual aspects of reason. I discuss how the postpositivist critique problematised the policy sciences and how this permits us to pose policy theory itself as a question. Part II answers this question by reconstructing policy theory upon the problematological foundation of knowledge. Meyer’s logic of questioning incorporates problematicity in answering, allowing us to account for the politics of policy. I outline the dynamic nature of the logic of questioning and how it incorporates key concepts of interpretative epistemology; hermeneutics, dialectic, and rhetoric. I conclude by describing policy making as a synthesis of two questions: the policy question and the question of legitimacy.
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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part I Problem Solving</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction: Questioning Policy</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. John Dewey and Problem Solving</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Dewey’s theory of inquiry</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Answering as the dissolution of questions: positivism and pragmatism</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Inquiry and practical reason</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Recovering the value of questioning</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Questioning and democracy</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. The Problem Orientation and the Policy Sciences</strong></td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Harold Lasswell: theorising the policy sciences</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Questioning the scientific model</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The scientific solution to the problem of politics</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Science and the problematicity of policy</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. The Politics of Policy Problems</strong></td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Problems, policy problems, and problem setting</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Politics and the policy process</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rethinking the problem orientation</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Increasing Problematicity: Interpretative Epistemology and the 'Argumentative Turn'</strong></td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The question of meaning</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Theorising problematicity: the ‘argumentative turn’</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Theorising reason: logic versus rhetoric</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Questioning, rhetoric, and interpretative theory</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part II  Problematology  181

5. Questioning: The Philosophical Foundation of Reason  183
   1. Questioning as foundation  185
   2. Postmodernism and questioning  201
   3. The problematological foundation and policy theory  219

6. Reconstructing the Problem Orientation  227
   1. Commencing from questioning  228
   2. Problematological answering  240
   3. The autonomy of the answer  255
   4. Problematological policy theory  263

7. The Problem Orientation and Interpretative Policy Inquiry  267
   1. The tripartite conception of the problematological logos  268
   2. Practice as questioning  299

8. The Question of Legitimacy  325
   1. State and society: the problem of government  330
   2. Legitimacy and discourse  352
   3. Legitimacy and the policy process: the practice of power  360
   4. Legitimacy, democracy, and policy studies  369

Conclusion  377
Notes  385
References  395
Policy theory has become a problem. The postpositivist critique has undermined the scientific conception of policymaking and exposed the idea of a problem solving policy science as a ‘myth’ (Rein and White 1977). In reality, political actors disagree over the nature and meaning of policy problems, holding many different interpretations of them and arguing with each other about them throughout the policy process. Apodictic policy solutions are rarely found, even in the most mundane of cases. The policy process is characterised by complexity and uncertainty, and sometimes goes on indefinitely without ultimate resolution. In fact, the implementation of solutions tends to change the very nature of problems, leading to difficulties in evaluation. Politics is everywhere in policymaking – it even seems to commence after policy decisions have been made rather than being completed before the policy process commences (Hajer 2003a: 89). The idea that the policy process is an ordered separation of politics and administration has collapsed. Sometimes solutions are found but not implemented, at other times they are implemented, evaluated and found to have failed but are not reconstituted. On other occasions policymakers do nothing about a problem at all, or insist that there is no problem, despite other views to the contrary – is this a solution? The very notion of what constitutes a solution becomes problematic under these circumstances. What,
precisely, is the relationship between policy problems and policy solutions?

Despite the confusion, policy still deals with problems. And, in general, policymaking goes on without collapsing into irrationality. We are able to coordinate responses to our problems, or least we can do enough to go on with debate, making changes incrementally as we go. Sometimes policymakers have even restructured major policy areas, for example, remodelling welfare states and establishing international environmental agreements. Whatever our views of these changes, the ‘problem orientation’ inherited from the work of Lasswell and Dewey still seems to accurately characterise what policy is about, even if we recognise the positivist or pragmatist versions of problem solving as idealistic descriptions. Many advances have already been made in policy theory. The interpretative or postpositivist theorists have retained aspects of Dewey’s and Lasswell’s ideas but have also drawn upon European philosophy and social theory in the form of hermeneutics, phenomenology, critical theory and poststructuralism (see Fischer 2003a; and, for a concise summary, Yanow 2003: 229-34). Taking this work as a starting point, we can now seek a framework within which to develop new theory that incorporates the contingency of politics and the complexity of policymaking activity with the problem orientation of policy theory.
Accompanying this theoretical shift away from the problem solving model is its empirical counterpart, found particularly in new institutional arrangements. The search for problems and solutions is no longer carried out exclusively by the state but is conducted in concert with non-state actors in complex, changing networks (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003b). Hajer and Wagenaar (2003b) point out that the shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ is not just theoretical but describes well the changing contemporary practice of politics. With major changes to the welfare state, and the activity of new social movements that conduct politics outside the state (on ‘subpolitics’, see Beck 1996), the institutional structure by which we understand policymaking has been problematised. We can no longer substitute institutional structures for our theoretical organising concepts, nor rely on the inertia of established power to make our definitions of policy for us, because the power to set problems does not lie exclusively with the state. Rather, we have to look to new interpretative theories in order to explain reality. And, I would also suggest, this refocuses our attention on policy problems themselves as the object of our inquiry, and on problem setting, deliberation and political mobilisation in particular. Much work has already been completed in this respect, in policy studies and in political and social theory generally. The trend was summed up at a historical level by Lyotard, who said we are living in a ‘postmodern condition’ in which everything is uncertain and the organising conceptual narratives of modernity no longer adequately describe the world. The postmodern
condition is a period in which everything is problematic; problematicity has come to the fore across society as well as in scholarly thought. The trends in policy studies thus reflect trends elsewhere.

In short, everything about policy has been called into question because its prior meaning, the rational progress towards solutions by stages, no longer holds. Thus we are left with many questions about the nature of policy as well as the question of formulating and justifying our identity as a scholarly discipline, which has also been called into question by the postpositivist critique of policy science. We need to question our own organising concepts, our conceptual framework through which we view the policy world, which in turn returns us to questioning itself. We need to reconsider what constitutes a problem and what a solution if we are to ground and extend the postpositivist revitalisation of policy studies and develop better theory about the policy process, which in turn will inform future empirical study. Some scholars have already posed the problem of policy theory as a problem, but as a policy problem (Brunner 1991). My argument in this thesis is that policy theory is not a policy problem. It is a philosophical problem. And by a problem I mean a question for which we seek an answer. We must return to the concept of inquiry, as questioning, and re-examine the ‘problem orientation’ of policy theory, this time looking for a suitable discourse to account for all the complex permutations of policymaking.
Policy and politics have always involved questioning, but its meaning is often taken for granted. In fact, neither philosophy nor politics has paid much attention to questioning as such. Any search of philosophical dictionaries reveals scant mention of questioning, and often only as a specialised branch of logic. In politics, we discuss problems all the time but the meaning of ‘problem’ and ‘solution’ has often been taken for granted. Policy science has largely focused on solutions rather than questions. This was quite natural, considering that Lasswell viewed multidisciplinary policy science as holding the potential to solve our most difficult social problems. Policy science was to be a general solution to the question of politics itself, in the hope of avoiding protracted, and especially violent, political conflict.

But this has not occurred in the ways imagined. Despite all the sophistication of the social sciences, policy problems have persisted, so much so that it seems they are rarely resolved as imagined by the policy sciences. Far from resolving problems, empirical study has revealed that policy processes are messy affairs in which there is little agreement among the participants. Policy discourse produces a multiplicity of interpretations of problems and the whole process seems to continually reconstruct problems in new form rather than proceed neatly towards resolution. Today, policymaking tends to produce new problems even as we implement solutions (Hajer 2003b). But isn’t this, too, a result, even if it does not dissolve the problem? Problematicity is everywhere in the field of policymaking despite the commonsense understanding of policy
as problem solving. We need a new way to understand both problems and solutions that incorporates problematising and partial answering. I propose a philosophical, internal reconstruction of the theory of policymaking by reconsidering the nature of problems and solutions.

Writers in the policy sciences have already undertaken much work in reviewing the field and proposing new directions. A number of disciplinary stocktaking exercises have taken place in the journal, *Policy Sciences* (Brewer 1974; Brunner 1991; de Leon 1981, 1994; Dryzek and Torgerson 1993; Lasswell 1970; Quade 1970). I do not deal with the entire range of the policy literature. I concentrate broadly on the ‘interpretative’ strand of policy theory which has been at the forefront of the postpositivist critique. I do not suggest that existing interpretative approaches are incorrect or need to be replaced. Fischer (2003a) makes a comprehensive summary of work in the field that reveals the diversity and fecundity of interpretative approaches to policy studies. I support the interpretative approach to policy and take the postpositivist criticisms of empiricism as my starting point. I do not reject empirical inquiry but rather seek a new framework in which to conduct it. Nor do I aim to develop a methodology for policy science in the manner of other sciences. My aim is to develop the interpretative approach and synthesise it with a new understanding of the problem orientation, drawing together the various strands of interpretative theory in an overarching philosophical framework. The idea is to articulate a broad theoretical orientation for conceptualising policy in terms familiar to us,
to bring together interpretative theory with the origins of the policy sciences tradition in the concept of policy problems.

Nor do I make prescriptions about the practice of policy analysis. Indeed, we do not need philosophy to practice policy. We can discuss policy problems, debate solutions and implement programs without any knowledge of the logic underlying our thoughts; ordinary language contains everything we need to operate in the political world. Neither is this a normative thesis. I make no prescriptions about what policy makers should do about problems nor how they should implement solutions. The strength of a philosophical approach lies not in eliminating questions but in giving expression to questions, in 'bringing the unthought out from thought' (Meyer 1995: 11). Philosophy assists us to examine our most fundamental assumptions about the world; to reveal, as Dewey put it, 'how we think' (1971).

My intention here is to philosophise about policy theory; to consider how we think about policy and policymaking. To do that, I commence by examining the thought of a key thinker in the field, the philosopher John Dewey, who also saw the benefit of philosophising about public problems. Nonetheless, I will point out that his philosophy actually involved systematically rejecting philosophy – as metaphysics – in favour of science. While science is a useful and sensible method of producing information for policy, it does not necessarily help us understand policymaking. In fact, over recent decades scientific inquiry
has largely failed policy theory. Scholars have been busy searching for new conceptual frameworks through which to articulate the full complexity of policymaking and to develop new explanatory theories. My thesis is a further investigation of this kind. An American Professor of Economics, on a recent visit to Australia, insisted to me that there was no theory at all in policy and that philosophy was irrelevant to the field. Now, I am neither a professor nor a philosopher, but by philosophising about policy, by restoring the importance of philosophy against those who reject it out of hand, by restoring the importance of philosophy against even those who reject it on systematic grounds, I hope we can appreciate its value and see how it provides an innovative way to understand policymaking. I believe that a radically new kind of philosophy – Michel Meyer’s\(^1\) problematology – is best placed to do this.

Meyer rejects the conventional view of ontology and epistemology altogether. He conducts a rigorous examination of the historical fate of questioning in philosophy and devises an entirely new conception of judgement based on question and answer rather than the proposition. Despite its radicality, the philosophy of questioning has much in common with current concerns in social theory and policy studies. In considering policy problematologically, it will become apparent that this philosophy suggests many further avenues of exploration for political theory and social science beyond policy analysis. In this thesis, these are only suggestive spurs from my argument about policymaking. I must leave these problems for another time. At this stage, I note that these
important issues emerge because policy theory no less than other forms of social theory encompasses a wide range of activity and therefore important questions of social theory also pertain to policymaking.

The thesis is divided into two parts. Part I investigates the problem solving concept that underpins policy theory. I draw on the heritage of the policy sciences field, commencing with Dewey’s discussion of problem solving as the main building block of reason. I outline his argument that the problems of the public, rather than metaphysics, should be the key concern of scholarly thought. I reconsider the status of questioning in Dewey’s reasoning to understand its difficulties. In Chapter Two I indicate how Lasswell drew on Dewey’s ideas in formulating the ‘policy sciences’. Lasswell is a key figure in the field and much contemporary theoretical work draws on him in some way. Here I discuss how the problem solving view permitted Lasswell to develop the project of a science of policymaking and I identify the theoretical problems of the policy sciences. Chapter Three further problematises the policy sciences, showing that it excludes the political dimension from its frame of reference. Part I ends with a discussion of interpretative epistemology and the ‘argumentative turn’ in Chapter Four, where I claim that the introduction of argumentation and rhetoric describes an increasing problematicity of policymaking and policy theory. However, the classical philosophical division between logic and rhetoric obstructs
the proper integration of the argumentative turn with policy theory. The progress of Part I depicts an increasing problematisation of policy theory, to the point where it becomes possible to question the problem solving concept by posing policy inquiry itself as a question.

Part II uses the philosophy of Michel Meyer, *problematology*, to answer the questions posed in Part I. It seeks to reconstruct the ‘problem orientation’ of policy theory along problematological lines. Chapter Five addresses the fundamental philosophical question of the foundation of knowledge. Meyer differs from other philosophers by arguing that questioning is the founding principle of reason. Chapter Six articulates the logic of questioning Meyer deduces from this principle. Both Chapters Six and Seven introduce Meyer’s terminology and outline how he thematises problem setting in a positive sense by showing it is a type of answering. This enables us to articulate policymaking as a dynamic questioning process that involves both problem setting and problem solving. Chapter Seven explains how Meyer’s philosophy draws together key concepts of interpretative theory – hermeneutics, dialectic, and rhetoric – into a singular framework. It also deals with the issue of practice as a form of knowledge, along with the passions. Finally, Chapter Eight further extends the reconstructed problem orientation by articulating policymaking as a synthesis of policy questions and legitimization questions. Throughout Part II, I discuss the implications of Meyer’s logic of questioning for policy theory. I conclude by pointing to the potential of the problematological conception of policy.
We could study policymaking and policy theory historically, for example by examining the use of scientific knowledge in policymaking over time (Brooks and Gagnon 1990; Wagner, Weiss, Wittrock and Wollmann 1991a; Weiss 1977) or the development of institutional forms (Keman 1997; March and Olsen 1996; Skocpol 1985). These approaches have already proved productive and remain important avenues for inquiry. My approach is different. I examine the philosophical foundations of policy theory. In particular, I examine the concept of policy ‘problem’, the fundamental building block upon which theories about policy have been built. However, the idea that policymaking concerns problems and seeks solutions has been so much at the heart of policy studies that rarely have we asked what it is to pose a question and find a solution.3

The idea that policy solves public problems seems common sense, however this concept has a rather short but specific intellectual history in Harold Lasswell’s ‘problem orientation’ of the policy sciences and the philosopher whose ideas he drew upon, John Dewey (Lasswell 1971; Lerner and Lasswell 1951; Torgerson 1995). Dewey was an important influence upon Lasswell (1971: xiv), particularly his philosophy of practical problem solving. Indeed, Torgerson (1995: 235) points out that three major figures in policy theory, Lasswell, Herbert Simon and Charles Lindblom can all be understood by how they responded to
Dewey’s formulation of problem solving in *How We Think* (see Dewey 1971). Dewey remains an important influence on policy theory, as he does in philosophy and social theory, with the contemporary revival of American pragmatism (see, for example, Habermas 1997; Rorty 1979, 1982) and also in contemporary discussions of ‘practical reason’ (Bernstein 1966, 1986). The origins of the policy sciences in Dewey should alert us to the philosophical underpinnings of policy studies, a legacy not often appreciated in a highly empiricist field. However, today, philosophical reflection has become a feature of contemporary policy theory (see for example Anderson 1987; Fischer 1998, 2003a; Forester 1993; Gottweis 2003; Hawkesworth 1988; Hoppe 1999; Torgerson 1995; Yanow 1996, 2000). It is in this spirit that I return to Dewey.

Dewey’s philosophy is a useful origin from which to inquire into the concept of policy problems for two reasons. First, it anchors us in our own intellectual history, a familiar ground upon which to start. More importantly, in order to truly reconstruct policy theory we must start from the beginning with the most basic assumption – policy as problem solving – to look for an alternative route other than the partial side roads of other approaches. It is in this respect that Dewey is most important. Dewey’s thought centred on the idea of inquiry, or questioning, through which he sought to reconstruct philosophy as a practical form of reasoning applicable to politics. He points to questioning as fundamental to thinking itself and makes problems the object of all
questioning. For Dewey, thinking was problem solving and therefore his thought is the starting point for my inquiry into problem solving.

We often associate problem solving with science, in this case with the policy sciences. Others have already made an extensive critique of the positivist-inspired scientific model of policymaking; on theoretical, practical, ethical and political grounds (see, for example, Bobrow and Dryzek 1987; Eidlin 1988; Fischer 2003a; Fischer and Forester 1993b; Hawkesworth 1988; Schön 1996). I will not re-make these criticisms, which I believe to be well established. Rather, I trace these difficulties back further to the problem solving logic contained within science. Problem solving – the idea that the meaning of problems is to be found in their dissolution – is an idea common to pragmatism, positivism and commonsense thinking. I contend that the theoretical difficulties which have plagued our attempts to get a precise hold on what policy is, and the seeming irrationality of politics, arise from the presumption that problem solving is the only way to conceive of answering questions. This critique is based entirely on Michel Meyer’s philosophy, problematology, a new way of understanding questioning. Meyer’s philosophy not only permits us to reconstruct policy theory on problematological grounds, it is also a way to uncover the errors and paradoxes of past philosophies. Returning to Dewey’s ideas on questioning shows the utility and relevance of a philosophical approach – by getting to the very heart of things we can seek both the source of past difficulties and new solutions.
to the theoretical problems of understanding policy that confront us today.

Central to Dewey’s philosophy is the concept of questioning, in both his theory of ‘inquiry’ and his attention to practical ‘problem solving’. Dewey’s attention to problems arose from his desire that philosophy be relevant to human concerns and improve society. His theory of inquiry is important for politics because he was concerned with the deliberative process as much as the solutions to problems. The point of examining Dewey’s theory of inquiry is to ask whether his pragmatism describes political questioning or scientific questioning. I argue that despite extensively using the concepts of inquiry, problem and solution, the way he treats questioning presents fundamental difficulties for understanding policy and politics. Dewey did not allocate a constitutive function to questioning but saw it as a tool, a cognitive device, supposing instead that only the solution counts as knowledge and that all problems could be solved by recourse to experience. Thus Dewey’s version of inquiry takes a scientific form. This philosophy is less than compatible with democratic deliberation because he asserted that dissolving questions was the only valid way of answering them, thereby restricting knowledge to problem solving. By emphasising the outcomes of politics in his logic he could not set political reasoning as an open, deliberative process against rule by expert scientists.
I use *problematology* to reflect upon Dewey’s theory and illustrate the source of his conceptual difficulties in differentiating pragmatism from science. I make an alternative reading of Dewey’s ideas using Meyer’s philosophy, pointing to a new conception of inquiry that moves beyond scientific problem solving and establishes a place for questioning as a positive and constitutive quality of reason. I do not apply Meyer’s philosophy to particular political problems. Rather, my concern is to examine how we might think about knowledge – and therefore politics as one form of knowledge – in terms of questioning. Firstly, I discuss Dewey’s problem solving logic in which inquiry should be directed towards, and evaluated by, experience. Secondly, notwithstanding the differences between Dewey’s pragmatist inquiry and positivism, I show that both share the theme of answering as the dissolution of questions. Thirdly, I draw a parallel between practical reason and science, showing that the two concepts cannot be entirely disentangled. Fourthly, I use Michel Meyer’s problematology to find the underlying limitations of Dewey’s theory of inquiry and suggest that we might arrive at quite a different depiction of reason that accords a new, positive value to questioning, one that defines politics by the problematic. Lastly, I discuss the implications for democracy of reconsidering questioning.
1. Dewey’s theory of inquiry

Dewey’s ideas on democracy derived from his more fundamental ideas on knowledge. How we think was, for Dewey, a questioning process. He argued that encountering problems impels us to reflective thought, the essential characteristic of which is *inquiry* (1971: 7-9). He equates inquiry with *questioning*; ‘We inquire when we question; and we inquire when we seek for whatever will provide an answer to a question asked’ (1938: 105). And elsewhere, ‘Thinking is inquiry, investigation, turning over, probing or delving into, so as to find something new or to see what is already known in a different light. In short, it is *questioning*’ (1971: 265). Questioning is reflective thinking, which he distinguished from other forms of thought, for example the stream of consciousness, daydreams, or beliefs unreflected upon (1971: 3-7). Reflective thinking is best because it forms an ordered chain of thoughts, it aims at a conclusion and it impels one to inquire as to the grounds of one’s beliefs (1971: 4-9). Dewey felt that reflective thinking would help solve public problems through better social planning.

What does Dewey mean by ‘problem’? A problem is ‘a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty’ that prompts us to give pause for reflection (1971: 12). It is ‘an entanglement to be straightened out, something obscure to be cleared up’ by thinking (1971: 6). At another point he defines problems in terms of an alternative; ‘Thinking begins in what may fairly enough be called a *forked-road* situation, a
situation that is ambiguous, that presents a dilemma, that proposes alternatives’ (1971: 14). By alternative, he means that the situation poses a question for us. Reflective inquiry searches for a solution that will solve the difficulty by eliminating it: it is ‘searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity’ (1971: 12). The purpose of inquiry, then, is to make an indeterminate situation into a *problematic*, thus transforming the situation into an intelligible object of study (1938: 107). Without understanding thinking as the inquiry into problems, reflective thinking is ‘blind groping in the dark’ (1938: 108).

Dewey defined the meaning of a problem in terms of its solution. Rational thought inquires into problems in order to find a solution that eliminates the problem; thinking about problems is *problem solving*. The purpose of questioning is to bring about an answer in which the problem, the perplexity, no longer exists:

> each situation is in some fashion uncertain, perplexed, troublesome, if only in offering to the mind an unresolved difficulty, an unsettled question. *It shows in each case that the function of reflection is to bring about a new situation in which the difficulty is resolved, the confusion cleared away, the trouble smoothed out, the question it puts answered.* Any particular process of thinking naturally comes to its close when the situation before the mind is settled, decided, orderly, clear, for then there is nothing to call out reflection until a new bothersome or doubtful situation arises [my emphasis] (1971: 100).

Problem solving involves finding an answer that dissolves the difficulty of the *situation*. The difference between problem and solution lies in experience itself:
Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole [original emphasis] (1938: 104-5).

The solution is to be found in the actual transformation of the situation, such that the problem no longer exists. In other words, an open, indeterminate situation is resolved through questioning that produces a determinate situation in which experience is universal rather than fragmented (1938: 105). The goal of knowledge is to eliminate problematicity in experience.

For Dewey all solutions were to be found in experience. He even defined inquiry itself as within the realm of experience which contains subject and object in a totality (1958: 8). Knower and known are mutually constituted within the field of experience, they are both aspects of the fact of knowing (Moore 1961: 191). The view of inquiry as problem solving within experience was not just Dewey’s, it characterises American pragmatism in general, despite differences between the individual thinkers (Depew 1995: 13; Moore 1961: 202). Even though Dewey distinguished knowledge from experience as what arises from interrogating experience, he also stated that the objects of reflection are secondary representations of primary experience, which ‘sets the problems’ (1958: 4-5). The problems of experience are mediated through questioning but are not constituted by it. Rather, it is the other way around. He argued that language is unintelligible apart from the thing to which it refers (1971: 236). Because he held that experience is a totality
in its own right problems arise only from obstructions to experience. Questioning is not required for situations that are by nature unproblematic, for which unreflective thinking suffices, since there is no disruption to the pattern of thought (1971: 14). More specifically, no problem exists when no inhibition to action exists (1971: 108-9).

So, Dewey said experience is not itself knowledge: knowledge arises from the inquiry into experience (1958). Reflection permits us to explain the objects we experience directly, ‘they enable us to grasp them with understanding, instead of just having sense-contact with them [original emphasis]’ (1958: 5). Despite allocating questioning a central role in his philosophy, it is important to note that Dewey did not give questioning a constitutive value in knowledge. Even though questions are his criteria of intelligibility, that which transform an unintelligible situation into an intelligible problematic, Dewey is clear that it is the situation itself which has indeterminate traits:

it is of the very nature of the indeterminate situation which evokes inquiry to be questionable; or, in terms of actuality instead of potentiality, to be uncertain, unsettled, disturbed...We are doubtful because the situation is already doubtful [original emphasis] (1938: 105).

So, even though we need to question a situation to make meaning of experience (1958: 1) this is only possible because the situation itself holds an indeterminate quality independent of our inquiry into it. This also applies to social problems, which exist independently of questions we might ask about them, the latter being ‘intellectualizations in inquiry of these “practical” troubles and difficulties’ (1938: 498): a question is a
discursive abstraction from a problematic situation. In fact, Dewey rejected the idea that problems could arise from subjective experience as pathological (1938: 106, 499). Questioning gives us access to knowledge but it is a secondary process; the problem into which we inquire is primary and independent of the questions we ask of it.

Now, Dewey stated that experience recognizes in its primary integrity no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains them both in an unanalyzed totality (1958: 8). The primacy of experience remains out of the question because it is ‘unanalysable’ and so reflection upon experience only has a secondary quality. Insisting that experience is primary indicates Dewey’s and the other pragmatists’ naturalist ontology (Brandom 2004: 3). For the pragmatists, experience was not just part of knowledge, it was the only form of knowledge (Brandom 2004: 4). Pragmatism was different to positivism in some respects, however both positivism and pragmatism shared a thoroughgoing empiricism that viewed the only true knowledge as residing in experience (Brandom 2004: 4). Hence Dewey thought only empirical method was adequate for philosophy: it alone takes this integrated unity as the starting point for philosophical thought (1958: 9). Experience is primary and ultimate, both the starting point and the end point of knowledge, ‘primary as it is given in an uncontrolled form, ultimate as it is given in a more regulated and significant form’ (1958: 15).
Dewey said that to solve a problem is to eliminate it. The purpose of questioning is to bring about a solution that transforms the doubtful situation into a unified whole (1938: 104-5; 1971: 100). Because experience is a totality we must also look for solutions in experience. All inquiry, therefore, has practical intent. This definition of problem solving has been taken for granted, appealing as it does to common sense, and in this Dewey makes explicit what is often presumed; we find meaning in the answer that dissolves the question, so the goal of knowledge is to eliminate questions by transforming situations in practice.

Dewey’s problem solving rationale produces the distinctive characteristic of pragmatism; its practical orientation. Dewey wanted to establish a practical role for philosophy which he felt previously had few practical implications (Moore 1961: 206). He believed this would restore its value by directing it towards problems relevant to the public at large and not just to the small community of philosophers. Judgement itself, he said, resides in modifying (or at least the possibility of modifying) a pre-cognitive unsettled situation (1938: 118). Thus judgement involves more than an abstract proposition about reality, it proscribes an action to effect a change upon it (1938: 120-1). For Dewey, meaning itself lies in the practical resolution of problems, in action upon the world: observed problems are ‘capable of being understood only in terms of projected consequences of activities [original emphasis]’ (1938: 499). So, not only do problems arise only from experience but solutions are only intelligible in terms of an actual change to social conditions. Moore
argues that Dewey’s pragmatism was broader in scope than that of Peirce and James because he defined reality itself as possessing a practical character (1961: 261). As in science, the meaning of problems derives from the method of resolving them. Dewey’s version of pragmatism is *instrumentalism*: ‘For the pragmatist, ideas are controlled by facts. The idea starts from facts and returns to facts, and it is the differences that it makes to the world of fact that indicate its meaning’ (Moore 1961: 206). This definition applies for inquiry into public problems, which Dewey defined in utilitarian fashion: ‘In short, all propositions about policies to be pursued, ends to be striven for, consequences to be reached are propositions about subject-matters having the formal relation *means-consequences*, and are, in the sense defined, causal propositions’ (1938: 461).

The practical orientation distinguishes pragmatism from other forms of empiricism. Dewey believed that we could establish logical causality but his version of cause was specifically practical (1938: 462). Both pragmatism and other versions of science operate according to the scientific method of formulating hypotheses and verifying them by experimentation. The difference between positivism and Dewey’s pragmatist empiricism is that, for Dewey, judgement does not end by confirming a hypothesis but the hypothesis itself directs future action. Reason only terminates by acting correctly upon existence rather than seeking knowledge for its own sake, which distinguishes practical reason and scientific inquiry (Putnam and Putnam 1992: 44). Practical
inquiry has the distinguishing characteristic of the pragmatic criterion; knowledge is practical problem solving. In social inquiry policymaking is a rational plan for action to solve practical problems (Dewey 1938: 499).

For Dewey, this epistemological distinction had important implications for politics. Just as he felt that philosophy was too abstract he also thought positivist science denigrated practical matters in favour of theory (Moore 1961: 266). When science is ‘pure’ (detached from human affairs) it becomes ‘another class-interest, that of intellectualists and aloof specialists’ who might also use research for private profit (Dewey 1958: 162-5). In contrast, pragmatism, which makes public problems the object of inquiry, was concerned with determining collective social values. Dewey argued this conception of inquiry was democratic because it was oriented towards solving the practical problems of the public rather than the abstract problems of philosophy (Dewey 1927). Applying knowledge to public problems establishes the democratic quality of Dewey’s thought, and this is what people see of most value in pragmatism today.

To understand Dewey’s emphasis on experience we should consider the historical context in which he worked. Just like positivism, Wilson points out that pragmatism grew out of a revival of empiricism and a cultural climate that held scientific values and methods in high regard (1995: 138). Indeed, pragmatism and positivism were so similar that the former paved the way for the latter in the United States,
effectively creating the condition of its own demise (Wilson 1995: 139).\footnote{5} Dewey explicitly rejected metaphysics, which he considered irrelevant and sterile, criticising non-empirical philosophy for failing to verify its conclusions in experience, for remaining aloof and being overly abstract in tone (1958: 6). He felt that neglecting primary experience resulted in knowledge ‘indifferent to human interests’ (1958: 11). He attempted to reconstruct philosophy away from metaphysics, giving it a new, positive role by making it applicable to public affairs (Bernstein 1966: 75). His rejection of metaphysics thus had a democratic intent and it is here that some contemporary thinkers find in pragmatism a systematic opponent to positivist science (Wilson 1995: 128; see for example Rorty 1991).

However, the question is whether he really did reconstruct philosophy on positive lines or whether he transformed it into another version of science. If it was the latter then this would not preclude a view of politics as best conducted by scientists and would not, in turn, support democratic problem solving. Do we read Dewey’s reason as technocratic or as a desire for open and democratic deliberation? This conflict within Dewey’s thought impacts upon debates about the applicability of pragmatism to political theory today. Richardson, for example, points out that Dewey rejected the narrow version of instrumentalism of which he is often accused, seeing his theory of inquiry as supporting collective, democratic deliberation (1999: 111, 145). However, this conflicts with his emphasis on experimental method
as a mode of inquiry and his faith in public policy experts (1999: 111-12).

Despite this scientific orientation, pragmatism was different because it was oriented towards solving problems in their context. The pragmatists responded to Darwin who described the world in terms of adaptive processes rather than permanent logical structures (Depew 1995: 3). Hence a solution was only temporary, a ‘demi-cadence’ awaiting further inquiry in the light of a world in flux (Depew 1995: 3). Inquiry never ceases because new problems arise as nature and society change. Ignoring this shifting context, as traditional epistemology has done, produces abstract and sterile knowledge (Bernstein 1966: 110-11). The organic nature of social life requires that we cooperate to deal with new problems and requires an ongoing process of practical and productive reason (Depew 1995: 7). Dewey felt that cooperative problem solving could replace religion as a social bond (Depew 1995: 7). This reflects Peirce’s idea that the pragmatic criterion of practical problem solving served as a Kantian regulative ideal (Depew 1995: 4). Dewey linked ongoing inquiry to an anti-elitist vision of public life, in which modern individuals would be both more autonomous and more cooperative having formed associations oriented towards instrumental problem solving (Depew 1995: 8).

To sum up, Dewey allocated a central place to questioning. He situated questioning within an overall picture where experience
determined what counts as knowledge, since it gives rise to both problems and solutions. Inquiry gives us access to the totality of experience though it does not contribute any meaning in itself. So, while Dewey stressed that we think by questioning it was not, for him, what made knowledge.

2. Answering as the dissolution of questions: positivism and pragmatism

Both positivists and pragmatists constructed rationality as the dissolution of questions. Michel Meyer notes that this conception of answering applies to many philosophies, and not just positivism, which was not alone in its anti-philosophical attitude (1995: 40). With positivism, for example, Meyer points out that despite many references to questioning, Wittgenstein and the other members of the Vienna Circle did not conceive of questioning in its own right but instead construed the meaning of questions as the possibility of their dissolution (1995: 38-41). Moreover, they argued that philosophy had mixed false problems with real ones and that a proper logical language would allow us to distinguish them, eliminating false problems by declaring them unsolvable and therefore senseless (1995: 40). The problems of philosophy which continually recur have no apodictic solution and are therefore meaningless pseudoproblems (1995: 39). Meyer describes positivism as dissolving problems for which it could not account through
a ‘reducer’, thereby producing univocal knowledge (1995: 41). The reducer eliminates questions as meaningless where no solution can be found; ‘solving a problem consists of making it disappear, once resolved. Failure to do this implies that the problem doesn’t exist’ (1995: 41). That is, since meaning arises from solutions, declaring a solution impossible eliminates the problem and has the same effect as finding a solution that responds directly to the problem. Wittgenstein, for example, thought the reducer was language, ‘he considered as self-evident that when “there is then no question left...just this is the answer” (Tractatus 6.52)’ (Wittgenstein, in Meyer 1995: 42).

Meyer argues that the paradoxical basis of positivism stems from its limited conception of resolution as the dissolution of problems (1995: 43). Why? While empiricist science can and does solve some problems, all anti-positivist philosophies have pointed out that positivism cannot justify its validity on its own logico-experimental terms (1995: 44). Positivism can only assert this resolutional model a priori (without justification) because it cannot account for its own necessity; ‘When we are told that meaning is verification, we must concede the self-refutational character of such an assertion because it is unverifiable on its own grounds’ (1995: 44). Indeed, ‘There is an inevitable paradox [in positivism]: how to prove that one is answering a question by showing that one cannot answer it?’ (1995: 47). Such an answer cannot be verified on positivist grounds because ‘no proposition can be verified as an answer to a meaningless question’ (1995: 47). Indeed it is possible to
answer a question by rejecting the question but this lies outside the principle of meaning as empirical verification. By reflecting upon the foundations of positivism as a mode of inquiry we see that positivism is only one modality of the question-answer difference. Its ambition to monopolise knowledge collapses because the notion of resolution must be enlarged beyond the criterion of dissolution (1995: 44-5).

Why should the dissolution of questions be the model for all answering? If we reflect upon knowledge without seeking an a priori reduction of questioning then the paradox disappears; ‘By contrast, if one begins with this difference, as applied to philosophical questioning, it can be better understood that there can be an answer to a question which rejects the question as a question, even as it resolves it’ (Meyer 1995: 48). Dissolving a question in the answer establishes a difference between question and answer. This primary difference gives such a solution meaning; positivism can make it the only model of resolution by force alone (1995: 43). Science and commonsense operate upon the assumption that answers are solutions which eliminate problems, but this does not adequately describe all forms of answering. In philosophy, for example, solutions are in fact problematisations; ‘To answer a question, in philosophy, is equivalent to unfolding the question in the answer’ (1995: 43). In politics, problem posing is fundamental since productive political cultures create problems; the public thematises its concerns in order to deliberate over them. In politics, problem setting is as important as the search for solutions, the usual sense by which we
understand policymaking. Moreover, when problems are unclear technical problem solving procedures that depend on known ends are of no use (Schön 1996: 41).

If positivists rejected anything they could not observe then pragmatists rejected anything that could not be done. The rejection of metaphysics embodied in the scientific shift was a consequence of the general climate against philosophy. Dewey also rejected traditional philosophy on the grounds that it failed to solve its problems. He cast metaphysical questions as meaningless abstractions, as obstructions to knowledge, because meaning derives entirely from problem solving within experience. Therefore unsolvable philosophical problems – problems that could not be dissolved through experience – were non-problems and could be dismissed. For logical empiricism, experience acts as the ‘reductor’ or ‘reducer’ of questioning, imposed as the sole criterion of knowledge (Meyer 1995: 58-9). Similarly for Dewey, non-empirical problems were not true problems but ‘blind alleys’ or irrelevant intellectual ‘puzzles’ (1958: 7). Abstract thought is useful but secondary, ‘an outgrowth of thinking on practical and immediate matters, but not a substitute for it’ (1971: 227). Dewey did not reject theorising nor did he assert that experience has meaning on its own. He did, however, explicitly reject non-empirical thinking as non-knowledge. Non-empirical philosophical problems are only ‘arbitrary’, they are disconnected from ordinary experience (1958: 6). Dewey confirmed that all ideas ‘must be brought to some sort of check by actual given material
or else remain ideas. Many ideas are of great value as material of poetry, fiction, or the drama, but not as the stuff of knowledge' (1971: 106).

Dewey also asserts that the dissolution of problems is the only valid model of resolution. The pragmatic criterion of relevance to experience eliminates non-empirical philosophy from the realm of knowledge. If we cannot eliminate a question by transforming a situation in practice then it is an irrelevant question and is thereby dissolved. If philosophy could not solve its problems then asserting the pragmatic criterion would enable us to see which problems were important and which ones not. This practical requirement is different from positivism but, in the end, experience acts as Dewey’s reductor of questioning, so his problem solving logic and recourse to experience is similar to positivism.

On what grounds does he justify this answer? Certainly not on empirical grounds nor by reference to its practical consequences, for making such a resolution has no meaning as practice. He must maintain that the dissolution of problems is the only model of resolution. What he does is substitute the pragmatic criterion for a metaphysical principle. He rejects philosophical questioning and asserts that all problems can be brought back to experience alone. Experience acts as a de facto first principle by resolving the question of knowledge while remaining out-of-the-question itself. However, this is not an empirical conclusion and is therefore contradictory. Dewey cannot
consistently argue that answering has meaning only in experience and then assert the validity of an answer that dissolves the question because it doesn’t refer to experience. He assumes the primary answer (experience) has already been established when in fact it has never been questioned. Practical problem solving is certainly possible but this does not suffice for a philosophical view nor for an understanding of the question-answer link, which is more fundamental.

The pragmatic criterion has much in common with science beyond Dewey’s preference for scientific method. What is problematic is eliminated a priori on the grounds that it has no practical solution and cannot therefore be a meaningful question. Reason partitions the realm of the problematic from the realm of knowledge where (practical) solutions prevail. This underlying logic remains even if one agrees with contemporary advocates of Dewey who value his approach over positivism for taking account of context and human values (see, for example, Bernstein 1966: 168-70). Pragmatism suffers from the same contradictions at its base, so even if it is more contextual, interpretative and less authoritarian than positivism it does not change its underlying logic. In the end Dewey follows the same mode of resolution as science, which will always be preferable because of its sophisticated and rigorous method.

Reflecting upon Dewey’s problem solving logic does something else important; it enables us to understand the problems with positivism at a
deeper level. Fischer explains that empirical policy scientists have reacted to the postpositivists’ critique by accusing them of setting up a straw man for attack (2003a: 119-21). By revealing the nature of positivism as a particular and partial mode of questioning we can give more force to the postpositivist critique. Science is not limited simply because it separates fact and value, it is limited because of its fundamental conception of meaning as the dissolution of problems. No matter how sophisticated a positivist argument is, it can only be a partial mode of answering and not the whole of rationality. Pragmatism is the same, even though it permits a greater scope of problems and solutions by defining judgement in relation to the context rather than as universal. Positivism in policy science has been discredited precisely because it cannot deal with political realities in which problematicity persists because both problems and solutions are far from clear. This is the nub of the theoretical and empirical critiques of positivism; it is completely unable to account for the richness of policy discourse and the complexity of political problematisation. Policymaking does seek solutions to problems, but at the same time it seeks to create a response to problems that binds disparate social interests together in a common purpose. Such a cohesive function is essential to politics but is outside the realm of scientific logic.

Pragmatism is different from positivism in important respects. Pragmatists proposed a model of inquiry as cooperative human action within context, and the extent of fallibilism is greater in pragmatism
than in positivism (Putnam 1995: 70). Pragmatism is less reductive than atomistic empiricism (Brandom 2004: 4) because it takes its problems from the social context and seeks practical solutions that can be implemented to bring about change. Furthermore, good scientific problem solving, for Dewey, could not be achieved by isolated scientists but required the ‘democratization of inquiry’ (Putnam 1995: 73).

Bernstein argues for an interpretative reading of Dewey, commenting that Dewey long ago recognised that facts depend on the questions we ask of them (1966: 110). But doesn’t this suggest that questioning is primary, not experience nor some other reductor that secures a propositional starting point?

Even if we concede these points and acknowledge Dewey’s democratic sentiments, the question we must ask is this: Is the conception of knowledge as the dissolution of questions adequate to understand politics and policy? Policy solutions do not, in most cases, resolve political problems by making them disappear. Even the most minor policy measures can attract vehement and sustained dispute. Far from solving problems, continuous disagreement characterises policy and politics. If policy failed to change experience would it then be meaningless? Dewey’s test for solutions is certainly useful by concentrating judgement upon practical effects. But it is overly reductive for the question of understanding. Political reality is usually much more complex and to understand it we must allow room for the subtleties and complexities of the policy process, including differences of
interpretation. The world has greater meaning for us than simply how we might practically change it. While policy does usually seek to change things, setting the criterion of meaning as the dissolution of problems in experience seems to rule out reasonable differences of interpretation between individuals. As a complex process, policy inquiry has meaning beyond its practical consequences.

3. Inquiry and practical reason

What of Dewey’s pragmatic criterion, the general solution that grounds answering as the practical dissolution of questions? Doesn’t this serve as a useful substitute for thought that lacks a first principle, something that enables us to answer practical questions even if we cannot confine all resolution to this mode of answering? Because of its practical orientation pragmatism has been associated with Aristotelian practical reason (see, for example, Bernstein 1986). As I noted above, the pragmatists were reacting to the influence of Darwin, who revealed the importance of continuous contextual adaptation in an ever-changing world. Because experience itself changes and because knowledge derives from experience then all knowledge is partial in some respect. Since the mind is adaptive it must be tied to environmental conditions and therefore philosophy should assimilate theoretical to practical reason (Depew 1995: 7). Hence pragmatism is oriented towards finding solutions in context rather than universal truths. Practical judgement
(phronesis) is not only relevant and useful but also democratic and anti-elitist. The restoration of phronesis (Torgerson 1995) is thus the restoration of a more positive Aristotelian politics against an ontological view that cannot stomach contingency.

Is practical reason truly different from science? Jaako Hintikka (1974) makes a strong critique of Aristotle’s conception of practical reason, arguing it is indistinguishable from theoretical science and that it relies on an oversimplified conception of human decision making. Firstly, he notes that Aristotle drew a direct comparison between the practical syllogism and science (1974: 90). He quotes Aristotle, who stated that the difference between the two forms of reason is that for science the end is the truth seen, whereas for practical reason the end result is an action (1974: 90). Despite this difference Hintikka points out that practical reasoning proceeds in exactly the same manner as geometry, describing practical deliberation as ‘not about ends but about means...They assume the end and consider how and by what means it is to be attained...what is last in the order of analysis seems to be first in the order of becoming’ (1974: 89-90). He then notes that this analysis is an identical methodological process to that of the great scientific thinkers, Newton, Galileo and Descartes (1974: 90). Practical reason and science may be different in consequence but are no different in logic; ‘It is thus instructive to find precisely the same conceptual model at the bottom of both the most typical operation of practical reason and one of the first and foremost methodological ideas of modern natural science’
(1974: 90-1). Practical reason cannot, Hintikka concludes, be disentangled from theoretical science.  

We find the same model of reason in Dewey’s problem solving. The solution is not only the end of thought but also the starting point; ‘The nature of the problem fixes the end of thought, and the end controls the process of thinking [original emphasis]’ (1971: 15). Thinking proceeds from the end and deliberates over the means to achieve the end, so meaning becomes the (practical) method for reaching a solution that is known in advance. To think is to deliberate over practical ends, the conclusions of which must be justified, in turn, by recourse to experience. Dewey was clear that his logic of inquiry was scientific but Hintikka’s assessment points out how similar practical reason and science really are.  

Science can substitute for practical reason because of its similar logic in which the method of problem solving is of utmost value. Because science has the most rigorous methodology and its reductionist approach is so efficient, pragmatism cannot foreclose a participatory version of politics as practical problem solving from a scientific view. We can see the consequences of this not only in the success of positivism over pragmatism in the United States, but also in other related fields. For example, Harold Lasswell, a follower of Dewey, incorporated a strong methodological emphasis in his idea of a ‘problem orientation’ for the ‘policy sciences’ (see Lerner and Lasswell 1951; see also Chapter Two).
The similarity in logic of practical reasoning and science means that we cannot conclusively identify practical problem solving as a non-elitist form of reason that supports participatory democracy.

Hintikka makes a second major criticism of practical reason, pointing out that Aristotle’s account of deliberation is ‘wildly oversimplified’ because he supposes that deliberation proceeds by a linear sequence of ends and means (1974: 91). Firstly, it is frequently possible to propose ‘different equally practicable means to the same end’, as Aristotle himself was forced to admit (1974: 91-2). This indicates that there need be no necessary correspondence between a solution and its practical end (1974: 92). Hintikka notes that some contemporary thinkers attempt to bypass this objection by arguing that practical reasoning is not supposed to be apodictic (1974: 93). However, he counters by arguing that his critique is truly damaging because he shows that Aristotle has overlooked ‘an important feature of human decision making’ (1974: 93). Even in geometry there are multiple dependencies between more than two terms, excluding the possibility of dealing with linear sequences of dependent relationships (1974: 94). If we consider political deliberation, when many individuals and organisations deliberate over complex problems, it is improbable that they would proceed in a linear fashion towards a single end. Accounting for all the interdependent relationships in a linear system would be difficult in even the smallest organisation, let alone in a complex community of many participants. In fact, pervasive uncertainty
characterises all but the most trivial instances of inquiry, even if we know all the laws that govern the relationships among the objects concerned (1974: 94-5). Ultimately, therefore, Aristotle’s conception of practical reason rests on an oversimplified model of decision making (1974: 95).

This undermines Dewey’s argument that a solution to a problem constitutes an immediate causal relationship of means-consequence. His model of inquiry into public problems, which is goal oriented, seems overly optimistic about decision making in practice. Policymaking and policy implementation are far more uncertain in reality, both politically and epistemologically. Dewey pointed to the limitations of problem solving himself; since deciding what is to be done relates to unknown future events, differences of opinion over policy actions may well arise from knowledge of the same facts (1927: 178). Nonetheless, what is important is that we see the shortcomings of the conceptual model of practical reason as problem solving and that it is inappropriate to impose it on top of human action, even as an ideal type. This is not to say that we can’t act intentionally towards some end; only that the conception of practical reason as instrumental action to achieve an end known in advance does not depict the whole of human decision making. If we are to establish a legitimate place for political reasoning which takes place under conditions of pervasive uncertainty and disagreement then we need to thematise questioning in positive terms rather than as
something to be eliminated *a priori* by a reductor that itself remains out of the question.

4. Recovering the value of questioning

Now that we understand a little more about Dewey’s Aristotelian influences we can appreciate that the pragmatic theory of inquiry shares its logic of resolution with scientific logic. Other than accounting for restrictions upon decision making power in context and greater uncertainty about the future there is nothing inherent in practical problem solving that distinguishes it, logically, from a scientific conception of policy and politics. Can we correct the quandary at the origin of Dewey’s theory of inquiry? Dewey’s own attention to questioning gives us a clue; instead of assuming that the dissolution of questions is the only model of resolution, we shall follow Michel Meyer and consider questioning in its own right.

Dewey’s practice reflects the value of inquiry, but inquiry is even more important to his own reason than he acknowledges. Putnam and Putnam make the important point that Dewey’s ‘Logic as the theory of inquiry is itself the result of an inquiry’ (1992: 41). They then go on to describe his theory of inquiry ‘as a product of the very sort of inquiry that it describes: *epistemology is hypothesis*’ (1992: 56). Maybe so, but it would not be correct to conclude that Dewey’s philosophy is internally consistent. Dewey’s philosophy of inquiry is certainly the result of an
inquiry but it is not the result of an empirical inquiry. Putnam and Putnam correctly point out Dewey’s consistent use of questioning, but this does not square with Dewey’s answer that all questioning pertains to experience. Just like positivism, the answer comprising Dewey’s rejection of philosophical problems is not verifiable by its own model of resolution and is therefore contradictory. Inquiry is reduced to experience only after the fact. In reality the theoretical is primary despite Dewey’s assertions that philosophical answers must be verified empirically. Inquiry into experience is therefore only a particular instance of answering, one possibility of a more general relationship between question and answer which, Meyer argues, is a more fundamental logical difference. Dewey’s inquiry is not an inquiry into experience but an inquiry into inquiry itself.

Since the theory of inquiry is the result of an inquiry, an important conclusion follows: the *answer* to the question of knowledge is *questioning* itself. Dewey’s answer to the question of knowledge is itself a theory of questioning, from which he could have deduced that inquiry (questioning) is the primary element of thought and also its first result. The affirmation of questioning is itself an answer to the question of how we think. This is not circular reasoning because the solution that confirms questioning is different to the question to which it responds. It is an answer that confirms, theoretically, the practice of Dewey’s questioning procedure. This solution establishes a particular type of logical *difference*, such that the first answer is a partial solution that
makes the constitutive and implicit role of questioning explicit.\textsuperscript{9} Meyer terms this a \textit{problematological answer}; a question that is also a result (1995: 11). The meaning of this partial answer does not depend on a final solution that eliminates the question but rather the answer has meaning in its status as a question.

Dewey might have accorded such a positive status to a problem as an ‘answer’ in its own right. Indeed, he suggests as much: ‘A problem represents the partial transformation by inquiry of a problematic situation into a determinate situation. It is a familiar and significant saying that a problem well-put is half-solved’ (1938: 108). Here he describes a \textit{difference} between an initial indeterminacy and discourse that gives explicit form to that indeterminacy (as a problem), a stage on the way to an ultimate resolution. He also puts this view later in the \textit{Logic}, when he says that judgement does figure in intermediate propositions, and that this is a necessary condition for an eventual solution: ‘\textit{something} is settled. It is through a series of such intervening settlements that the final settlement is constructed. Judgement as final settlement is dependent upon a series of partial settlements’ (1938: 122). His five stage conception of thinking that moves from the intuition of a problem, through its discovery, the formulation of a hypothesis, and the corroborative justification of the hypothesis by action, indicates the importance of partial stages in the process of inquiry (1971: 107-15).\textsuperscript{10} The partial answers of the intermediate stages make an advance on the
initial doubtful situation, while not going all the way to a solution that dissolves the problem.

Ultimately, however, Dewey accords no logical status to partial answers, which have no meaning on their own. Partial answers are important only insofar as they refer to their potential *dissolution* in the final answer. This final answer is certainly contingent upon the context and therefore ‘fallible’ (Putnam 1995: 21; Richardson 1999: 120). Indeed, Richardson reminds us that Dewey did not see any end as ‘final’ but always potentially subject to revision, arguing that Dewey’s philosophy could be extended to ‘allow robust enough deliberation about ends so that the possible existence even of an ultimate end could at least be a live question’ (1999: 121). Nonetheless, even though Dewey saw answers as somewhat problematic in practice what is important in his logic is that ends are not thematised in terms of questioning because they are still framed as solutions that dissolve questions.\(^1\) We can better see this where he asserts that the goal, the answer or solution, structures the thinking process itself; ‘There is a goal to be reached, and this end sets a task that controls the sequence of ideas’ (1971: 6). So, even if partial results count for something, the process of inquiry has meaning only insofar as it reveals a final solution (even if that solution is only a possibility).\(^2\) Rather than seeing the question-answer complex as providing meaning (including the partial stage that establishes the difference between implicit worries and explicit problems) Dewey resolved questions into hypothetical propositions, just as in science.
What is a hypothesis? We can commence a questioning process by assuming the question at hand to be resolved (Meyer 1986: 107; 1995: 85). A hypothesis has no problematic character in its form, which is a statement, but its content is still in question. Meyer points out that a hypothesis is indifferent to questioning because it takes the form of a proposition, although it is undeniably the result of an inquiry and therefore also an ‘answer’ (1995: 102). A hypothesis does not arise from nowhere. Whereas Popper described a hypothesis as a mere conjecture, Meyer points out that it is, in fact, a result (1994: 136). A hypothesis is an answer, even though it is still problematic. That is, a hypothesis is a temporary ‘answer’ that awaits verification by some other means. A hypothesis excludes the process of discovery from knowledge by offering up an initial answer in propositional form (1994: 136; see also Meyer 1995: 72-107).

Classical terminology, focusing on questions rather than propositions, fails to see the dual nature of hypotheses in terms of questioning: ‘The logical difference between question and answer is absent from the notion of hypothesis, which conflates both dimensions as if they were of no relevance to the study of knowledge’ (1994: 136). Instead, science concentrates on knowledge as the verification of hypotheses, taking this to be the whole of reason. This produces the theoretical problem of the division of discovery and justification (Meyer 1994). Science, in commencing from hypotheses, commences from the point where knowledge has already been partially obtained. This enables
it to exclude other aspects of reason – problem setting in particular – and focus on empirical verification alone. The problematicity of the initial hypothesis is disguised in the form of a proposition, however logically it retains its problematic character. The suppression of questioning in the hypothetical method supports the reductionist approach of science that excludes other forms of reason which express the problematic, for example, philosophy and politics. The consequence is abstract, technocratic models of policymaking that simply cannot account for the problematicity of reason in practice nor the creative function of questioning in generating problems for deliberation.

In scientific reasoning, experience works as a device to eliminate problematicity by guaranteeing (asserting) the principle of meaning as verification (Meyer 1995: 46). Problem solving logic and experience work together to eliminate the problematic a priori, however this is contradictory because it is itself not verifiable by experience (Meyer 1995: 46). We find the same process in Dewey, who did not see the primary importance of questioning by declaring that the locus of all meaning resides in problem solving via experience. Meyer describes this process as measuring the worth of philosophy by borrowing a resolutinal model from outside philosophy, from science (1995: 7-9). So, instead of concluding that questioning is constitutive of knowledge, of which the questioning of experience is one possibility, experience acts as the reducer of questioning in Dewey’s theory, resolving all non-empirical questions by a priori dissolution when an answer cannot be
found. Questioning gives us access to experience but contains no meaning in itself because it is born of, and returns to, experience, the unanalysable first principle. Experience is the ‘out-of-the-question’ that resolves all questions, even though, were we to think about it, we might then wonder why it was necessary for Dewey to conduct his philosophical inquiry at all, since we already use this reasoning in practice. But this elimination of problematicity could only be brought about by assertion. Dewey declared that experience is primary, however this answer to the question of knowledge was not itself arrived at by experience.

Dewey’s depiction of inquiry as practical problem solving appeals to our common sense, and is certainly applicable to politics. What could be more natural than to solve the pollution problem by eliminating pollution? This is not at issue. What is at stake is the idea that this model of resolution is sufficient for understanding the process of policymaking about the pollution problem. We can only pose the problem of pollution by already having a partial answer in the formation of the problem, in deciding that pollution is something we care about, that has meaning for us, and that we might want to take action to redress the situation. It is obviously sensible to use the consequences of a policy solution to evaluate its worth but questions of evaluation are not the same as questions of understanding. In the remaining chapters in Part I, I discuss research into the practice of policymaking that has shown the problem solving view is inadequate for understanding policy
as a political process, even if we might see value in it as a normative ideal for evaluating policy. Problem solving via experience only operates because it is a secondary element derived from questioning, which is really Dewey’s first answer. In Part II, I explain Meyer’s deduction of the problematological difference, the primary difference I have alluded to here. There is a paradox at the heart of Dewey’s philosophy because he cannot verify his own reasoning by the pragmatic criterion he asserts as a conclusion. Hence he could not make philosophy into science without (philosophically) denying the theoretical aspect of his own conclusions, the constitutive role of questioning, and the question-answer difference as the primary difference of thought. By reflecting upon Dewey’s logic using Meyer’s ideas on questioning it is apparent that while answers can refer to experience it is not necessary that they do so. However, all answers must refer to questions, even answers that resolve questions by rejecting them.

Although Dewey stated that problems and solutions refer to one another it is solutions which bear the meaning and not questions. He defined knowledge as the elimination of questions, making science the ideal model of reason. Hence he described questioning as an ‘art’ (1971: 266), a useful technique to elucidate problems from elsewhere, for example, in education (1971). Although I have only discussed this procedure in respect of Dewey’s work, Meyer argues this is a feature of propositional reason in general (Meyer 1995). Notwithstanding Dewey’s assertion that inquiry should not be limited by an end established in
advance (1957), his normative aim of freedom of inquiry is at odds with his logic. The centrality of the problem solving mode of resolution applies even if we acknowledge that he made room for some contingency when he insisted that, since experience changes, all knowledge is only temporary. Problematicity gives us access to knowledge by prompting us to think but actual knowledge resides in eliminating problematicity and restoring the totality of experience.

5. Questioning and democracy

Where does the exclusion of the problematic leave us when theorising about policy and democracy? Although defining solutions as the elimination of questions seems uncontroversial, it does have significant consequences for philosophy in general, and for our understanding of policy and politics in particular. Meyer argues that the a priori elimination of questioning makes problematicity a residual aspect of reason, an addition to knowledge that is necessary for it to be complete but is also, by definition, inferior to problem solving (1995). In particular, this relegates rhetoric to a subordinate status in comparison with logic (1994). For our purposes, problem solving logic makes it exceptionally difficult to theorise about politics, for which uncertainty, contingency and persistent problems are typical. Dewey advocated reflective thought to find solutions to public problems but we know this is only one possibility. He attempted to make philosophy more relevant
by moving away from abstract metaphysics and asserting the value of practical reason, which we use in politics. However, because he held a problem solving view of rationality, it is difficult to use his thought to distinguish science from politics. Furthermore, by valorising problem solving, politics seems fundamentally weak, a form of discourse that produces only imperfect or wrong answers because, like philosophy, it cannot point to a catalogue of dissolved problems as science can (see Meyer 1995: 1-26). This suggests that imposing a scientific framework upon policy and politics might be a better solution, and therefore pragmatism does not rule out an elitist, scientific conception of the policy process\textsuperscript{14} (even if we accept the pragmatic criterion as a norm).

But political inquiry in practice is more complex because the maintenance of a question can be a result. Human decision making might be complex and less than consensual but we should not accept that it is irrational because it does not follow scientific method. Partial answers are also important, and in this Meyer shows that the solutions of philosophy, its problematisations, are equally valuable. Compared with a process in which only a few experts are needed to solve the problems of experience more or less efficiently, by affirming the constitutive role of questioning Meyer better establishes the grounds for democratic inquiry where everyone is potentially a questioner.

Although philosophical reflection is complex and abstract, and seemingly leads us away from practical policymaking, digging deep into
the historical foundations of policy theory reveals important concepts that direct our thought without our being aware of them. The line of reasoning I offer above is drawn from Michel Meyer’s deduction of the principle of questioning (1995) applied to Dewey’s philosophy. Meyer is the only philosopher to think about questioning in this way. This analysis reveals how Dewey actually suppressed questioning in spite of the importance he gave it.

Dewey eliminated the constitutive link between question and answer via the ‘reductor’ of experience and the pragmatic criterion. Meyer’s assessment of contemporary philosophy applies equally to pragmatism:

Rather than undertaking directly to study questioning as such, contemporary philosophy has continually reconceptualized it by reducing it to something else, a ‘reductor’ or ‘reducer,’ which has assumed the role of a first principle, but a first principle which never will admit to being what it is. If it had been necessary to state it—language, science, action, or being—as an ultimate \textit{answer} to the question of principle, the latter would have destroyed itself in its own affirmation. An answer which does not refer to the questioning in which it originates cannot state itself as an answer to the problem of the first principle. The question has been veiled, a nonexistent foundation has been imposed, and therefore there was a mistake (1995: 58).

In rejecting metaphysics Dewey imposed a new first principle by default, which went unjustified. He reduced the difficulty by asserting that dissolving questions via experience, as practice, was a univocal, exhaustive mode of answering for all of rationality. Problematicity was partly displaced into the evolving nature of experience, and elsewhere dissolved by asserting that because non-empirical questions had no
practical consequence they could not be solved and could therefore be eliminated or ignored.

The elimination of questioning via various reductors in positivism and pragmatism had an important consequence; it made problematicity a residual aspect of reason. It eliminated the problematic a priori, excluding it from rationality. The end of questioning (the solution to be reached) controlled the process of inquiry and what remained in question had to be eliminated as it had no meaning. Eliminating problematicity expels politics – which is defined by problematicity – from reason. In positivism, problematicity became the residual of an equation, the excluded portion that bears the remaining difference without having to be accounted for in the whole. This has the unfortunate consequence that problematicity is contained in the failure of the policy process to be sufficiently scientific; implying that human activity is not just imperfect but irrational. We shall see that the initial elimination of problematicity at the heart of Dewey’s and positivism’s problem solving rationality generates theoretical difficulties further down the track. Separating problematicity from necessity requires the fragmentation of theory in order to sustain itself. Therefore it is to this fundamental philosophical dissolution of problematicity that we must return if we are to understand the causes of our own contemporary theoretical difficulties.
Dewey’s focus on public problems is the strength of his pragmatism. By subordinating philosophy to ordinary experience Dewey reflects both the practical reason for which American thinkers are admired and the democratic, egalitarian ethic embodied in the serious attention to ordinary people and their problems that characterises the best aspects of democracy. Dewey is important for us because he linked the problems of reason and democracy together. However, his problem solving epistemology that privileges method does not necessarily produce his preferred conception of an active democratic community. By questioning Dewey’s philosophy anew, we see that he deduced his own philosophy not through experience but through questioning; not through scientific answering, but through philosophical answering. Therefore it is a product of, and should reflect, questioning as a fundamental property. Meyer’s problematology is very different. Using his fundamental insight, we can correct that difficulty while recovering and extending what is positive in Dewey. It is not only situations that are fundamentally indeterminate (Bernstein 1966: 104); thought and action alike are constructed upon indeterminacy, which we can give positive logical form by starting from questions rather than propositions.

While I disagree with Dewey about his epistemology I support his emphasis on democracy, and it is for the latter that his pragmatism resonates with contemporary political theory. If pragmatism is relevant to our present circumstances it is because questioning, or problematicity, has come to the fore in knowledge generally, as well as in
politics. The twin problems of epistemology and democracy combine today to form a single, intertwined problem, just as they did for Dewey. Rather than rejecting philosophical questioning in favour of problem solving, Meyer suggests we return to the foundations of philosophy and reconsider questioning in a new light. Only then might we ask what the fundamental value of questioning means for inquiry into public problems in contemporary democracy.

But this is the task of Part II. Before I go on to reconstruct policy theory from first principles, we first need to examine the consequences of the suppression of questioning for policy theory, commencing with Harold Lasswell’s ‘policy sciences of democracy’.
2. The Problem Orientation and the Policy Sciences

From Dewey’s concern with public problems we move to Harold Lasswell and his influential formulation of the policy sciences. Lasswell is a central figure in the policy sciences field. Contemporary writers both within and outside the United States continue to draw on his ideas and reiterate his key themes, particularly his concern for democracy (de Leon 1981; Dryzek 1989; Dryzek and Torgerson 1993; Fischer 2003a; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003a; Torgerson 1985, 1995; Weiss and Wittrock 1991). Lasswell explicitly framed his ideas as a contemporary adaptation of Dewey’s general approach to public policy (Lasswell 1971: xiii-xiv).  

We see Dewey’s problem solving logic at work in Lasswell’s pragmatic vision of the policy sciences. Torgerson outlines the strong influence of Dewey throughout Lasswell’s thought, noting that Dewey’s How We Think was Lasswell’s point of departure for understanding the policy process, his ideas reflecting Dewey’s step-wise model of problem solving (Torgerson 1995: 236).

Lasswell and his colleagues formalised the ‘policy orientation’ in the middle of the twentieth century (Lerner and Lasswell 1951). A typically modern idea, Lasswell had a grand vision that the policy sciences would scientifically address fundamental problems of employment, peace and equality (Wagner, Weiss, Wittrock and
Although, his ideas about a dedicated policy science were not taken up for some time (Dror, in the Preface to Lasswell 1971). The two components of improving the quality of scientific information for policymaking and the science of policy forming and execution proceeded largely independently of each other (Wagner et al. 1991b: 9). In the policy studies field generally, Colebatch describes a struggle between economics and political science for the soul of policy studies, won by economics in the bureaucracy and by political science on campus (2002a: 84). The differences in methodology then exacerbated differences between the academy and policy practitioners and academics found it difficult to reconcile the normative orientation of Lasswell’s vision with traditional academic detachment (2002a: 84). But whatever his influence in practice, Lasswell’s vision is an important landmark in the field and, for policy theory in particular, continues to influence contemporary writers.

Although the social sciences have always been interwoven with politics and government, the idea to construct a research programme specifically oriented towards policy emerged only in the 1940s and 1950s with Lasswell and his fellow scholars in the United States (Wittrock, Wagner, and Wollmann 1991: 28, 31). Even today the term ‘policy sciences’ is not used universally, although Wagner et al. (1991b: 4) define it well as ‘the tradition within the social sciences that seeks relevance to contemporary affairs.’ The development of the policy sciences was itself very much a part of the increasing demand for social
science research as the state took on new functions, such as macroeconomic planning and redistributing wealth (Gagnon 1990: 1). The social sciences at large developed with the success of the natural sciences in mind, seeking control of the social environment just as science commanded the natural one (Fay 1975: 19). From the Enlightenment notion of a world of puzzles to be solved, the policy sciences developed as the desire for knowledgeable governance (Parsons 1995: 17). Scientific politics would provide technical arguments to reach mutually acceptable answers, and disagreements based on values would drop away, as would rhetoric and concern for power and position (Fay 1975: 22). Wolin describes the depth and extent of the assumption that social phenomena could be rationally understood and society advanced by scientific means (1961: 358-60). The last two centuries saw a long term movement against politics and political philosophy in favour of science that even extended beyond positivists to reactionary theocrats (1961: 358-60). All of them saw facts as central to questions of policy and government, and all of them utilised ‘necessity’ as a bridge for smuggling facts into the territory of norms (1961: 360). As such, the social sciences depicted a model of society which left no room either for politics and the practice of the political art, or for a distinctively political theory (1961: 360). But even where policymaking was not explicitly theorised as a science, scientific ideas about policy and politics were widespread and elements persist in contemporary policy theory (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003b: 18).
Although philosophers have always sought to provide advice to rulers (Lasswell 1962: 2; Wittrock et al. 1991: 29), and while the idea of a science of politics is not confined to Lasswell, Lasswell’s work is important and interesting for more reasons than this. He is important to our field of policy studies because he is the founder of the policy sciences. He is important because his work is one aspect of the larger movement of science against politics. He is also interesting because he tried to formalise the relationship between science and policymaking and because he extended Dewey’s ideas by making problem solving the defining characteristic of policy science. So, while the specifics of my discussion only apply to Lasswell, his thought reflects the broad theme of the possibility a science of politics. I hope that my discussion of Lasswell resonates with this larger question but the point of this chapter is not to repeat the argument about science and politics. It is to see how it unfolded within the policy sciences tradition and, more importantly, to see how Lasswell dealt with the concept of questioning in doing so.

In this chapter, I examine Lasswell’s policy sciences in terms of the problem solving rationality discussed in Chapter One. Firstly, I describe how Lasswell extended upon Dewey’s problem solving logic in his vision of the policy sciences as a multidisciplinary approach to problem solving, made up of two poles of one larger scientific rationality. Secondly, I review some of the critiques of this construction by examining the literature on the use of scientific knowledge for policymaking. Thirdly, I discuss the policy sciences vision as an attempt
to scientifically solve the problem of politics by suppressing problematicity. Finally, I draw on Michel Meyer’s ideas to argue that the scientific view of policy results from the suppression of problematicity in favour of necessity at a philosophical level. I identify the consequences of this for the question of policy and democratic politics.

1. Harold Lasswell: theorising the policy sciences

i. Policy science as problem solving

Lasswell derived his vision of the policy sciences from Dewey’s conception of knowledge as problem solving. Dewey contended that problem solving pertained only to experience, therefore to the problems of the public, an idea reflected in Lasswell’s dream of the policy sciences of democracy (1951a: 10). Lasswell shared Dewey’s rejection of private abstract thought in the form of metaphysics and theology, citing the philosopher’s focus on social institutions as exemplary of the pragmatist attitude (1951a: 12). The ‘problem orientation’ was to be the distinctive outlook of the policy sciences (1970, 1971). He adopted Dewey’s definition of problems and solutions in terms of experience: by definition a problem is a perceived discrepancy between goals and an actual or anticipated state of affairs (1971: 56). Lasswell tried to develop policy science as a distinct field, a ‘policy orientation’ distinguishable by its particular focus on problems (1951a). These problems were to be addressed with the goal of realising human dignity (Lasswell 1951a: 15;
1951b: 5; 1971: 41). The problem orientation of the policy sciences combined the twin questions of the nature of knowledge and the best mode of democracy (Lasswell 1971: 4). The policy sciences were ‘the policy sciences of democracy’ (1951a) because the problem orientation was the regulative criterion which would integrate scientific inquiry with solving the problems of the public.

Lasswell and his colleagues favoured a scientific approach to solving policy problems. Despite Dewey’s concern to distinguish practical science from abstract science, Lasswell saw that policy science\textsuperscript{18} had much in common with the logical positivism\textsuperscript{19} of Carnap and that it could be of great benefit, for example in developing indexes of social attitudes (1951a: 12). It is important to note that early writers in the policy sciences did not propose a simple mechanistic interpretation of social action. In the seminal edited collection *The Policy Sciences* (Lerner and Lasswell 1951), Hilgard and Lerner noted the great changes to social theory brought about by Darwin, Marx and Freud, who all recognised greater social flux and individual autonomy against perfect predictability (1951: 17-18). Policy science was both a symptom and a response to the new problems of social coordination that arrived with modernity. But while acknowledging the impossibility of predicting human behaviour and making scientific generalisations about the future, Lasswell said that such projections should still be appraised in a scientific frame of reference (1951b: 28).
Policy science was to be an interdisciplinary science to address social change by improving policymaking (Hilgard and Lerner 1951: 42-3). Hence Lerner and Lasswell’s (1951) inaugural volume The Policy Sciences not only discussed policymaking but also included chapters by social scientists such as Margaret Mead and Edward Shils. The five chapters on research methods in this same volume (notably by Kenneth Arrow and Paul Lazarsfeld) reflect the methodological bent of policy science’s origins. The idea was not simply to apply scientific knowledge to policy problems. They supposed that ideal rationality was scientific rationality and that decision making could also be conducted according to scientific methods and principles. The empirical criterion marked the distinction between science and non-science, and the emphasis on decision making marked the difference between policy science and other disciplines (Lasswell 1971: 1).²⁰

Despite his scientific outlook, Lasswell and the positivists differed regarding the question of values, a position he shared with Dewey. Dewey criticised other forms of empiricism for separating questions of fact and value (Moore 1961: 266). He believed that philosophy oriented towards practical action overcame scientific elitism and demanded that inquiry be directed towards practical measures in line with fundamental human values. Lasswell also dealt with the problem of values and was keen to indicate how important they were for the policy orientation.²¹ He argued that practical science does involve values because the goals of policymaking should produce the type of human relations we find most
desirable (1951a: 9). He defined value instrumentally as “a category of preferred events,” such as peace rather than war, high levels of productive employment rather than mass unemployment’ and so forth (1951a: 9-10). Although values introduce an element of subjectivity to science, Lasswell argued that this does not totally undermine scientific objectivity since nonobjective values could be considered in advance, when determining the goals of policy inquiry, after which ‘the scholar proceeds with maximum objectivity and uses all available methods’ (1951a: 11).

Although Lasswell included values in the choice of problems, he separated them from the rational process of scientific policymaking, which required ‘scrupulous objectivity and maximum technical ingenuity in executing the projects undertaken’ (Lasswell 1951a: 14). Setting value questions comprises an entirely different process than the scientific procedure that solves them in experience. We see this division elsewhere in Lasswell’s writing when he described clarifying goal values as a preliminary step to selecting hypotheses (1951b: 5). So, he thought values important, although in suggesting such a separation in the process of thinking, Lasswell divided rationality and limited the flexibility of reason in order to support a methodological, staged model of policymaking. The question here is whether we can divide rationality in such a way. Is it possible to fix social values, or do they change with the very process of inquiry regardless of the goals we set? Even if we could
establish clear social values, would policy prescriptions automatically follow that are consistent with those values?

Lasswell’s vision was distinct from the specialist sciences because he saw policy science not as just another new science nor as just another term for social science, rather, it was to be an interdisciplinary concept. All scientific knowledge was relevant to public problems and the disparate sciences would come together in the policy sciences. Thus there is no singular policy science but policy sciences in the plural (1951a). Lasswell stressed that the policy sciences should investigate the most important, fundamental problems, and that policy scientists should not become distracted from this by attending only to the urgent issues of the day (1951a: 8). It is the orientation towards these important problems that is different about the policy sciences, since they are a fraction of the issues which fall under the purview of a range of sciences (Lasswell 1951a: 4). This encompassed both the social and natural sciences since any item of knowledge, whether about social attitudes or the range of weapons, was potentially useful for policy (1951a: 3). He identified two main forces driving the need for interdisciplinary inquiry. Firstly, social problems are complex and a great variety of scientific information is relevant to complex problems. Understanding such problems required a way to integrate different types of knowledge for decision making (Lasswell 1951a: 14; see also Merton and Lerner 1951: 300). Secondly, Lasswell understood that we encounter problems and solutions in context. He sought to overcome the

ii. The two poles of the policy sciences

Lasswell formalised his vision through the twofold orientation of the policy sciences: 1) 'the development of a science of policy forming and execution' using social and psychological inquiry, and 2) improving 'the concrete content of the information and the interpretations available to policy makers' (1951a: 3). He later rephrased this as 'the policy sciences are concerned with knowledge of and in the decision processes of the public and civic order' (1971: 1). Knowledge of the decision process is achieved by 'systematic, empirical studies of how policies are made and put into effect', while knowledge in the decision process draws upon the various scientific disciplines to increase the stock of knowledge relevant to public policy (1971: 1-2). Since the policy orientation includes many existing disciplines, he had to identify for it a distinguishing characteristic; integrating science with the decision process (1971: 1). That is, synthesising scientific decision making and scientific knowledge via the common focus on policy problems produces a larger, unique policy orientation. Policy science advances knowledge 'whenever the methods are sharpened by which authentic information and responsible
interpretations can be integrated with judgment’ (Lasswell 1951a: 4). Just as Dewey wished to redress the denigration of applied knowledge, Lasswell stressed that while policy science had practical importance it was not simply an applied science, that is, of less value than pure science (1951a: 4; see also, in the same volume, Hilgard and Lerner 1951: 42). He insisted that focusing on how policy is made and executed ‘identifies a unique frame of reference’, while also utilising other pre-existing sciences (1971: 1). The orientation towards public problems followed directly from Dewey’s pragmatism, but it is the synthesis of Lasswell’s two poles that establishes the distinct nature and identity of the policy sciences; science encompasses both in an overall problem orientation.

To digress for a moment to the important, subtle distinction between Lasswell’s policy science and other versions of policy science inspired by logical empiricism, Torgerson has interpreted Lasswell’s use of the term ‘judgement’ as closer to political prudence (phronesis), than technocratic policy science (1995: 238-9). He sees Lasswell’s work as very different to positivist policy theory, resonating with the contemporary revival of Aristotelian practice as a postpositivist alternative (Torgerson 1995; on phronesis see Fischer 2003a: 133; for an example, see Flyvbjerg 2001). This involves emphasising Lasswell’s concern for context and improving public deliberation, distinct from a purely technocratic policy science (Fischer 2003a: 221). Lasswell’s and Dewey’s pragmatism differed in outlook, but I do not think it has been
established that their approach was logically different; they both shared an underlying ‘scientific’ problem solving rationality. Lasswell did say that the yardsticks for analysis used by the policy scientist and the decision maker must be separated, since decision makers might have to be satisfied with achieving less (1951b: 16). Taking account of political circumstances and other constraints requires some degree of intuition over pure empiricism. Even so, Lasswell’s theory is still scientific at its root and employs scientific method in devising and implementing solutions to problems. His pragmatist heritage is different from positivism in valuing practical action as the primary goal of knowledge, however this is a normative criterion. The underlying logic of both is to resolve key questions by reference to experience, which is what counts as knowledge in the end. Authentic interpretation and decision making eliminates questions apodictically by referring to experience and therefore the most rigorous and sophisticated policymaking integrates scientific knowledge with a scientific decision making procedure.

Whatever similarities and differences there were between positivism and pragmatism, in elaborating the policy sciences Lasswell moved qualitatively away from practical reason and further towards science. Dewey acknowledged that inquiry could conclude with a directive for action rather than definitive problem solving action. However, his main idea was that knowledge should have instrumental, practical consequences, and these were not to be distinguished from the process of inquiry itself. Rather than seeing practical reason as
necessarily concluding with action, Lasswell formulated the practical stage as a different but related question, subsuming the two under a larger synthesis true to Dewey’s ‘problem orientation’. If we recall Hintikka’s criticism of practical reason (apodictic judgements about the world do not necessarily entail only one possible way to achieve our ends; Chapter One) then Lasswell correctly divided policymaking into two stages of inquiry. He acknowledged that scientific inquiry can produce knowledge without necessarily making directives for action. It can do, and one could suppose that perhaps scientists should be civic-minded, but it is not necessarily in the nature of inquiry to do so. It is the synthesis of the two poles of the policy sciences that brings science together with an orientation towards solving public problems.

In sum, Lasswell divided what was for pragmatism a singular questioning process into a dual questioning process. He transformed a holistic procedure that moves us from problem to solution as practical effect into two inquiries; one into the nature of the problem and another into how best to bring it about in practice. Lasswell’s two poles of the policy sciences divided scientific findings from the practical methods of bringing them about. He moved beyond the Deweyan model and established a distinction between science and scientific politics, even though he did not think that policymaking was logically different from scientific inquiry. So, at the same time as Lasswell explicated Dewey’s program in the form of a policy sciences that would draw science and politics together, we see a fragmentation of the theoretical model despite
his attempts to establish a unified discipline. Science still encompassed both questions but separating them made explicit what was at stake and allowed us to see the distinction between science and policymaking, a distinction that became the source of later critiques.

The question we must now ask is this: is Lasswell’s synthesis of the two poles of the policy orientation itself scientific? Without even considering whether policymaking can be conducted scientifically, for Lasswell’s vision to be consistent the relationship between the two poles must itself be scientific. He made this judgement theoretically, without reference to experience, and on the same grounds as Dewey, via the orientation to public problems. This operation is not scientific at all. It is based on a normative view that policymaking should be ‘rational’ (where rationality equals problem solving) and that scientific research is best for solving public problems. Therefore the construction of the policy sciences is not consistent with the criterion for scientific problem solving he proposes. We now need to examine the literature to find examples which will allow us to unravel the theoretically seamless connection between social science and policy.

2. Questioning the scientific model

i. The use of scientific knowledge

Lasswell’s formulation of the two poles of the policy sciences raises the question of how one pole translates to the other, how scientific
knowledge is used in policymaking. Why is the use of knowledge in policymaking important? The link between scientific theory and practical control was essential to positivist science (Fay 1975: 29-48) even if it was not theorised in quite this way. Dewey, the pragmatist, went further in declaring that non-practical problems were non-problems and that all inquiry is oriented towards action. Wilson confirms Dewey’s opinion that knowledge itself was action upon reality: “*Reality is not to be read in terms of knowledge as such, but in terms of action*”...the dominant “interest becomes the use of knowledge; the conditions under which and ways in which it may be most organically and effectively employed to direct conduct [original emphasis]” (Dewey, in Wilson 1995: 127). Indeed, Dewey even seems to suggest that action that fails is nonsensible, according action an epistemological status; ‘To fail to understand is to fail to come into agreement in action; to misunderstand is to set up action at cross purposes’ (Dewey 1958: 179).

But research since has shown the progress of knowledge between the two poles of the policy sciences to be far from continuous. Scientific information is often used in policymaking in a manner that is neither objective nor goal-directed (Weiss 1991). Indeed, in *The Policy Sciences* Merton and Lerner (1951) pointed to the insidious possibilities for policy makers to use scientific research for ulterior purposes. They noted that decision makers sometimes commission scientific studies on problems upon which they do not wish to act so as to delay action and allay criticism against them (1951: 299). Hence they distinguished between
two types of knowledge use in policymaking. The first type, they argue, conducted by groups with self-interest in mind, is more likely to be exploited for propaganda, to justify a predetermined decision, and the research findings less likely ‘to be subjected to the test of experience’ (1951: 299). The second type of research, research for action, is subjected to the test of experience by scientists and is therefore a genuine response to a problem (1951: 299). This pejorative distinction between research tested by experience and research for persuasion is an interesting one that I will return to in Chapter Four where I discuss rhetoric. For now we must admit the possibility that knowledge can be used for other than instrumental purposes, no matter how undesirable this might be.

What has been the experience in practice? Over the last few decades many scholars have examined the use of scientific knowledge in policymaking (see Brooks and Gagnon 1990; Wagner et al. 1991a; Weiss 1977). Despite the great volume of social science developed for policymaking many researchers have concluded that social science has had little success in influencing policy solutions (Jenkins-Smith 1990: 47; Rein and Schön 1977: 235). The idea that analysis is used to solve problems has been debunked as a ‘problem solving myth’ (Rein and White 1977: 262). Weiss, for example, outlines the many disappointments of social scientists: research findings were not as influential on policy as scholars had hoped; scientists naïvely failed to appreciate how important ideology and interests are in politics; research
was more likely to influence how policy makers conceptualised problems than provide solutions, or it was used to move issues higher or lower on the public agenda; and policy makers often used research as an argument to advocate for a favoured position (1991: 311-14). The ways science and the state interact continue to be an important research area, and the sociology of knowledge is now an established theme of policy studies.

Because scientific knowledge is not used consistently in the two poles of the policy sciences Lasswell’s synthesis is not coherent. At the end of the volume by Wagner et al. (1991a), Weiss and Wittrock (1991) review the Lasswellian vision of the policy sciences in light of the relationship between social science and policy in practice. They emphasise that policy theorists must move away from a simplistic understanding of the use of scientific research in policymaking, stressing how historical forces and institutional structures impact upon the relationship between social science and the state (1991: 356). They call for a re-examination of Lasswell’s programme, saying we should pay particular attention to its historicity, epistemology, ontology and, importantly, account for human agency (1991: 366-7). They state that this is not a call ‘for abstruse philosophizing’, but say that social science will only be relevant to human concerns if it accounts for how social structures condition those concerns, and how we can act independently of them (1991: 367).
Weiss and Wittrock rightly move away from a naïve scientific view and locate the source of the difficulties in understanding policy in fundamental philosophical questions of epistemology, ontology, and human nature. But why, we might ask, might philosophising be abstruse? Doesn’t this simply repeat the past rejection of philosophy and the disjunction between theory and practice that led to the theory they criticise? In fact, Weiss and Wittrock are concerned with these questions and do take them seriously but their qualification perhaps illustrates their keen awareness of how difficult it is to broach fundamental philosophical questions within such a practically-oriented concern as policy studies. If the problems underlying the policy sciences concept stem from fundamental questions of knowledge and human nature then why not return to philosophy to see what it can offer us? All this suggests the relevance of the larger theme of this thesis. For now I would simply note that the use of research for a variety of purposes other than problem solving in the policy arena breaks the theoretical link between knowledge, action and problem solving envisioned by both Dewey and Lasswell.

ii. Reconsidering the relationship between science and policy

Understanding the relationship between social science and policy, Wittrock says, ‘ultimately rests on an assumption about the analogy between the operational modes of the realms of research and of policy’ (1991: 336). If policymaking deploys scientific knowledge to varying
effect and for non-scientific purposes then we cannot maintain that the
two poles of the policy sciences fall under one larger, scientific
rationality. Wittrock examines this relationship anew by considering the
logical assumptions behind the various theories of how social science
and policy interact (1991: 337-9). Firstly, the enlightenment model sees
social science as identifying problems rather than solving them, i.e.,
supplying general orientations and concepts which filter into public
consciousness. Secondly, the engineering model is utilitarian and
subordinates research to the demands of policy. Thirdly is the
technocratic model, where research is primary and to which policy is
subordinated. Finally, the classical bureaucratic model gives primacy to
politics and administration. From these he identifies two separate logics;
the enlightenment model and the classical bureaucratic model suppose
that the research and policymaking/administration domains operate
according to distinct logics, whereas the technocratic and engineering
models suppose a unitary logic where the only perceivable obstacles are

Both these logics are paradoxical. If science and politics operate
according to entirely different logics then it is difficult to see how
enlightenment could occur (1991: 344). That is, were the two domains
distinctly different epistemologies it would be impossible to translate
knowledge from one to the other. But were we to accept the contrary,
that the two realms operate according to a unitary logic, it would be
embarrassing to admit that the planned interaction rarely happens and
that the technical and engineering models rarely seem to apply (1991: 344). Despite this, Wittrock argues that the domains are ‘roughly analogous and compatible’ if not identical (1991: 344). He proposes an alternative theory, describing the two logics as ‘strongly analogous and continuous’ and ‘weakly analogous and discontinuous’ respectively (1991: 344). He goes on to examine how other policy theorists conceive of the relationship between the two domains, concluding in favour of an interactive depiction which he describes as ‘discourse structuration’ (1991: 351). This takes the historical and institutional context of political activity into account while still allocating an important role to the agency of the political actors involved (1991: 350-1). The two processes feed back upon each other to create policy discourse.

Wittrock’s final, interactional model best characterises the two-way process in which policy makers utilise scientific knowledge and how they also influence scientific research; it is not a unified logic, but nor is it necessarily an entirely political process in which evidence plays no part at all.

Studies of how scientific knowledge is used in policy have ‘problematised’ the idea of a direct, logical connection between the two poles of the policy sciences. That is, they questioned the relationship between social science and policy and showed the link to be contingent rather than necessary. In logical terms, this link is not scientific but rhetorical and political. The two domains interact, but knowledge flows between them in variable ways and for variable ends, without being
confined to a singular meaning or usage by the larger problem solving criterion. Politics cannot be entirely removed in policymaking nor from scientific research for policy, despite attempts to quarantine policy science from political contamination. The overall rationality of the policy sciences has fragmented. In the next chapter I explain the consequences for theories of the policy process of dividing rationality into political and scientific domains. Colebatch points out that the scientific model of policymaking is not so much an accurate theory as an idealistic view of how people think policy should be made (2002a: 125). In reality, official versions of the policy process are often only rationalisations, rhetorical constructions that touch up a chaotic process with a rational gloss (Colebatch 2002a: 129). This forces us to reconsider both the nature of politics and its distinctiveness from science in order to understand the relationship between the two. If we do not bring politics into the frame of rationality then we allow science to be the standard by default. While problem solving is the unquestioned standard of rationality we will not establish a place for political discourse nor be able to distinguish when it is manipulative nor when it is sincere. This is because politics is a far more problematic realm of rationality which appears inferior to science when judged by the problem solving standard. The contingent relationship between science and policy indicates that we need to thematise problematic logical links, requiring argumentation and rhetoric, which I discuss in Chapter Four. Also important is the association between contingency and the problematic (questioning)
which is quite different to the problem solving, ‘necessary’ logic of science.

One of the reasons theorising about policy is so difficult is its multidisciplinary nature. Policymaking involves a great range of information, ideas and arguments, as well as complex political institutions and a multitude of different actors: Lasswell was right to stress its interdisciplinary nature. But today we have moved beyond the overarching scientific conception of the two poles of the policy sciences to investigate the complex relationship between science and a related but qualitatively different policy domain. How are we to theorise this difference between the two? Given that ideology, interests and power are prevalent in policymaking, we can say that it is political. How do we make sense of the political aspects of policy and articulate its intricacies within a larger theory? Wittrock’s discussion is productive but we have a new question for policy theory; how can it provide an overarching conceptual framework that deals with the problematic relationship between science and politics without separating them into incommensurate domains? We lack an interpretative schema which can replace the problem solving model. It remains the standard, in principle, though we acknowledge it is conditioned by other factors in practice. With problem solving science as the benchmark, the goal of replacing politics with policy science persists. Without articulating a space for political rationality on its own terms it will be difficult to understand policymaking outside the scientific framework. Only when we have
integrated these two aspects of knowledge under a singular epistemology will we be able to expound the logic of policymaking and say how it differs from, and relates to, science.

3. The scientific solution to the problem of politics

Wagner et al. (1991b: 9) are not surprised by the methodological focus of United States public policy schools, considering the extensive discussion of methods in Lerner and Lasswell’s *The Policy Sciences*. This methodologism did not just reflect the fashion of the day but followed from the idea that rational thought involves the methodological justification of solutions to problems. The scientific view of rationality does not deal with questioning as such but with hypotheses (Meyer, 1994: 136). In policy science, policy solutions are hypothetical conclusions which are supposed to resolve social problems in practice. The question has already been partially resolved into a hypothetical answer, the empirical (or practical) validation of which is all that remains. For knowledge to progress, the hypothetical solution must be converted into an independent result through empirical/practical verification. For example, Campbell proposed a scientific model of policymaking with his ‘experimenting society’ theory, derived in part from Popper’s philosophy (Campbell 1988). Popperians viewed policies as hypotheses and policy implementation as correspondent with scientific experiment (Dryzek 1993: 219). Campbell argued that testing policy hypotheses empirically, by trial and error, leads to the growth of
knowledge (Dunn 1993: 256-7). If problems cannot be resolved in the first instance, the principle of falsification permits partial explanations to suffice as solutions until better ones can be found (Dunn 1993: 257).

Such a conception actually resolves its questions in advance by converting them into hypotheses. It tells us nothing about the process required to arrive at those hypotheses. The movement from initial question to answer-as-hypothesis does not appear because the problem is already solved and presented as an autonomous judgement (Meyer 1995: 103). The demand for problem solving thus shifts the focus to the methodological treatment of hypothetical solutions, emphasising the methodological validation or falsification of the hypothesis. The hypothetico-deductive method thus suppresses the initial questioning and becomes the whole of the policy process. The initial questioning is lost, being either entirely suppressed or removed to a prior stage of discovery. Justification becomes the whole of rationality and science the most rigorous and technically proficient form for justifying results. This is the source of the methodologism we associate with science generally, and with policy science in particular.

Policymaking is judged by its decision processes, i.e., whether they were scientific, by how well scientific techniques were applied to verifying policy solutions and action. Simon’s Administrative Behaviour, for example, is a seminal work in the application of scientific techniques to governance (1976). Policy science is an instrumental rationality that
interprets the world scientifically and employs scientific techniques to effect change. Even though this is practical, stipulating that the criterion for answering questions is the modification of existence shifts the focus onto the method by which we verify solutions. The pragmatic criterion is a worthy one but the logic whereby problems are assumed to be known in advance emphasises technological rigour as the measure of rationality even more than the efficacy of the solution. We can point to some shortcomings of this idealised view in practice. Dunn notes that different stakeholders in a policy area can hold conflicting interpretations at the same time and in reality few ideals are shared around ill-structured or messy policy problems (1993: 259-60; see also Rose 1977; and Chapter Three, following). Further, Dryzek points out that this view requires normative schemes to remain fixed and closed to discussion, allowing for an impoverished conception of politics which fails to take proper account of the context for policy implementation (1993: 220).

Applying scientific method to policymaking brackets out important qualities of the policy process, including complexity and contextually-situated knowledge. At a more fundamental level, Lindblom and Woodhouse describe this shift to science as ‘a demand that seems to call for a reduction of partisan political conflict, of political manoeuvering, of power, of “politics”’ (1993: 6). Scientific problem solving would succeed in solving problems where politics had failed. Policy science thus comprised a general solution to the problems of the public; science is the answer to the question of politics. Again, Fay notes that a major theme of
positivist social science was to replace subjective politics with rational social engineering (1975: 27-8; see also Wolin 1961). Lasswell was clear on the benefits of science in this respect: ‘What has eluded scientific and policy attention is a large number of the human factors which prevent the resolution of these difficulties by rational means’ (Lasswell 1951a: 8). He believed psychology, for example, had great potential to change destructive human nature for instrumental ends, concluding that treating policy problems scientifically provided the basis ‘for a profound reconstruction of culture by continual study and emendation, and not by (or certainly not alone by) the traditional means of political agitation’ (1951a: 8). His cautionary parenthetical remark here is just that: the grounding idea is to replace politics with scientific decision making. Political problems in general are to be resolved by science, using scientific methods and by recourse to experience. Scientific rationality would eliminate the human – and by implication, irrational – practice of political agitation. Lasswell's scientific theory of inquiry terminates in an instrumental, scientific rationality that replaces politics altogether.

By excluding politics from the field of rationality Lasswell was able to distinguish between policy and politics. He wrote that “policy” is free of many of the undesirable connotations clustered about the word political, which is often believed to imply “partisanship” or “corruption” (1951a: 5).27 Science is 'disinterested', in contrast to self-interested, partisan politics, so policy science is a non-political mode of finding solutions to public problems. Because science uses logic and experience
as its mode of resolution and because it solves its questions by rigorous method, it limits debate, restricts argument about the value of solutions, and also asserts the only valid means to obtain them. For Lasswell, policy science was firmly on the side of dispassionate rationality. The ideal of a problem solving policy science survives for many today (see, for example, Johnson 2004; Lauder, Brown and Halsey 2004). This is not to suggest that policy cannot solve problems, only that understanding policy is more complex. In other words, the difficulty is not that we consider policymaking to be scientific in practice but that our theoretical basis for examining policy continues to be grounded in problem solving rationality, of which science is the most sophisticated expression. The problem solving framework still presents theoretical difficulties even for those who reject logical empiricism, particularly in recovering the political sense of policy.

In this chapter and the next, I want to suggest that the hostility of science towards politics arises from the suppression of questioning.28 This is exemplified in the way Dewey and Lasswell constructed the problem orientation. Despite the importance of questions and problems in policy theory, Dewey and Lasswell located knowledge in solutions and the means for obtaining them, not within the question-answer link. Scientific rationality covers both the input of information to policymaking and the process of decision making based on that information. Lasswell’s articulation of these two poles extended Dewey’s philosophy. It was consistent with the practical problem orientation but
also made a difference by moving away from practical reason towards a purely scientific view of policy. He made scientific problem solving encompass both poles of the policy sciences and, even if we allow for ‘satisficing’ solutions (Simon 1976), the contingencies of budgets, and other institutional and contextual constraints on perfect decision making, the scientific rationality underlying the policy sciences tended to exclude politics in favour of methodology. Scientific method relates back to experience, which is the ultimate determinant of knowledge. Method guarantees the meaning of policy by constructing an instrumental path from problem to solution, where the nature of the problem has been decided in advance as also residing in experience. Scientific method is the general solution to political problems. In fact, science is the answer to the very question of politics, eliminating the latter as a mode of resolution because science dissolves its questions in its answers. Politics – which deals with opinion, values and a debate between pro and con where questions remain open and solutions are partial – is excluded from rationality a priori. All that remains is to eliminate the residual problematicity by devising sufficiently sophisticated research methods and a technico-administrative regime to implement the scientific program. Can we really eliminate politics from policy? Attempting to establish science as the supreme problem solver limits our view of policy and fragments our theory of the policy process, a consequence I describe in Chapter Three.
4. Science and the problematicity of policy

Returning to the theme of problem solving and questioning, what results from this discussion of the policy sciences?

i. Problematicity as residual to reason

The relationship between science and policymaking is contingent, not necessary (or causal). It is problematic because there is no seamless logical path from scientific inquiry to policy solution. The demand for problem solving cannot deal with this problematicity, so it overcomes this fragmented picture by imposing science \textit{a priori} as the only proper rationality. Just as logical empiricism is flawed because it ignores what it cannot dissolve, so policy science cannot account for reality when it cannot resolve problems apodictically, when reality fails to conform to the scientific norm. It considers problems to have meaning only in their dissolution and what remains problematic cannot be thematised except as a \textit{residual} element. Even if we include the pragmatist idea that upholding values is a goal of policymaking against positivists who exclude them as non-measurable, the central idea is that the meaning of policy questions lies in the method of their dissolution and that which cannot be dissolved is inessential; merely an extraneous factor, a leftover one supposes will eventually be eliminated through better technique. The problem solving concept makes a residual aspect of the political qualities of policymaking; a generalised problematicity external to the problem solving model. That way policy can remain a ‘non-
political’ politics. Policy may be conditioned by an external political context but it remains largely immune from it.

In the next chapter I argue that the demand for problem solving fragments policy theory internally – precisely the opposite effect to that desired by Lasswell – dividing the theory of the policy process into autonomous stages instead of an overall coherent picture. In proposing that science could solve political problems, science not only reduces complex policy problems to analytic questions but necessitates that the problematic qualities and uncertainties of policy and politics be separated from the scientific ideal in order to preserve the latter. Finding solutions scientifically becomes the object, which lends itself to containing problems within particular disciplines, such as economics or psychology, and runs against the multidisciplinarity required to treat policy questions effectively.

ii. Problematicity and scientific ‘overrationalisation’

I go on to discuss further critiques of the scientific ideal in the following two chapters. For now I want to stress the underlying philosophical sources of our contemporary difficulties in policy theory. Despite the critiques, the scientific model still remains the norm for many. Even though the claims of science to perfect rationality have come under attack the ideal survives, partly because it has political purchase in its legitimating powers. This has pernicious consequences for democratic politics; an important line of critique for postpositivist theorists who
continue to draw inspiration from Dewey’s and Lasswell’s concern for democracy. The source of the legitimacy of science is not just historical, but also theoretical, because it is related to the demise of the Cartesian foundation of Enlightenment thought which was undermined with Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, when philosophy lost much of its territory to the social sciences (Meyer 1995: 28). Dewey and the pragmatists represent one particular rejection of philosophy while positivism was another. The policy sciences are not simply a particular, isolated attempt to rationalise politics but a symptom of a much more general effect of the scientific response to the decline of the Cartesian subject. Michel Meyer describes the fragmentation and scientisation of thought at a global level as a consequence of, and a response to, this foundational fragmentation, so we see a contemporary ‘overrationalisation’ in every field of knowledge (1995: 131). Meyer writes that theoretical fragmentation corresponds to the abandonment of a single norm of resolution, with the following consequences:

we have flexible and adjustable resolutionary models that emerge from close adaptation to their objects. Thought becomes manipulative: trial and error becomes necessary, linked to the reality of objects, because thought fails to have a unique, preestablished standard of rationality, which could always be false because it cannot adapt itself a priori to the particular requirements of each situation. In this way, thought becomes technique regarding its object, while it theorizes itself as science [original emphasis] (1995: 131).

The thematisation and consequent trajectory of the policy sciences is a particular instance of this more general overrationalisation in which the use of scientific techniques has become a justification in itself. Political
philosophy is as much a casualty as metaphysics (see Wolin 1961), with methodology taking over the burden of justification while it is theorised as policy science. Even though it has been rejected at an epistemological level, the 'scientificity' of science – its accompanying methodologism and abstract analytical relationships – serves to justify the continued use of theory inspired by logical empiricism. Technocratic reason survives because of its efficiency and the continued legitimacy of the scientific ideal and its attendant rhetoric. In policymaking, scientificity serves as a legitimating device that adds a gloss of rationality and objectivity to partisan political decisions (Jennings 1987: 133).

Methodologism, Meyer argues, is an overcompensation for our lost philosophical foundations. Scientific hegemony is a product of our failure to thematise the generalised problematicity that arose from the crisis of metaphysics and the assumption that knowledge is exclusively the dissolution of questions:

The problematization of the thinkable, experienced as a negative feature of thought, impels us toward a scientific overcompensation, based on assumed technique, since science guarantees each new result one by one, but without any concern for, or any necessity of, a global reflection. Therefore, science becomes the implicit norm of rationality and of the thinkable at the same time, because science is the perfect embodiment of the analytical nature of the mind, and because science, in the last analysis, does achieve a sort of unity by default, creating a limited model of resolution which functions satisfactorily because components are isolated and analyzed into parts. Scientificity is really the substitute for, and the displacement of, thought that lacks a first principle, and for which it becomes the implicit principle, the norm which imposes itself without being able to justify itself, but also, and above all, without having to do so...Technical performance, the fact that something 'works', is raised to
the same philosophical level as, for example, religious dogma (1995: 132).

The scientificity of contemporary thought, of which the scientific conception of politics is one example, substitutes for the lack of a first principle. Science is still the normative model for philosophy and for politics but, even worse, it has become a pure technique detached from a larger rationality. The consequent methodologism then justifies itself precisely because it achieves a result, a solution, and this is all that counts. ‘Scientifically’ determined policy solutions are legitimate because of their scientificity rather than their pertinence to the problem at hand or the related consequences of a decision. This is also used to override popular dissent and to exclude laypersons from participating in the policy process. Both scientific research for policymaking and scientific policy processes then serve not an enlightening but an ideological function.  

The reductionist path of policy analysis is then further entrenched by policy makers’ demands for research characterised by scientificity (Wittrock et al. 1991). Policy makers like the neatness of scientific models of problem resolution (for example, the use of neoclassical economic theory in decision making; see Harpham and Scotch 1988). Byrne (1987) explains why such a conception of knowledge production serves the ends of those in power. He gives cost-benefit analysis as an example of a technical decision making device that resolves amorphous, contentious problems through a rational model apparently superior to
broad public debate, displacing politics with non-political administration (1987: 71). This technique transforms rule by consent into rule by ‘reason’, reducing politics to utilitarian calculation (1987: 77). Its intent is ‘to dispense with the inefficiency and irrationality of politics, but in fact it dispenses with democracy in favor of the administrative state’ (Byrne 1987: 77). The cost-benefit technique ‘cannot rationalize social problems without considerable violence to our understanding of these problems’ (Byrne 1987: 89). Reducing complex policy problems to analytic problems for the sake of finding a solution is, therefore, inextricably linked to both our understanding of problems and the quality of democratic deliberation.

Importantly, these theoretical impasses result from our inability to thematise problematicity in a positive light because we have assumed problem solving to be the standard. This produces problems in policy theory and elsewhere. Dewey rejected abstract metaphysics and construed knowledge as the dissolution of problems by practical action, borrowing his model of resolution from science. Lasswell formalised this logic as the policy sciences, emphasising the methodological treatment of problems for instrumental outcomes, but the link between research and policy failed to conform to the scientific norm. The general cynicism held for politics and politicians is no reason to ignore the reality of politics, no matter how much we might hope for objective policymaking. Even if only to criticise it more effectively, our task should be to understand politics for what it is and not as what obstructs the
imposition of a scientific politics. We need to understand what is political about policymaking in order to reveal the differences between sincere and manipulative uses of science, and to democratise the problem orientation by taking policymaking out of the sole hands of experts. This is a task that goes beyond particular political preference. Neither science nor practical reason provide a satisfactory theoretical response to the question of politics: an alternative answer is required, one that does not seek to eliminate politics altogether in answering it, but an answer that reflects what politics actually is.

iii. Policy science, democracy, and problem solving

For both Dewey and Lasswell the problem solving policy sciences were also linked to the question of democracy. How does the critique of the policy sciences impact on this question? I have already suggested an answer to this question above. Lasswell intended the policy sciences to be a general solution to the problem of politics, directing it away from political agitation towards a methodological policy process beyond contention. Even if one reads Lasswell and Dewey as primarily in favour of science contributing to better public deliberation rather than establishing policymaking by experts, the test of the legitimacy of decisions in the theory of the policy sciences was neutral, empirical verification, not political mobilisation. Asserting scientific procedures for making political decisions has well-known anti-democratic properties: the scientific norm lends legitimacy to scientificity, to the trappings of
science regardless of the ethics of its processes; it degrades the legitimacy of human concerns couched in non-scientific language, excluding value questions as well as those people without access to scientific knowledge; it potentially co-opts scientists and other experts to serve established power; and it implies the possibility that the state can shift responsibility for policy failure on to an ‘irrational’ public, thereby justifying constraints on human liberty to make people conform to the demands of the scientific state.

The suppression of questioning impacts upon both the question of knowledge and the question of democratic politics. Because science cannot account for the contingency of politics it renders this contingency a residual feature of reason that it either ignores or forcibly excludes. This is not only a limitation of logical empiricism as a theory of knowledge, it also has consequences in a political context where it becomes ideological. Scientificity becomes a legitimating ideology for policy makers by closing itself off from public questioning. The problem solving view puts the emphasis on method and thus supports highly structured, complex models of decision making and the use of specialised discourses to formulate and solve problems. While Dewey was against elitist thought, and Lasswell wished the policy sciences to be ‘the policy sciences of democracy’, their own scientific orientation produced a methodologism (whether this was intentional or not)\textsuperscript{34} that limited the theory of policy inquiry to that most suitable for science. The pragmatist heritage, despite its democratic aims, did not produce a
democratic conception of policymaking. By viewing the world in instrumental, scientific terms and stressing the dissolution of questions as the only means of resolving them, pragmatism instituted a scientific conception of rationality that sought to replace politics with a specialised decision making procedure. The assumptions that better knowledge will produce better policy and that science is value neutral combine to perpetuate the myth that policy science transcends politics (Fischer 1987: 95). Public demands for democratic control over government conflict with the desire for decisions to be rational and scientific (Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993: 6-7). Of course the outcomes of policymaking are important, but practical problem solving is not the only result of policymaking in practice nor is it sufficient to understand it theoretically. The fragmented rationality of science justifies making decisions for the sake of reaching solutions without regard for human needs and concern for democratic process. Devising a unified theory that broadens the scope of policy beyond scientific problem solving, therefore, has more than just scholarly appeal.

Much of the literature in the field since the 1960s comprises an extended postpositivist critique of the idea of a science of policymaking and of the perfect ‘rational model’ of the policy process, drawing on new insights from social theory and interpretative philosophy. Postpositivists aim to show that both making and understanding policy is far from scientific; it is interpretative, argumentative, and political. I discuss some of this literature in the following two chapters. For now I note that
policy theory is not difficult simply because theory is idealistic and practice is ‘messy’. The difficulties in theorising about policy arise from fundamental assumptions about the link between problems and solutions. Dewey and Lasswell, despite their shortcomings, are interesting precisely because they attempted to articulate an explicit logic of policy problem solving rather than treating policymaking as a practical phenomenon unworthy of serious reflection. They understood that the issues of policy theory have weight beyond the derisory view of policymaking as a lower form of thinking and go to the heart of debates about knowledge and democracy. Hence, our difficulties lie deeper than the critique of science, originating in a more general attitude hostile towards philosophy and politics, of which logical empiricism is but one manifestation.

Until now the meaning of problems has been assumed to lie only in their dissolution, for which science is best adapted. Philosophy and politics do not always eliminate their questions, producing partial not apodictic solutions. In fact, defining politics as the dissolution of problems leads to authoritarianism because it condemns the agency of human beings and is consistent with attacks on the rights of citizens to ask questions. Going back to the origins of Western philosophy, Meyer points out that Plato’s authoritarianism resulted from his own rejection of Socrates’ questioning method in favour of an essentialism that eliminated the problematic a priori (1995: 72). In the twentieth century, we saw the most horrific consequences of scientific politics in the ‘final
solution’ to the Jewish question in Nazi Germany. Stalinism was equally scientific in theory and oppressive in practice. By unravelling the consequences of the problem solving ideal we can appreciate not only the complex interaction of science and politics but we also understand its political uses. Science is not authoritarian in itself. It has been a great civilising and liberating force in many respects and to reject it outright would be just as irrational as embracing it as the whole of knowledge. It is the interaction of science and politics that concerns us and this is a key question for policy studies as well.

The difficulty of understanding policy is closely related to larger questions arising from the contemporary crisis of reason. Philosophical questions, more than ever, are relevant to questions about policymaking and to the politics of policy, which I examine in more detail in Chapter Three.
3. The Politics of Policy Problems

Many scholars have criticised the policy sciences ideal by attacking the scientific norm itself. The philosophy and sociology of science have been greatly influential here, particularly figures such as Kuhn (1962). The idea is to consider the social and historical influences on scientific knowledge production and reveal science as less than scientific because it is bound up in social relations. These critiques are important, and have done much to show that science is not detached from social forces, nor is it a perfectly neutral, problem solving rationality. I do not wish to continue these critiques in this chapter but rather take a different tack; to investigate the politics of policy inquiry and understand how it differs from problem solving policy science. In Chapters One and Two, I discussed how both the power of science, and its limitations, derive from its problem solving rationality. Problem solving is important but we run into difficulties if we make it the sole conceptual basis of policy theory because our view of policy fragments in order to retain the problem solving ideal, separating science from politics and leaving us with inadequate conceptual tools for theorising about policy.

In short, it is the underlying problem solving rationality of science that presents the problem for policy theory. It follows, therefore, that we must move beyond the demand for apodictic solutions and thematise the problematicity of policy answers and the policy process. We should
look for what is positive about this indeterminacy rather than condemn it as something to be dissolved a priori, whether by positivist or pragmatist criteria. Because policy scholars inherited the problem orientation they have already begun to move in this direction, revealing the extent of questioning in policymaking and pointing out the limitations of the problem solving model.

In this chapter I revisit and extend upon this critique by asking whether we can treat policy problems scientifically. We also need to ask whether policy solutions are of the same type as scientific solutions, and whether the policy process follows the scientific model in practice. I deal with these questions in two major sections. Firstly, I consider some criticisms of the problem solving model of policymaking, showing that problem setting is just as important as problem solving and that this is a political process. Secondly, I discuss criticisms of the linear, rational model of policymaking. In the third section I draw from these discussions to highlight the politics of policy and the persistence of problematicity in policy discourse. I argue that it is the problem solving concept that causes us theoretical difficulties and that we should look to questioning as our founding concept to express the problematicity of the policy process in practice.
1. Problems, policy problems, and problem setting

i. Univocal definition of problems

In practice, policy deliberation presents conceptual difficulties for the problem solving theory of policymaking. First of all, the problem solving model assumes univocal definitions of problems. That is, problems have a clear meaning and therefore we need only inquire as to what is the best solution. This is expressed nowhere better than in the idealistic model of science. Scientific problem solving treats questions analytically, starting from hypothetical solutions and seeking yes or no answers that verify or falsify the initial hypothesis. But policy problems seldom appear in an unambiguous fashion to allow objective, analytical treatment (Anderson 1987: 23). Indeed, Lindblom and Woodhouse argue that it is not possible to make analytical definitions of social problems (1993: 21). For example, riots in Los Angeles might be a problem of declining law and order, racial discrimination, poverty, family disintegration, and/or poor police training (1993: 21). They identify many difficulties for the analytic framework in practice; even the best analysis is fallible, information about the problem is often less than comprehensive, conflicting values lead to differences of interpretation, and time and cost factors constrain the possible solutions (1993: 15-21). Even if goals could be clearly defined they would unlikely remain fixed for very long. Public preferences are neither stable nor transparent to investigation but can only be discovered through ongoing collective
deliberation: we cannot ‘presuppose the existence of a stable and connected set of preferences concerning the policy questions at hand’ (Jenkins-Smith 1990: 78). Of course, both Dewey and Lasswell acknowledged the shifting context of social meaning and that solutions to public problems were only temporary. But the problem solving view either excludes particularly complex, ‘ill-structured’ problems (Rose 1977) from consideration or requires that they be simplified for the purposes of analysis. In the latter case, the demand for a solution leads to oversimplification and research findings are not applicable to the problem.

As I noted in Chapters One and Two, the problem solving concept shifts the focus from debating the meaning of the problem to confirming the solution. Rein and Schön also make this link, pointing out that the problem solving model of policy incorrectly assumes a shared view of the problem and, from this, also assumes an instrumental approach towards discovering discrete solutions to a finite problem (1977: 235). The univocal definition of problems is closely linked to the demand for solutions and to the corresponding demand to reach those solutions scientifically and for instrumental purpose. The problem solving view encourages us to limit the interpretation of problems to permit the instrumental-rational approach. Indeed, since rationality commences from a known problem and solution, situations in which disputes persist about the nature of the problem are at worst irrational and at best pre-rational; if the problem has no clear set of solutions then there
must be a failure of thought. Although complex problems are not
without meaning, the problem solving criterion implicitly denigrates
much of the ‘imperfect’ reality of policymaking by demanding a univocal
meaning from which to start.

Real policy inquiry proceeds under conditions of uncertainty
rather than working from a hypothetical solution towards its
empirical/practical verification. In practice, even defining a ‘policy’ is
often very difficult. Is a policy a group of propositions set forth by a
government? Or is it a more amorphous concept, composed of a series of
interrelated decisions and routine practices than can only be called a
coherent policy upon interpretation (Colebatch 2002a)? Since different
political actors make different interpretations of that activity, a policy
means something a little different for each of them. Yanow points out
that the meaning of policy changes in different contexts and that this
flexibility is a positive quality, allowing policies to continually adapt to
new circumstances (1996: 228-30). Understanding the symbolic and
contextual meanings of policy is as important as the legalistic, literal
interpretation of formal policy statements (Yanow 1996; on symbolic
politics, see Edelman 1964, 1971).

ii. Problem setting

Since we cannot always clearly define social problems in practice, much
thinking occurs around understanding the problem itself. Problem
setting is crucial in policymaking because ‘the questions we ask shape
the answers we get’ (Rein and Schön 1977: 236). How do problems come to ‘be’? First, while some problems are so obvious that we need not reflect upon them, most social problems do not appear to us ready-made by a determinate reality. Rein and Schön cite Dewey’s definition of problematic situations as less than clearly defined, but rather as provoking in us “a diffuse, intuited discomfort or irritation” (1977: 238). We then have to work through a process that gives order to our worries by converting them into a defined problem. We can approach the same problem in different ways and different people can hold differing interpretations of the problem at the same time. Scientific techniques aimed at verification are not adequate to treating an unstable problem (Schön 1996: 41). The mode by which worries are aggregated produces a definition of the problem that structures future action by setting directions in which we might look for solutions (Rein and Schön 1977: 238).

A related question suggests itself here, of the difference between problems and policy problems; how social problems become problems requiring policy solutions. I will leave this for later in the chapter. Here, I want to stress that if inquiry commences before a problem has a specific definition then a policy problem itself is already the result of an inquiry, just as I suggested in my discussion of Dewey in Chapter One. Rein and White point out the limitation of the problem solving view of the policy process, which in practice commences before we have a defined problem:
The problem-solving image holds that the work of policy begins with articulated and self-evident problems. Supposedly, policy begins when recognizable problems appear, problems about which one can hypothesize possible courses of action and in relation to which one can articulate goals. But is that really the beginning of the policy-forming process? It seems more realistic to posit a precursor period, often quite extended, during which various indications of stress emerge in the system (1977: 262).

Policymaking does not proceed from obvious problems and correspondingly clear solutions, but commences from a point where we have only questions. Again, Rein and White put it well:

the situation is such that the problem itself is problematic. Policy analysis contains processes for finding and construing problems... In short, the researcher is not only in the business of finding or sorting among Answers. He is inevitably involved also in finding or sorting among questions [my emphasis] (1977: 262, 263).

Policy inquiry, then, involves questioning about questions as well as seeking solutions.

Rein and White have made an important, fundamental point. By enlarging the scope of their definition of the policy process they have explained that policymaking is not defined solely by problem solving but also by problem setting, and that forming questions advances knowledge, as does dissolving them. Continued questioning can certainly 'be disruptive as well as integrative' (1977: 251), but it is a constitutive quality of policy discourse nonetheless. To extend upon this conclusion by drawing upon Michel Meyer, I would point out that the formal policy problem that results from this questioning is not the same as the initial disaggregated worries, which were diffuse and unarticulated (Meyer 1995: 207-8). Problem setting, therefore, makes a
transition from unformed worries to a formal question, and as such establishes a *difference* (Meyer 1995: 209; see also Chapter Six). Even though it is a question, it is also a new stage in the process of inquiry, which then makes it possible to search for an ultimate solution that eliminates the problem.

All this has two consequences for the problem solving model. First, even if we take problem solving to be the ultimate end of policymaking, it would be a very limited policy theory that defined policymaking in terms of solutions alone. Problem setting is just as important. By returning to Dewey and re-examining his ideas, Rein and White (1977) and Rein and Schön (1977) have given more explicit voice to what was present in Dewey but not fully elaborated by him. Secondly, since policy problems result from questioning they must also be *answers*. They are not the same kind of answers as in problem solving but they are answers nonetheless. Problem setting not only plays a vital role in policymaking, it is also a substantial result. Policymaking is an inquiry in two senses; it sets the problem by giving it form, and seeks the best solution to that problem. Rein and Schön conclude that the problem solving framework is a valid but special case of policymaking and should be subsumed within a larger view of policy research (1977: 251). Problem setting is a separate logical step in the policy process that extends the ‘problem orientation’ beyond its problem solving roots. Using Meyer’s ideas on questioning we can extend this insight beyond the problem solving assumptions of the field by rethinking the role of
problem setting, giving it positive status as an ‘answer’ that emphasises the constitutive value of questioning.

iii. The transition from undefined to defined problems

In troubling situations we need a way to draw together a range of disaggregated concerns by formulating a problem in order to grasp it (Rein and Schôn 1977: 238). Interpretative ‘frames’ provide the link between these concerns and the formulation of problems (1977: 238). A frame enables us to highlight important worries and features of the situation, select out other irrelevant features, and bind together the relevant features into a coherent pattern (1977: 238-9). It provides the context by which we name the elements of the field of inquiry and thus ‘mediate[s] the transition from disaggregated worries and scattered perceptions of situations toward the cognitive experience of meaning and the work of creative problem solving’ (1977: 239). Frames are interpretative schemes, groups of ideas – also called knowledge ‘paradigms’ (Kuhn 1962) – that establish a broad orientation towards public problems.

Framing combines with questioning to shape the substantive problems that form the content of the policy process. Forester writes that questioning both inquires and partially organises at the same time because it calls forth certain responses that direct the attention of policy makers and affects how they construct possible future actions (Forester 1993: 49-50). Questioning, therefore, does not admit of simply any
answer but indicates the answers that are most relevant to the question at hand (Forester 1993: 51). Framing is a questioning process that structures the world by delimiting the field of possible answers, while at the same time remaining open because it does not constitute a final resolution in the sense that we understand answering as problem solving – as the dissolution of questions. We do not have to proceed in two discrete steps because a problem frame is implicit even when we proceed straight to a solution.

Depending on the questions we ask of a worrisome situation and the frames by which we interpret the situation, we might arrive at different formulations of the problem. In the rational model, policy ‘is centred around a statement or set of statements that can be ascertained in terms of its justification and, ultimately, its truth’ (Wittrock 1991: 345). A hypothesis is a hypothetically true proposition, awaiting confirmation of its validity by a further procedure intended to justify (or falsify) it. Still, a hypothesis, even if supported by empirical evidence, must have been arrived at by some procedure, by some questioning process (Meyer 1995: 102; I discuss the greater significance of this in Chapter Six). By emphasising a stage prior to hypothesis testing, the stage at which the problem and solutions were not definitively marked out, we reveal a hypothesis to be an answer, that is, a hypothetical response to a question, expressed as a statement. Because the question itself could be called into question again at any time, the definition of the problem need not remain fixed throughout the policy process. For
example, even after a policy problem has been defined and solutions developed and implemented, anyone could argue that the definition of the problem was inadequate to the situation in the first place. They could introduce an equally plausible, alternative way to frame the problem. Argumentation about the problem definition might therefore persist throughout the process. This contrasts with the traditional theory of policymaking, in which problem definitions remain fixed and indisputable while the process is in its administrative testing phase.

Now, Anderson points out that making the transition from worries to problems is not scientific since all frames have normative implications (Anderson 1987: 23). If there are instances for which there is no unique definition of a problem, and if experience is not a necessary and sufficient condition for us to make the transition because all frames have normative implications (not to mention their grounding in socio-historical forces), then problem setting is non-constraining. That is, the move from worries to defined problems is not a necessary logic, but a contingent one in which we must choose between many possible formulations of the problem. Whereas science seeks necessary links between questions and answers, non-constraining reasoning is argumentative because no indisputable criterion exists to eliminate all but one of the solutions. This contingency is even greater when formulating problems, when there are few limits on inquiry and we can draw from many sources to frame the problem. Problem setting is a creative exercise. When there are multiple frames by which political
actors might formulate a policy problem, to give it form they resort to argumentation rather than scientific demonstration. By showing that problem solving is only part of the picture, we also see that science is only part of the picture. Policy science depends on the problem solving model, with its emphasis on the necessary link between problems and solutions, so by problematising that link with the contingent logic of problem setting we move from policy science to politics.

iv. From problem to policy problem: mobilisation

Not all problems become policy problems, about which we deliberate and search for a collective solution, in particular a solution involving the state. And not even all public problems that could be policy problems necessarily become so if we fail to see them, if key actors do not perceive them to be important, or if these powerful actors do not want such questions raised. Political actors need to persuade others that there is a problem and that it warrants deliberation and/or action: they need to mobilise others to bring pressure for debate about the problem. This could involve directly setting in motion the resources of the state or organising non-state interests to pressure the state to take action. The structure of coalitions of interests affects problem setting as much as paradigmatic ideas. This also applies to public officials themselves, who are not neutral but constantly concern themselves with their relationships with other policy actors (Rose 1977: 25). Officials seek success by attaining power and influence, and influencing the structure
of problems is one of the vehicles by which they attain it (Rose 1977: 26). Whereas the ideal policy scientist is nominally free to pursue inquiry, the public official accepts practical constraints on his freedom to interpret problems for the trade-off of political influence. Problems only become policy problems when actors mobilise to make them so.

To draw a more fundamental, theoretical distinction from the problem solving model, recall that in Chapter One I noted that Dewey held an organic view of society, for which collective problems were given by experience, defined by the whole. However, today we are very much aware of increased individuality and social pluralism, especially given the social changes in Western societies since the 1960s, the impact of immigration and greater awareness of cultural differences. The problems of society are not just of the whole but also problems for individuals living with each other within the whole. Individuals make different interpretations of the world, they have different interests and different priorities so they do not unilaterally agree about what public problems are, how to interpret them or what to do about them. With greater individuality and differentiation within modern democracies, the politics of problem setting comes to the fore. Problem setting is a fundamentally political activity that mediates the individual and the collective: experience alone is not enough to eliminate problems between people. Politics is involved in making things policy problems, in making the transition from undefined worries to matters of collective concern. So, not only is problem setting a creative act, it is also a political act.
Now, what are the ramifications of this for the problem orientation? This politicisation of problem setting puts into question Dewey’s pragmatic criterion for selecting the relevant problems for inquiry because experience no longer exclusively and exhaustively sets the problems of the whole. Problems are not automatically public problems; their relevance is an open question requiring public deliberation. In other words, a political question exists about which problems are public problems. Again, this is a political question: it cannot be resolved analytically by reference to experience. All public problems, therefore, express these two questions: the question of the problem and the question of whether it should be a policy problem. This is an important distinction that seriously undermines policy science. This is not necessarily so for the problem orientation if we allow for the extended sense of questioning I suggest here. I address the logic of this synthesis of questions in Chapter Eight.

v. Problem selection: agenda setting

From the question of relevance in formulating problems follows the related question: which problems should receive the greatest attention and resources and in what order? Kingdon (1984) has discussed agenda setting in policymaking at length. Echoing the point about the transition from worries to problems, he notes that the agenda by which problems are dealt with is determined by complex political processes and not by some analytical method (1984). Political actors argue over the agenda,
trying to persuade others that their preferred problem should be a priority. The multitude of stakeholders and problems ensures that agenda setting is a key aspect of the policy process and the subject of much debate. Again, this also applies to the bureaucracy, which is not neutral in this respect. Rose points out that public officials respond to problems more in terms of their immediacy (1977: 26) than their worldwide significance (as envisaged by Lasswell). They select problems according to the demands of the job; what is in the ‘in-tray’, who calls on the telephone, and so on (Rose 1977: 26).

The media also plays a vital role in setting contemporary policy agendas. With instant access to an audience of millions the media can completely transform the agenda by elevating some worries or completely ignoring others. Political agendas are not stable; they are constantly in flux. Policymaking is not just a matter of seeking solutions to problems one at a time, policy makers look for ways to deal with many pressing problems at once. Hence the urgency or otherwise of problems on the political agenda provides an incentive for policy makers to link problems together, or to separate them. In this way, the political process of agenda setting interacts with interpretation and problem setting as well.

vi. Problem solving

Moving from problem setting to problem solving, policymaking does not often solve its problems in the manner of scientific, apodictic solutions.
Rather, policy solutions are often partial, small advances upon the previous situation. They transform things to a greater or lesser degree, but they do not usually eliminate problems of experience altogether. Lindblom noted that policymaking is not really problem solving at all, but mostly a process of incremental change and ‘muddling through’ (1959). Some policy solutions are effective and become standard practice but many are questioned anew immediately upon their formulation. This is especially the case for complex policy areas, such as taxation or welfare policy, where changes go on all the time, often not addressing the whole picture but only smaller, more approachable questions within it. Policymaking is thus a complex and continuous process rather than one with a finite beginning and end. Its solutions are compromises made in the midst of all sorts of constraining factors, not the least of which is the need to mediate between conflicting political interests.

What should we conclude from all these criticisms of the problem solving view? Questioning the theory of problem solving shows that we must deal with a greater depth of questioning in theory and practice, and that policy inquiry is political rather than purely scientific or practical. Can we, therefore, retain the problem orientation and reconceptualise it in a new way that avoids the pitfalls of the traditional model? This will be difficult, because acknowledging fundamental problematicity is opposed to the problem solving view of traditional policy theory. But this is only a limitation if we denigrate questioning a priori in favour of solutions. By concentrating on questioning as our
primary unit of analysis, we can keep the problem orientation by extending it and regrounding it in a larger theory of policy inquiry. I offer such a reconstruction in Part II. But before I proceed to that point, I will address key assumptions and limitations of the problem solving model, this time about the policy process.

2. Politics and the policy process

Policy problems are far more problematic, uncertain, and of variable meaning than they seemed to proponents of the rational model. Thinking about the process by which we treat public problems, we should note that even though we speak of social structures, the social world does not fall into neat patterns. Tilly cautions that when constructing social theory, we should accommodate the fluidity of social processes and not artificially fix social action for the sake of generating abstract models (1995: 1602). Anton identifies such a trend in policy studies. Contrary to the less-structured process of reality, the policy analysis field has employed implicit images of stability and determinism to characterise policymaking, neglecting the idea of ‘process’ and, along with a fascination with technique, drawing on the ‘system’ concept from sociology ‘to emphasize the interrelatedness of separately identifiable political actions at a given point in time’ (Anton 1976: 94). This misuse of the system concept prompted a technological approach to drawing generalisations that ignored the realities of political life; leadership, negotiation, mobilisation, bureaucratic routines and ‘old-fashioned
bullheadedness’ (1976: 95). We might add persuasion to this list. The mechanical view of social processes produced an unsophisticated view of political interaction, treating contextual factors as separate from political activity and ignoring the continuous flux and feedback that occurs in real policy processes (1976: 96). Let us now consider theories of the policy process with these concerns in mind.

i. Propositions and the stages model of the policy process

The proposition is central to the scientific notion of policymaking. Science operates from hypotheses or propositions; fixed entities to be verified in practice or through experiment. The hypothetico-deductive method is connected to the problem solving view of questioning, suppressing the role of discovery and invention and making the rigorous, analytical method of treating propositions the criterion for rational policymaking. A hypothesis might be initially derived by political means but the important thing is that the problem is treated as if it is already resolved – hypothetically – by putting it in propositional form (as I explained in Chapter One). It follows that the policy process is the ordered treatment of a proposition, a series of stages that progress from policy hypothesis through experimental or practical testing to evaluating the results. Each step follows the previous one in a rational, linear fashion, always referring back to the initial hypothesis. We know this as the ‘stages’ model of the policy process (or its modified form, the policy ‘cycle’). The notion of policymaking as the treatment of propositions has
important consequences for how we theorise about the policy process, encouraging us to make idealistic representations derived from science.

There are many variants of models of the policy process in the literature (see Howlett and Ramesh 2003). Generally they follow this form; problem definition → policy development → implementation → evaluation. The models may or may not involve various forms of feedback but Yanow describes them generally as assuming 'a linear, unidirectional, instrumental policy process that is also future- and progress-oriented, and hence incremental as well, although it also implies a finite end point' (1996: 17). Each stage corresponds to a different point in the treatment of a policy proposition. Positivist-inspired implementation theories assume that human action is based on a mandate to deal with a univocal problem with defined goals to enable administrative deployment (Yanow 1996: 210). Indeed, the entire subject of implementation ‘was born out of an intellectual heritage that saw the administrative phase of the policy process as one of routine, technical administrative practice’ (Yanow 1996: 227). The rationality of the process is marked by the orderly completion of each stage, separated by time, and linked to a pre-defined policy goal.

The result of the propositional view is an impoverished understanding of the policy process. Firstly, it artificially constructs a beginning, middle and end, when in reality policy is always in ‘mid-current’ (Anderson 1987: 33). We never have a clean slate upon which to
write any policy problem. They are always considered against a contextual background and the precedent of previous work in the field, so that we ‘reevaluate’ policy each time (Anderson 1987: 33). Secondly, once the process starts, constant feedback and adjustment at every stage create great complexity. Empirical studies show that political actors reformulate both policy solutions and the problems themselves during and after implementation, and even during the evaluation stage. For example, ‘street-level bureaucrats’ (Lipsky 1980) affect the implementation of policy and thus change its practical effects and its meaning. Indeed, administrators at every level have considerable discretion in interpreting political discourse and translating it into policy (Anderson 1987: 23). It is also difficult to identify the various stages as discrete, since they might follow a different order, occur simultaneously, or not happen at all (Sabatier 1999: 7). Howlett and Ramesh (2003: 165) describe how decision makers might make a ‘non-decision’ to uphold the status quo, or a ‘negative decision’ which abandons a policy process before implementation. Sometimes a solution is found but nothing is done to implement it. Sometimes there is no action on a problem because it is too difficult to know what to do about it; it is too hard or too controversial. Sometimes the solution is that there is really no problem at all, so we need not always explain inaction as a failure of rationality because it is in fact an intelligible outcome (if not always a desirable one), a result in itself. Practical action is not the only way to answer policy questions.
As I noted in the previous chapter, expelling problematicity from policy theory results in a fragmented theory of the policy process. While many possible variants of the process result from the propositional view, we can identify some general patterns. Firstly, we could consider the entire process to be scientifically rational, factoring out political variables to an external context that intervenes and complicates otherwise rational processes. We have seen that such a model fails on both empirical and theoretical grounds (nor can it be divorced from its own ideological implications, as I point out later in this chapter). Secondly, we could divide the process into political and non-political rationalities, for example making the first half of the process, the discovery and definition of problems, a purely political one (or at least one in which science and common sense combine through a political process), after which scientific testing and administrative rationality take over and policy makers select the best solution, implement the policy and evaluate the findings. But policymaking rarely proceeds so neatly, in even apparently mundane administration. Nor does it add much to place politics in between policy cycles. Finally, we could conceive of the whole process as political in the pejorative sense of a pure contest for power. Here, everything is given over to agency and the pursuit of interests regardless of the actual policy problem. Policy analysis becomes pure advocacy and gives up even the positive aspects of science as critique, lapsing into relativism (Jennings 1987). The cynic might say this is an accurate depiction of politics. However, while power-
seeking is certainly fundamental to politics it does not describe the whole of political action or its effects. This view tends to lose sight of whatever genuine consideration of problems really does occur in public life; policymaking has some reasonable qualities. Even were it correct, it would not suffice for an interpretative framework since reasoned, rational debate is still theoretically possible. In practice, political activity is given over entirely to self-interest in only the most dysfunctional and corrupt polities. And policymaking does produce results and change things in significant ways despite such self-seeking attitudes. Even though contingency and uncertainty sometimes characterise political cultures, politics is not entirely irrational nor unpredictable.

I believe the general difficulty in accounting for the politics of policy arises from our inability to express questioning. Rein and White argue that the problem solving image is a ‘myth’ that arises from ‘the fundamental incompatibility of the games of science and the games of politics’ (1977: 269). This incompatibility arises because our entire system of thought is based on propositions rather than questions (see Meyer 1995). The root cause of theoretical fragmentation is that problematicity must be located outside propositional reasoning. By working from non-problematic propositions we divide the policy process into discrete stages linked by scientific/administrative reasoning, which is an unrealistic and fragmented view of contingent and dynamic political reality. Questioning is exiled to either; an external, amorphous political context that interferes more or less with the proper rational
treatment of propositions; to a prelude to rational action; or to a stage in between one rational policy cycle and another. No matter what the variation, it excludes questioning and fundamentally degrades it in favour of a model built on isolated propositions. Even though we speak of questions and problems all the time, we have no language of questioning as such because our underlying theory has been founded on propositions that disguise the constitutive role of questioning. Certainly, we can still use the policy ‘stages model’ as a heuristic device (de Leon 1999); but the shortcoming of the stages model is the propositional language in which we have developed it. In a policy process marked by great conceptual uncertainty, radical disagreement among the players, robust political debate and significant mobilisation of interests, is not the problem itself always in question and the process marked by pervasive questioning? The propositional view simply cannot express these qualities. It must idealise the process, which makes it abstract and irrelevant to practice; or alternatively it must transform practice by forcing reality to conform to the ideal model, which makes it authoritarian. A theory of the policy process based on questioning would not be of the ‘grand theory’ kind that displaced existing theories and perfectly predicted how policies are or could best be made in each case. However, it would provide us with an overarching framework to improve theories of the policy process by expressing contingency without sacrificing the scope and relevance of our interpretations.
ii. The unitary decision maker

Another major flaw of the propositional view of policy and the linear policy process is that it assumes or implies a unitary decision maker. That is, it presumes that policy decisions are made by an individual or at least an organisation acting as a single thinking mind, analogous to the scientist looking to solve a problem or a group of scientists working on a clearly defined research program towards the same goal with roughly the same ideas. But how often is policy made by a single decision maker? In large organisations, decision making usually involves multiple decision makers acting without an overriding focus on singular goals (Weiss, in Howlett and Ramesh 2003: 177-8). It is now well-established that the state is made up of many competing organisations and interests, forming a loose coalition rather than a unified whole with a defined aim (Rein and White 1977: 265). We can theorise the state as a coherent entity for evaluative purposes, but this does not explain the complexity of the modern state. In modern democracies power is widely dispersed throughout the political system. The institutional separation of powers guarantees that no arm of the state is able to exert full control over decision making (Howlett and Ramesh 2003: 63), and interest groups outside the state have a powerful impact on policy debate and are able to influence decisions. Even within state agencies people hold conflicting views.
The prevailing institutional structure supports the idea of a unitary decision maker by creating boundaries of perception along with norms about the proper role of the various actors. Governments legitimise decisions (and scholars legitimise analysis) by appealing to institutional structures, even if the reality of decision making is somewhat different (Colebatch 2002a: 62). Substituting institutional structures for an epistemological framework tends to reify them, legitimising established political processes by putting them beyond question, and limiting the scope of politics to the activities of players at the apex of those institutions. We should interrogate processes more broadly than this, because while institutions structure the transition from question to solution they never entirely proscribe it. In politics, where any decision can be questioned along with the institutional processes that led to that decision, appealing to institutional rules is in fact an argument in favour of an answer, not the answer itself.

Any account of policymaking must look beyond the public interest as defined entirely by the demand for collective problem solving. Politics is a field in which actors mobilise support in the pursuit of different interests (Braun and Busch 1999; Stone 1988: 166-83). This contrasts with the ideal of ‘disinterested’ science, where inquiry is freely directed and not affected, or at least affected as little as possible, by self-interest and the immediate demands of the day (hence Lasswell’s idea of a policy science not captured by the exigencies of politics, but that sought solutions to globally important problems). Pursuing individual, sectional
or class interests is a routine element of political engagement, which is itself not unitary because social and political forces distribute power and influence unevenly. The political system mediates different interests through debate over public problems. This presents a classic problem of political theory – how to ensure that decisions are legitimate when it is rarely, if ever, possible to create equal benefit for all people? Forming and dissolving coalitions of interests is not scientific. It is based on conditional factors rather than universal ones and constantly changes. Political actors seek alliances with others and respond to circumstances by reflecting upon and altering their own strategies. In fact, both the interpretative frames and interests of policy stakeholders can always be altered upon reflection, so the structure of political coalitions interacts with ideas to influence the meaning of problems themselves. Policy stakeholders form ‘advocacy coalitions’ around shared beliefs, seeking to manipulate institutional rules to achieve their goals (Sabatier 1993). Furthermore, actors usually hide their interests, since they do not wish to appear self-interested but concerned only with the general welfare. All this makes the policy process highly complex for the players, who must account for the differential power of other players and their hidden interests.

**iii. Instrumentalism and the bias towards intention**

An adjoining component of the rational model is the assumption that people make decisions in a fully conscious, considered way,
intentionally directed towards instrumental ends. Because we know the solution in advance, the policy process is an instrumental procedure to bring about the desired change. The problem solving model, even modified for incrementalism and ‘muddling through’ (Lindblom 1959), presumes an instrumental approach directed by more or less clearly formulated intentions. But Yanow points out that attributing intention to actions falsely constructs a cause and effect relationship and ‘impute[s] instrumental rationality where it may not have existed’ (1996: 23). Even if we reject the unitary decision maker analogy, this still sees the policy process as the aggregated intentions of rational actors, when in practice complexity makes forming and realising pre-defined intentions very difficult. This becomes even more problematic when actors are unsure how to frame the problem and what the solutions might be.

The high value of instrumental rationality in Western culture looks for goal-orientation even where it does not exist (Yanow 1996: 23). The tendency to attribute intentions to activity and patterns to events arises more from our own epistemological framework rather than from the events themselves (Yanow 1996: 23). The complexity of problems and the many contingencies which decision makers must face makes it difficult to formulate clear intentions. People often act without certainty, and without full knowledge of all the consequences of their actions. Hidden psychological and social forces operating through our actions and discourse mean that even individuals do not perceive things entirely
independently of their own social context. Learned behaviours and social norms operate through us without our being conscious of them. Yanow concludes:

We ‘see’ governmental actions as government responding to problems; yet these very actions may have been expressive acts rather than instrumentally rational ones intended to cause particular effects or achieve certain explicitly stated goals (1996: 23).

What does she mean by saying that an act can be expressive rather than intentional? She means that social actions reflect the learned behaviours and cultural influences that form the background to our perceptions. Social actors comport themselves to the world and act in it through the filter of learned behaviours and ideas, often without consciously reflecting upon them (Bourdieu would say their ‘habitus’ 1998: 6-8). That is, unreflective practice explains social action as much as conscious intentions. Acting and speaking is a way of responding to the world, and only some circumstances prompt us to reflect upon the situation and devise a strategy to solve the problem through instrumental action. The same applies for policy makers, who know how to act in uncertain situations without inquiring into them and logically inferring the correct response (Wagenaar and Cook 2003).

Policy actors respond to problems through a variety of filters. They act towards the problem in ways typical of their position and do not necessarily even try to interpret the problem in an objective, detached sense. They may not think of the situation as a problem or a policy problem; they simply know that they must do something in the
circumstances (or avoid doing something). Bureaucrats respond to problems by calling meetings and producing reports, while academics conduct research. So, policy activity expresses their identity: in uncertain situations their dispositions enable them to respond without being paralysed into inertia by the complexity of the situation. Reflective inquiry is but one option when we are faced with a problem.

I return to the theme of intention in Chapter Seven when I discuss practice but for now I stress that putting intention into question further discounts the problem solving view and its accompanying rational actor model. This critique extends beyond simple political pluralism because it fractures even the unitary individual as an autonomous problem solver who is able to inquire of a problem objectively and independently.

iv. The politics of policy

The apolitical, problem solving view embodied in the rational model of decision making survives because, in part, in its de-politicising symbolism it has an ideological function. By describing the policy process as administrative/scientific, the problem solving model suppresses the political aspects of policymaking, implying that decision makers generally act in the public interest when they make policy, rather than seeking power or satisfying organised interests. The aura of dispassionate objectivity the policy analyst brings to debate accords some rationality to government decisions even though, as I noted in the previous chapter, social science research is often used to legitimate
decisions made on other grounds (Jenkins-Smith 1990: 47). Hence Fischer has criticised the policy sciences movement itself for failing to reflect on its own political interests beyond producing and disseminating knowledge (1987: 123). To render policymaking in scientific terms when decisions have already been taken has been criticised as ideological domination (Knorr 1977: 172). Maybe so, but it is still a reality that we need to account for in our theory. Fischer notes that the problem solving, scientific model is more than a simple technocratic takeover of policymaking, it is associated with its political functions. He argues that the rise of neoconservative think tanks in the United States results from the increasing importance of expertise as an essential commodity in obtaining political control (1987: 120). Despite the defeat of logical empiricism, the practices characteristic of this approach to social science persist. Jennings argues that policy analysts in particular continue to hide behind ‘the sandbags of science and method’ (1987: 133). Hence the debate around the epistemological basis of policy analysis also has implications for the democratic ethics of analysis (Jennings 1987: 133). This contemporary link between policy theory and democracy renews a theme running through policy studies since Dewey and Lasswell, revealing the close relationship between epistemological concepts and their political consequences.

If both policy problems and solutions are open to continual questioning, and if the instrumental drive towards a known solution does not wholly determine the process, then the policy process itself is
defined by a thoroughgoing problematicity. Questioning is not a preliminary feature confined to problem setting, nor just a temporary contingency to be resolved by the use of scientific method and rational action; it is a constitutive factor of policy discourse. Even the established institutional mechanisms used to move from question to solution can be questioned by any of the players. Deciding upon policy questions is ultimately a question between people. This is always the case for problems that arise between human beings, for collective problems, which need not be resolved empirically. Policy, in short, is political. Even if we agree to use experience to test the solution to a problem, the decision to do so answers a different, political question about how to approach the problem. Hence policy science is a political idea; to use science to solve political questions. While we cannot rule this out as a possible solution, we have reason to criticise it because it is empirically rare and theoretically partial. It is, rather, an answer as contingent as any other answer to the general question of politics. It thus has an ideological purpose when it is used to deny people’s power to question its solutions: as though the use of scientific method automatically solved the question of political questioning.

What are the most important similarities and differences between science and politics? A key difference between the two is the manner by which each deals with questions. Whereas science makes singular readings of its questions and refers to experience as a criterion of resolution, politics emphasises the dialogical aspect; questions arise
between people. Therefore there are always two perspectives on any question and the rules of progression from question to answer are more variable because it is up to the questioners to decide what these should be. In politics, a plethora of interested parties can challenge decisions on any number of grounds, including appeals to empirical evidence. Political solutions can be sought by agreement, by persuasion or by force. In particular, argumentation is always an option in politics because human beings have the ability to question solutions, whereas nature responds in more predictable ways.

3. Rethinking the problem orientation

Despite the criticisms of problem solving, the problem orientation of Dewey and Lasswell still has considerable benefits as an organising concept. Policy certainly does deal with social problems. Disputes over the interpretation of problems, their order on the agenda and the solutions proffered may well be intractable. This simply means that the problems are themselves in question, not that they don’t exist. The state and other agencies organise activities around social security, defence, the economy and the environment, with the intention of ameliorating these problems. If we do not always know the solutions in advance, we continue to act as though things were certain. And even if the solutions we implement don’t always work, we still believe we can find better ones. By evaluating policy in terms of its problem solving power we also have a
yardstick to assess a government’s performance. We can hold it to account for high levels of unemployment, for permitting damage to the environment, or for failing to eliminate racial discrimination. This does not mean that a government will stand down if it fails, but if it does fail then political actors can mobilise a challenge to its legitimacy, pressuring it into taking new action or putting in new decision makers who will take it. Applying scientific knowledge to social problems may not substitute for politics but it is often useful and has a valid role to play in informing policy deliberation. As much as science can be used to manipulate and obfuscate, it can be an equally powerful tool to critique the actions of those holding authority by revealing when decisions run contrary to the available evidence. Just because scientific findings have a less than scientific function in politics it does not follow that we should condemn science outright. Merton and Lerner, in The Policy Sciences, evoke the Socratic image of the social scientist as a ‘gadfly’, ‘stinging contented policymakers into a state of discontent by widening their horizons’ (1951: 299).41

By evoking Socrates, Merton and Lerner link the policy sciences to my central theme: the value of philosophy for policy theory and the value of questioning in particular. What is the positive, critical function of science for policy deliberation if not to question? Questioning was the basis of Socrates’ dialogical method and had a political purpose as much as a philosophical one. We might reject a scientific conception of politics on many grounds and continue to debate the appropriate relationship
between science and politics but scientists, at a minimum, still have a very important function in questioning the status quo – even if we might not grant them *carte blanche* to experiment on us to verify their results.

If the problem solving idea has benefits then it also has drawbacks. Critics point to many inadequacies of this conception of policymaking activity: it defines complex problems univocally, obscuring differences of opinion; it focuses on problem solving at the expense of problem setting; and it represents the policy process scientifically to disguise and/or suppress the contingent nature of political reasoning. For policy theory these are all consequences of an approach that privileges problem solving science over politics. As others have pointed out, such criticisms have prompted considerable reflection upon the scholarly enterprise of policy studies itself which, similarly, is not free from the political and social consequences of its own practices.42

So, the problem orientation is still relevant to understanding policymaking but the problem solving concept is inadequate to the task of developing policy theory. Lasswell intended the problem orientation to unify rather than fragment, however its own dynamics are counter to this vision because it limits the scope of problems. It imposes a fixed rather than open nature by defining problems in terms of their solutions, which are described as propositions. Interpreting political problems is much more complex because they are not self-evident in experience. The propositional theory articulates an overly rigid policy
process abstracted from its political context, making it as irrelevant to practical problems as the abstract metaphysics Dewey sought to replace. Anderson notes that closed systems of thought such as this do not progress knowledge beyond what is already known because they already contain the conclusion to their arguments within their premises (1987: 42). More generally, Meyer argues that propositional reasoning is question-begging because it denies a constitutive role for questioning by resolving all questions a priori (1995: 126). Such procedures can only justify what has already been decided, conflating questions and answers into propositions and stifling the real nature of inquiry by imposing inappropriate methods on all inquiry in the name of scientific rationalism. In policy theory, the propositional model of rationality is reflected in the separation of politics and administration, and in the division of the policy cycle into separate stages.

Policymaking is about problems, but our received understanding of ‘problem’ is no longer sufficient:

The manifold dilemmas that exist in the political arena all constitute “problems,” in the general sense of the word “problem,” but these are not the kinds of problems that are envisaged in the problem-solving image and that are resolvable in its terms (Rein and White 1977: 267).

That is, the problem solving view is inadequate for understanding policy problems or the process by which they are treated. Policymaking is political, not scientific. It involves contingent relationships between questions and answers, not causal ones. It is as much about expressing problems as resolving them. Scientific justification starts from the level
of results, where it already knows its problems and their possible solutions, while in politics the problem itself is always questionable, as are the mechanisms for its resolution. The policy sciences were an attempt to devise a new means for solving political questions. Science is a problem solving mechanism, and a very specialised one. While it is very useful for policymaking the scientific ideal is insufficient to understand it. Attempting to impose science upon policymaking has political implications itself. Rein and White argue that science and politics are incompatible because the former deals with facts and the latter with values (1977: 269). More than this, I would say they are different modes of treating questions and politics deals with a much greater degree of problematicity. Science does not suffice for a global view of policymaking because policy inquiry is more complex, more extensive in scope, extended to a greater range of questioners, and has different criteria of resolution. Therefore it is more political than is allowed for in the reductionist vision of science. While political inquiry is not rigorous like scientific inquiry, it is thorough in its own way by involving a great many participants from across the social spectrum, where the object is to express and mediate the differences of complex, pluralist societies as much as to solve problems.

To think about the policy process accurately, and in a holistic fashion, we need the ability to address these issues within a consistent theoretical framework. Lasswell, following Dewey, thought the ‘problem orientation’ would be the unifying concept, but it is severely lacking
because questioning does not really occupy a major role in it, even though Dewey affirmed inquiry as a key practice. A functional framework should not adopt a purely scientific outlook on problems; should not define politics as what is left over from problem solving; and should not explain away politics as residual irrationality. While it is widely accepted that the ‘stages’ or ‘policy cycle’ model of the policy process is inaccurate (Howlett and Ramesh 2003; Sabatier 1999), many persist with it while knowing events are far more complex than the model allows for (see, for example, Colebatch 2003, criticising Bridgman and Davis 2000). The model does serve a heuristic and pedagogical purpose (de Leon 1999) but it must be modified if it is to be a useful conceptual device.\(^{43}\) We need a way to understand the policy process without comparing it to the normative, linear, instrumental form that starts with a hypothetically resolved problem and proceeds in a series of discrete steps. Because the linear model is intimately connected to the propositional view that resolves questions at the outset, and because the critiques of the stages model have pointed to greater questioning throughout the policy process, I believe it makes sense to develop a new theory based on questioning rather than propositions as our primary concept.

The policy process is a global questioning process, within which there are smaller questioning processes. Both questions and answers result from policy inquiry. When few actors perceive the problem in the same way there is a high degree of problematicity; conflicting
interpretations, adversarial argumentation, debates over values and sectional interests play a great role. Extensive questioning about fundamental concepts characterises policy discourse and many options are open to the players. At other times there is something of a consensus about the problem which then proceeds towards debate about the best solution. Should there be general agreement, this is no guarantee that the policy will be evaluated or the resulting evaluations taken note of. Other problems might arrive on the agenda in the meantime that demand policy makers’ attention and surpass the original problem. At each stage of the process different actors ask questions of the problem and the process, perhaps even challenging the relevance or nature of the problem itself. This questioning may find greater or lesser force through the mobilisation of political interests that express it. Whatever example we choose, the degree of questioning defines each situation.

We need to revisit the problem orientation by reconsidering the nature of ‘problem’ itself without seeing it as a concept that has value only in its own dissolution (Meyer 1995; see also Chapter One). Politics is a mode of rationality that generates problems as much as it solves them. The persistence of problems does not necessarily indicate a failure of policy since this is a normal condition of politics (Rose 1977: 34). Persistent questioning is not entirely negative: problem setting enables us to give voice to concerns which are otherwise easily excluded, ignored or unexpressed, and is thus a powerful force for change. Policy theorists
have already extended the problem orientation beyond Dewey’s original problem solving conception. We now need a conception of the problem orientation that recovers the constitutive value of inquiry and expresses the contingency that characterises the politics of policy. We need to theorise the openness of policy questions and refuse to artificially resolve them via mechanical models. We need to uncover the political rationality of policy in order to understand it on its own terms rather than those of the problem solving rationality of science. We need a conceptual model and a language that incorporates the problematic as a fundamental property so that we can express what is in question in policy discourse, what has been solved, and how the process moved from the former to the latter. The problem orientation, reconsidered in terms of questioning, could form the foundation of such a framework for policy studies. Yanow, drawing on Dunn, confirms this alternative view of 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 (1996: 15).

If we can problematise the problem – that is, question the question – then it is questioning that demands our attention.

In the end, policymaking goes on without following the rational actor model. It deals with problems, but not in the strict problem solving ideal, which is at best a limited case and not a general theory. Judged by that standard, policy theory is largely irrelevant to practice. Because
of this policy science experienced something of a crisis of relevance about its practical utility and its teaching objectives, hence argumentation and rhetoric came to the fore as a response to our scholarly problems of theorising as well as to better engage the attention of policy practitioners (Fischer and Forester 1993a). However, the introduction of rhetoric presents its own difficulties, which I discuss in the next chapter on the argumentative turn in policy theory.
4. Increasing Problematicity: Interpretative Epistemology and the ‘Argumentative Turn’

Accompanying the trend towards conceiving of policymaking as problem setting came a critique of scientific rationality at an epistemological level. The interpretative or postpositivist school of policy theory extensively questioned the validity of the scientific conception of policymaking (Fischer 2003a, 2003b; Hawkesworth 1988). These writers drew on contemporary philosophy of social science and social theory to develop an interpretative view of policymaking (see, for example, Fischer 2003a; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003a; Yanow 1996). Interpretative theory revealed the limitations of logical empiricism and its irrelevance to political practice. It showed that policy discourse is capable of great flexibility because it is not scientific language. It is ordinary language and it must be read as such. Unlike scientific language it is not restricted to its literal meaning. Along with this we find the introduction of argumentation and rhetoric. When we are not able to proceed directly to an answer we must debate the pro and con of the question and persuade others to accept our answers. In politics, where the rules of progression are always potentially in question, the scientific justification of decisions does not always suffice to resolve a question nor necessarily convince an audience. When reason is contingent rather than apodictic, rhetoric comes to the fore. The ‘argumentative turn’ in policy theory thus
formed an important element of the postpositivist critique (see Fischer and Forester 1993b). However, argumentation presents its own difficulties because of the longstanding philosophical division between logic and rhetoric.

In this chapter I discuss interpretative policy theory and the argumentative turn in policy theory as part of the questioning of policy and consider the limits of this theory for developing a new conception of the problem orientation. Firstly, I discuss some of the postpositivist literature in policy theory and point out that with the rejection of the empiricist view of policymaking comes a new question of the meaning of policy. Secondly, I highlight the links between interpretative epistemology and the argumentative turn in policy theory. I describe the turn to argumentation as expressing a generalised problematisation of the problem solving model. Thirdly, I examine the philosophical division of logic and rhetoric and explain why it presents a problem for the argumentative turn. I discuss the classical division of logic and rhetoric and review some major contemporary theories of rhetoric in light of this division. Finally, I stress the importance of questioning for redressing the underlying fragmentation of contemporary thought and extending the argumentative turn in reconstructing the problem orientation.
1. The question of meaning

In acknowledging the political reality of policymaking, cracks begin to appear in the problem solving model. The instrumental rationality of the problem solving view is an insufficient account of policymaking. We cannot explain policy activity as problem solving by a means-consequence causal link. We need to shift from the machine metaphor of linear processes in the pursuit of goals to appreciating that social action expresses learned practices and the identity of the actors (Yanow 1996: 235). Attention shifts from the discovery of universal laws to an ‘interpretative’ approach that accounts for the active human construction and interpretation of meaning (Yanow 1996: 5). When combined with the rejection of the unitary model of decision making we find a ‘democratisation’ of meaning in the policy process. Interpretative philosophy enables us to describe this process, to define the meaning of policy discourse for the actors themselves (see Jennings 1987: 143). This also means we can examine the politics of meaning for the actors in competing policy discourses (Fischer 2003a: 76).

i. Interpretative epistemology: discourse

Interpretative epistemology has been very influential in the social sciences. In general, interpretative theory stems from the ‘linguistic turn’ in philosophy and social theory which contends that reality is defined by language itself, language that is only partial and not perfectly representative of external reality. Majone notes that social scientists
often forget that public policy is made of language (1989: 1), so in recent years policy theorists have followed the linguistic turn and drawn on interpretative theory. They have been heavily influenced by European social theory, particularly Habermas and Foucault; more broadly by theorists of hermeneutics, contemporary critical theory, French philosophy and social constructionism from Britain and France, along with the American progressive movement of pragmatism and its followers (Fischer 2003a: 2; Yanow 1996: 4; Yanow 2000: 7). Our relationship with the world is mediated through language, so we speak of the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Language constructs the world in a less than univocal manner because words do not possess a single meaning but vary according to the context, use and historical patterns of interpretation (Gadamer 1979). Hence, we speak of discourse, which is ‘an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena. Discourses frame certain problems; that is to say, they distinguish some aspects of a situation rather than others’ (Hajer 1993: 45). The meaning of discourse does not derive from the truth conditions of a sentence, not least because many sentences, such as questions, have no truth value (Meyer 1986: 88). Human beings do not simply use language to create the world but are also partly determined by it. Since language is directed towards others, the historical, social and political context intervenes and our discourse takes on different meanings in different times and places for different interlocutors. The context includes a whole range of
presuppositions that structure inquiry. For example, institutions are important because they provide actors with ways of seeing the world and ways of acting that largely transcend reflection (Douglas, in Keman 1997: 13).

The contextual basis of knowledge entails that meaning is not comprehensible from a purely literal reading of language and that meaning is not to be found in formal logic. Science utilises formal language in order to expound the mechanisms of a theory which enlightens us as to the veracity of a conclusion (Meyer 1986: 96). However, philosophers realised that ordinary language is the normal mode of language, not univocal, formalised logic (Meyer 1986: 88). The error consists in theorising formalisation as the general nature of language, when in fact it is a particular modality of discourse that rests on prior determinations of meaning (Meyer 1986: 96). Indeed, formal logic is the result, rather than the condition, of theorisation (Meyer 1986: 88). Formal logic does link univocal sentences but this is only possible on the basis of a prior understanding developed by means other than formalisation and only makes sense by reference to the division between logic and ordinary language; it is not self-evident (Meyer 1986: 88, 96). Despite the ambitions of logical empiricism to limit inquiry only to what can be observed, Meyer points out that not all premises of an argumentation must be expressed; there is always at least one implicit or implied meaning in any utterance (Meyer 1986: 96-7). So, rather than context interfering with the true, literal meaning of language, it is the
context, the implicit, which makes literal meaning possible (Meyer 1986: 97). Yanow notes that the possibility of meaning being tacit in the context means that we must abandon the idea that policy can be perfected by making all discourse explicit (1996: xiii, 25-6). Universally applicable policy theory is impossible since the contexts for different subjects are not identical (1996: 235). Therefore we need situation-specific understandings that attend to the meaning produced for the different actors within their own situations (1996: 235).

Meaning is not created by direct communication, it is intersubjectively constructed by both speaker and interlocutor. That is, meaning is constructed dialogically between different people in a communicative process. I contrast this with positivism; it seeks a singular meaning for every statement, meaning which is empirically testable for its correspondence to truth. It is assumed that meaning must be univocal in order for language to be rational. However, differences in interpretation occur as a normal aspect of everyday interaction (Yanow 1996: 233). Yanow criticises the ‘channel’ model of communication that presents a simple transmission of information between a transmitter and receiver, particularly for implying a passive rather than an active listener (1996: 15-16). Even clients of policy programmes are ‘active readers themselves of legislative language and agency objects and acts’ (Yanow 1996: 26). Since human beings interpret the activities of others, many different interpretations and meanings may be produced about the same phenomenon (Yanow 1996: 233).
Interpretative epistemologies also contest the possibility of neutral observation (Yanow 1996: 6). Knowledge is affected by the context and so is ‘the “knower” producing that knowledge’ (Yanow 1996: 7). This politicises policy science itself, infusing it with the political context that surrounds it (Fischer 1987). The meaning of policy discourse derives from multiple inputs by different actors, so policy discourse is (potentially) more democratic because it is constructed by a range of participants and not necessarily only by experts. At the same time any ambiguity generated by multiple meanings is not aporetic for interpretation; it simply makes it difficult and often partial.

Since each participant in the policy process approaches a situation from a different perspective, the context for each is different, as are their interpretations. Each participant is a questioner with their own, related questions. Policy problems are less defined by the situation than by multiple interpretations of that situation. Policy actors find opportunities to solve their own problems at the same time as they attend to social concerns. That is, they frame policy problems through the context of their own particular questioning. Policy problems are secondary results, constructed by many questioners asking many smaller questions. Policymaking is a political process that mediates competing definitions of problems.

Because the meaning of problems is constructed dialogically by many questioners, the meaning of policy and policy processes is usually
in question. Interpreting policy, therefore, is hermeneutic. In policy theory, Dryzek in particular has argued for a hermeneutic conception of policy analysis (1982). Theorists of hermeneutics reject the positivist view of policy problems. Dryzek argues that only hermeneutics can cope with ‘messy’ problems, where values are uncertain and conflicting, where there is little consensus on problem definition and no clear agenda (1982: 321-2). He draws on Gadamer, stating that hermeneutic policy analysis permits a fusion of horizons between diverse perspectives, in particular between expert and lay interpretations (1982: 323). He conceives of a mediation between normative ethics and the value basis of the status quo policy position (1982: 323). To explain this logic, we could draw on Gadamer further because his approach and that of Dewey share a concern for questioning. For Gadamer, the logic of the human sciences is a logic of questioning (1979: 333). He proposed that discovering meaning was a questioning process, stating that ‘We understand a text only when we have understood the question to which it is an answer’ (1979: 333). I take up the theme of hermeneutics as questioning again in Chapter Seven. For now, I note that for interpretative theory the meaning of problems is often in question and interpretation also proceeds by asking questions.

Interpretative theory extends the conception of meaning beyond a simple literal reading to include the figurative dimension of discourse. Policy solutions can be figurative and ambivalent rather than being limited to a univocal treatment via experience. Recent approaches in
philosophy view metaphor as an essential element of language (Yanow 1996: 132). Metaphors combine two unlike meanings in the same context to create a new perception (Yanow 1996: 132). They are powerful devices which create meaning, direct action and organise thoughts (Yanow 1996: 133). Metaphors and other symbols serve to create policy problems, conveying evaluative images of situations and implying actions to take in response (Stone 1988: 117-23). This influence is disguised because they involve implicit (or ‘tacit’) knowledge (Yanow 1996: 134). The meaning of metaphors is implicit within a particular context and must be decoded by reference to it, which means that metaphors can indicate more than one meaning at a time (Yanow 1996: 134). The incorporation of figurative language in interpretative policy studies is distinctly different from the positivist approach which limits language to a univocal meaning that excludes debate and reinterpretation (Yanow 1996: 135). The ambiguity of metaphors is essential to politics where it transforms individual intentions and actions into collective purpose (Stone 1988: 123). It permits people with diverse interests to unite around shared symbols, facilitating negotiation and compromise without exposing underlying conflicts between them that might divide them (Stone 1988: 124-5). It also supports the legitimation of authority, for example when officials pass vague and ambiguous legislation to satisfy demands for them to act, then allow administrators to work out the meaning (Stone 1988: 124). Interpretative theory also takes account of the meaning other symbolic
entities have for policy actors, such as landscapes (Yanow 1995, 1996). For example, the body language and gestures of politicians communicate symbols about their character to the audience and affects perceptions of the legitimacy of their authority (see, for example, Jaworski and Galasinski 2002). Wearing’s empirical study showed that the locations of social service provision, including the dress and mannerisms of service providers, are important in structuring power relationships with their socially marginalised clients (1998).

Beyond individual metaphors, we can read discourse figuratively at a global level. Research inspired by anthropology has pointed to the narrative structures of policy discourses as providing a rich source of meanings for policy actors (Fischer 2003a: 161-80). Narratives and metanarratives are joint, historical productions that express and construct collective beliefs and passions (Fischer 2003a: 162). Policy discourse functions like a narrative myth that guides action (Shore and Wright 1997: 7). Myths serve to explain puzzling reality for a group of people within a particular cultural context (1996: 191). Shared myths and rituals enable people to make sense of organisational or policy contexts (Yanow 1996: 188). Myths are not logical propositions, nor are they argumentative, since their language is not explicitly persuasive (Yanow 1996: 191). Myths function to explain incommensurable values to a group of people by allowing forbidden values to remain implicit (Yanow 1996: 192). That is, myths mask underlying tensions via a figurative resolution to an otherwise intractable problem. Thus silences
in public discourse are just as interesting as what is explicit (Yanow 1996: 193). Whereas logical empiricism only studies that which can be directly observed in experience, this figurative dimension provides a more comprehensive interpretative framework.

As I noted above, this approach also extends the political dimension of policy discourse analysis. The political dimension – the question of legitimacy in particular – is implicated in the figurative properties of policy discourse. The symbolic aspects of policy activity link to the question of legitimacy and political power; policy and organisational myths support social order by legitimating institutions and validating common beliefs and customs (Yanow 1996: 193). Shore and Wright argue that the scientific, legal-rational discourse of modern policy is like a myth that acts to remove political problems from the realm of politics to the neutral language of science (1997: 8). Edelman noted that the apparatus of politics and public administration symbolically legitimises decisions by reassuring the public, which largely remains in a quiescent state (1964). Policies establish order by structuring discourse according to a limited set of metaphors and references that buttress the authority of rulers by limiting potential opposing views (Shore and Wright 1997: 12). These concerns have been undervalued in policy studies outside of the recent attention to discourse analysis (see, for example, Fischer 2003a; Hajer 1993), found particularly in literature influenced by Foucault’s theories (see, for example, Colebatch 2002b; Dean 1991; Dean and Hindess 1998;
Gottweis 1998). In this latter work, discourse forms narratives ‘without a narrator’ that structure the identity and possibilities for action of the participants in policy processes (Gottweis 1998: 35).

All this raises broader questions of the scope of structure and agency for social actors. Without delving into this topic, I note that symbolic legitimation was already an important topic for Edelman (1964), who drew on Adorno’s theory of the authoritarian personality, Lasswell’s *Psychopathology and Politics*, and various theorists of rhetoric including Ogden, Richards and Burke. Edelman also emphasised the link between symbolic politics and the emotions of the public (I discuss the emotions, questioning, and politics in Chapter Seven). Given the dialogical structure of political language, concern for the public’s role as an active recipient of discourse is overdue. I note in passing that neither Frankfurt School Marxism nor Foucauldian discourse analysis provides a sufficient conception of rhetoric or of agency and therefore cannot reveal the full function of the public as audience for the rhetoric of political figures. In general, policy discourse has an important political quality and should be assessed with regard to the legitimation of political power (see Chapter Eight on legitimacy and policy).

**ii. Interpreting practice**

An important aspect of the problem solving model is it that presumes social actors act by rational calculation towards a pre-determined goal. The rational model of policymaking then presumes states can act in
similar ways and achieve planned ends. However, along with the complexities of policymaking I outlined in Chapter Three, the structuring effects of discourse debunk the idea that we can explain social action as purely the aggregated result of autonomous individuals and organisations engaged in rational problem solving activity. The critique of the rational model involves the critique of an actor’s intention as determinative of meaning (Colebatch 2002b: 433). Intention is important – we can all form intentions and act upon them. However, not all social action can be explained as purely the expression of actors’ intentions. People respond to and express the imperatives of larger discourses, or ideologies, often without meaning to.

Not all social action conforms to the problem solving model as we inherit it, which is a normative view of how we deal with problems. It is insufficient for understanding what really goes on in policymaking, which is a set of social practices as much as it is an intellectual, reflective endeavour. In many situations people are not able to act instrumentally towards ends known in advance and they operate on intuitive grounds instead. Bourdieu provides an illustrative example of a tennis player who anticipates where to position himself on the court (1998: 82). The player operates not on utilitarian calculation but on intuition built up over many experiences of performing the same actions and is thus able to anticipate where his opponent might hit the ball. Similarly, policy actors may proceed without considering a problem in its entirety because they can effectively act in routine ways that are
most unreflective. I discuss this sense of practice again in Chapter Seven.

Contemporary theorists have returned to the idea of ‘practice’ in policy and politics as a distinct mode of reason. Hajer and Wagenaar’s (2003a) recent book, in particular, examines various approaches to practice, among other interpretative concepts. Practice does not mean simply ideas in an applied context, but involves social norms embedded in routine action. Hajer and Wagenaar locate the interest in practice in the attack of the interpretative school of policy theory on positivism for failing to reflect upon the presumptions of its own epistemological structure, and the consequent association of positivism with hierarchical notions of governance (2003b: 6-7). Wagenaar and Cook (2003) sum up the issues well. Their main argument for the practice perspective is that the positivist legacy of policy science established a dichotomy between theory and action and reduced knowledge to a task of technical production aimed at pre-determined solutions (2003: 140). Positivism supposes a means-consequence relationship in which action follows logically and necessarily from theoretical knowledge (2003: 140). Hence it reduces action to the status of ‘appendix’ to knowledge and fails to understand its significant role in human understanding (2003: 140).

To this view, they counterpose practice as a distinct form of engaging with the world, one which constructs problems and solutions in a rational way, but is also non-scientific, interpretative, moral and emotional (2003: 141). They link practice to Aristotelian phronesis, or
practical judgement, which Aristotle said has its own status independent of science (2003: 141). They say this returns us to Dewey’s idea of inquiry into practical problems in context, as a unified conception of doing and knowing (2003: 148). Practice, in short, is ‘not just the executive arm of rational knowledge’ (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003: 141). Therefore Hajer and Wagenaar ‘suggest that a reformulated, deliberative policy science takes practices as its unit of analysis’ (2003: 19-20).

Policy theorists have a number of inter-related objectives in considering practice. Firstly, as I already noted, they seek to overturn the positivist division between theory and practice (Wagenaar and Cook 2003). Secondly, the language of practice has arisen to account for the new institutional context in which much policymaking activity now occurs outside the state, so formal institutional structures do not explain the full dimensions of politics and policy (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003b: 1). As a result of these new locations of policymaking, policy actors must cooperate more to deal with complex social problems. Actors’ dissatisfaction with the limitations of top-down government raises, thirdly, new possibilities for reasserting democratic control over politics (2003b: 2). Extending the democratic process includes a greater range of stakeholders in decision making along with a concurrent restructuring of processes away from hierarchies towards networks (2003b: 3-4). Hajer and Wagenaar describe all this as a shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ (2003b: 1). Understanding practice
acknowledges the ability of political actors outside the state to affect the conduct and meaning of policy outside the literal rules set by the state. Fourthly, focusing on practice emphasises the political nature of policymaking against the scientific view, defeating attempts to construct policy science as outside of politics (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003b: 18). Fifthly, it reinvigorates Lasswell’s goal of claiming a legitimate status for the scholarly study of policy analysis; if policymaking is practical reason, and if practical reason is equal to theoretical reason, then policy studies is equally important as other forms of scholarship, for example, political theory. It also shows policy theorists attempting to be more relevant to the world of policy practitioners. Positivist policy theory, despite its empirical focus, produced abstract models of politics and complex statistical explanations that said little about real political interaction and which people in policy practice could not use or understand. In reducing theoretical questions to analytic problems empiricism simplified politics beyond recognition, producing trivial findings that were also incomprehensible and irrelevant to practitioners at the same time. Thus the contemporary, interpretative turn to practice harks back to Dewey’s rejection of abstraction in favour of inquiry relevant to public problems.

Interpreting policymaking in practice, therefore, takes us beyond seeing policy as merely a problem solving activity. We cannot determine the meaning of social action solely by analysing an actor’s intentions with regard to a universal interpretation of a given problem. We must
look to how actions express the identity of the actors and create interpretative symbols for others (Yanow 1996: 234-5). This does not mean that the policy process is chaotic and resistant to interpretation simply because intention does not suffice as the repository of all meaning. Instead, it means that our interpretations include, but also reach beyond, the intentions of the actors. And beyond such structured action, actors have the agency to intentionally disguise their actions for strategic effect. For example, formal policy discourse organises many otherwise fragmented activities, making them appear coherent by presenting them as the result of intentional actions oriented toward defined results (Shore and Wright 1997: 5). We see here a connection between the appearance of intentional rationality and maintaining legitimacy. The rational actor model is not itself apolitical, however it can function as a rhetorical device for justifying policy. The full meaning of actions and discourse is often only implicit, so we need to look behind its literal appearance. We hermeneutically reconstruct events afterwards by considering a range of factors beyond the consciousness of the actors as they participated in the real time of the process. For example, a government instituting a work for welfare campaign may simply be copying a popular program from another country, but we can interpret this as extending neo-liberal reform of the welfare state. Indeed, since policy involves a great range of diverse practices, it is unclear what a policy actually is; its identity fragments (Shore and Wright 1997: 5). Interpreting the actions of others is hermeneutic since we cannot be
sure of their motives but, nonetheless, we can still offer interpretations. Interpreting the meaning of the whole process is a *global* hermeneutic comprised of many smaller questioning processes.

**iii. Frames, understanding, and incommensurability**

The concept of policy ‘frames’ is related to the idea of discursive structures. Frames are particular discourses that affect the interpretation of problems, the agendas set, the actions taken, and so on (Rein and Schön 1993: 145). Frames organise reality in such a way as to define problems. They are ‘generative metaphors’ that set normative purposes and images, for example, the metaphor of a diseased community (Schön and Rein 1994: 27). This is close to Kuhn’s concept of knowledge paradigms in the philosophy of science (Schön and Rein 1994: 30; see also Kuhn 1962). Frames or dominant ideas influence the interpretation of policy problems which subsequently affect choices based on interests (Braun 1999: 12). For example, Hall describes the transition to monetarist ideas in British economic policy as a paradigm shift (Hall 1990). Others have drawn on Lakatos rather than Kuhn in describing policies as ‘action programmes’ with distinguishable core beliefs (Majone 1991). Policy narratives are also framing devices.

This presents a problem for theory because if we equate paradigms with epistemology the problem of incommensurability arises, since one paradigm would support interpretations unintelligible to those working within a different paradigm. This fragments our epistemological
framework. There are two main conceptions of incommensurability. One view takes it to mean that there is ‘a radical conceptual discrepancy between two theories’, such that one cannot be translated into the language of the other or a neutral third language (Hintikka 1999: 228). That is, for two theories about the same phenomena, one is actually incompressible from the point of view of the other (Hintikka rejects this view; 1999: 240). Another view takes them as simply not comparable by a common method (Hintikka 1999: 228). Popper, for example, criticised Kuhn for arguing a radical incommensurability of theories, noting that, were it true, it would make scientific progress impossible because new paradigms could not be understood by anyone operating from the viewpoint of the old ones (Meyer 1994: 141-2).

Various solutions have been proposed to deal with the problem of reconciling conflicting policy frames. For example, MacRae describes two different forms of policy discourse, consensual and adversarial, to be used in different social situations (1993: 295). Rein and Schön draw on Rorty’s distinction between normal discourse, where there are established rules, and abnormal discourse, where there is no criteria for reaching agreement (1993: 148-9). Whatever the characterisation of policy discourse, people do understand and compare frames even if they have no demonstrative grounds to resolve conflicts between them. The radical incommensurability thesis does not hold because frame conflicts express disagreement about values rather than total lack of understanding. Misunderstanding might occur but it does not
necessarily result from frame conflicts. For example, we can view drug abuse as a moral problem, requiring abolition, or as a medical problem, requiring harm minimisation. The perspectives might be incommensurable, but they are not incomprehensible to each other. A prohibitionist might not agree with a proponent of needle exchanges but he can understand the position of the other.

We can relate this to the problem orientation by referring back to the critique of Dewey in Chapter One, where I proposed that there is a stage of Dewey’s reasoning at which he reaches partial answers. These answers are still answers even though they do not conform to the norm of answering as dissolving a question. The key move here is to detach understanding from the logic of necessity, which we can only do by considering argumentation in terms of questioning rather than propositions. Opposing frames or discourses are not mutually exclusive propositions that assert their own arbitrary grounds for knowledge. They are the results of a first level of questioning. They need not be the result of an explicit process of inquiry because they are often implicit within discourse. By considering two or more frames in terms of a question, they become answers that we can relate to each other in a totality. So, we would say that the two frames present alternative answers to our initial question of how to approach the problem. The opposed positions exclude each other because they are answers, and therefore different, but we can relate them to a larger questioning process. This enables us to understand them, even if we cannot hold both positions at the same
time. When frames remain implicit within discourse, i.e., when they are disguised (intentionally or not), they serve an ideological function by setting some concepts as presuppositions for inquiry and shielding them from questioning.

Frames are problematisations that advance knowledge without resolving everything; problem setting is a problem itself. Understanding is a matter of understanding alternatives, not of agreeing on the answers to framing questions as the starting point for debate (although this is an option). Interpretative frames reflect a first level of questioning that is implicit in every questioning process. The conflict between frames cannot be resolved in the problem solving manner by referring to experience, because we can always see more than one theory or ideological position at work in any social phenomena. Therefore we have to debate the pro and con of each frame by other means. This partial ‘solution’ is argumentative, because whatever answer we decide upon will remain problematic since we can always raise an alternative answer as a valid possible response to a question of interpretation. Rein and Schön ask ‘What can possibly be the basis for resolving conflicts of frames when the frames themselves determine what counts as evidence and how evidence is interpreted?’ (1993: 145). No scientific criteria exist to resolve the question of how to interpret a problem; we must use rhetoric to deliberate over them. We can argue in support of adopting normative frames to structure policy inquiry, however because norms are also answers they can be questioned in turn. Schön and Rein’s
‘frame reflection’ (1994) is a questioning process in which we inquire into the normative frames that structure policy discourse. Solving a question of frame conflicts by reference to a norm involves, therefore, the resolution of one question by another.

2. Theorising problematicity: the ‘argumentative turn’

The argumentative turn in policy theory is part of the postpositivist scholarship which undermined the credibility of the scientific model of policymaking. The argumentative turn diverged from the scientific, rational model of policymaking by focusing on language, interpretative epistemology, and plausible reason rather than demonstrative logic. While policy theorists only recently took an interest in argumentation and rhetoric, specialists in rhetoric certainly took notice of Harold Lasswell’s interest in rhetoric (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969: 4-5, 52, 83, 164, 332). Lasswell was interested in persuasion and propaganda and the rhetorical effects of mass communication in policymaking (Lasswell 1946b; see also 1946a; and Smith, Lasswell and Casey 1946). He understood that rhetoric was important for ancient Greek philosophers and believed that the opprobrium directed towards it ever since Plato’s condemnation of the Sophists represented an obstruction to proper inquiry into it (Lasswell 1949: 4). Despite this attention to language and argumentation, the ‘argumentative turn’ in policy studies did not arrive for some time. Even today we have not fully
incorporated rhetoric and argumentation in the study of policy and politics.

i. The ‘argumentative turn’ in policy theory

The argumentative turn introduced problematicity by critiquing the problem solving model of logical empiricism. What is the nature of the problematicity introduced by this movement? Firstly, social science has not been able to establish general laws nor models of causation predicting the effects of policy measures (Dryzek 1993: 218). If we cannot establish the cause and effect of policy measures then it becomes necessary to argue in favour of our conclusions (Dunn 1996: 91). Reason becomes all the more argumentative when deliberating about an unknown future action. While science seeks value-free knowledge that establishes the truth by reference to the world of facts, social scientists in particular have rejected the distinction between fact and value (Fischer 1995a: xiii). Since values are fluid and affect the nature of the problems themselves (Dryzek 1993: 218), they cannot be externalised and a causal model adapted to them, as it is with positivism (Fischer 1995a: 47). The purpose of reasoning where values are concerned is pragmatic, not absolute, so conflicts of values must be mediated through argumentative dialogue rather than apodictic scientific experiment (Fischer 1995a: 49, 90; see also Ball 1995).

Secondly, the argumentative turn follows from the linguistic turn (Fischer and Forester 1993a: 5). Because knowledge, in particular policy
knowledge, is bound within ordinary language, it is a social process and therefore argumentative (Dunn 1993: 263). Political actors must employ arguments to bring people around to their position and justify themselves with respect to the public interest (Majone 1989: 2). The joint tasks of persuasion and justification thus form the basis of the argumentative turn (Fischer and Forester 1993a: 4). We can further link this to interpretative theory. Decisions do not settle the meaning of policy, which remains subject to debate, consequently the policy process is less than problem solving and more a struggle to create meaning in different contexts (Yanow 1996: 18-19). Policy actors attempt to persuade others to share the meaning they attribute to events (Yanow 1996: 233). Creating symbolic policy narratives and persuading an audience are intricately linked (see, for example, Throgmorton 1991, 1996).

Thirdly, we need argumentation because human beings have agency. We do not necessarily respond in pre-programmed ways to events but can always change our mind on the meaning of something, rethink our values, or vary the degree to which we support someone or some policy. So, rhetoric is used routinely by political actors to secure the assent of others to their views and secure their cooperation. In politics, because anyone can question a decision, decision making cannot be foreclosed scientifically. Persuasion is essential for generating collective adherence to policy solutions. Political problems can be solved using scientific findings but even agreeing to use scientific evidence to
arbitrate policy dilemmas is ultimately a matter of consent and therefore also of persuasion.

Fourthly, the institutional, political and cultural constraints within which policy analysts work mean that they cannot make decisions by rigorous scientific processes. Much of the interest in argumentation constitutes an attempt to come to grips with the political realities of policymaking. Stone highlights political contest in policymaking, noting that attributing causality to events does not just explain them but also allocates political responsibility (Stone 1988: 148). Since policy makers do not hold unilateral power they must resort to argumentation to justify their position (Fischer and Forester 1993a: 4), to communicate with others, and to persuade them of the veracity of a conclusion or the effectiveness of a policy solution (Majone 1989: 2). Political actors can even question the established rules of progress themselves, so argumentation extends to debate over existing laws, institutional arrangements and the parties holding government.

All this is a major departure from the traditional problem solving view of rationality; the ‘rational model’ of perfect prediction has no place for the distasteful idea of persuasion (Stone 1988: 251). Fischer and Forester insightfully conclude that without rethinking the role of argumentation ‘the requirements of being politically astute and rationally sound will appear to be wholly contradictory’ (1993a: 3).
ii. The revival of argumentation as generalised problematicity

By questioning scientific rationality and introducing politics, policy theorists have responded to, and expressed, a *generalised problematicity* of rationality. Whether we understand it as contingency, indeterminacy, uncertainty or argumentation, problematicity defines the qualities of contemporary discourse in many fields. Problematicity is the domain of rhetoric. In general, rhetoric appears in times of crisis when stable systems of values break down and new systems co-exist with the old (Brooke-Rose, in Meyer 1994: 35; see also Gaonkar 1990: 363). It appeared in ancient Athens as a response to unresolved conflicts in pre-Socratic cosmologies (Copleston 1947: 85) and today we see the problematisation of traditional value systems in the ‘postmodern condition’ (Lyotard 1984). At a general level the rhetorical or argumentative turn forms part of the critique of Enlightenment thought. Whereas Descartes eliminated the probable altogether from knowledge, the non-compulsive element of argumentation is directly opposed to the idea of self-evident truth in which propositions follow upon each other necessarily and without appeal (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969: 1-2). Hence this contemporary revival of the ancient tradition of rhetoric constitutes a break with the dominant form of philosophical reason.

The critique of the scientific, administrative conception of policymaking is but one small part of a larger movement of reflection in the social sciences in response to the problematisation of reason. Crises
of reason, says Michel Meyer, are marked by 'a collapse of previous and well-established values and modes of thought, with an increased individualism which fosters recourse to rhetorical devices to relate to others' (Meyer 1994: 37). Science dealt with philosophical problems by reducing all questions to analytic form, fragmenting into diverse ontologies in order to maintain its own superiority in solving problems (Meyer 1995: 3). When it could not transform questions into its preferred analytic model, science expelled them to external domains as non-problems. But for political problems the contingencies of the context simply cannot be wished away. Here, several different answers (at both the level of frame construction and within a frame) co-exist simultaneously and the rules for progression are also often in question. Therefore we must resort to rhetoric. In policy theory, scholars tried to reverse scientific fragmentation and develop more unified theory, drawing in, through argumentation, the problematicity that science is forced to ignore or deny. This also addressed a simultaneous crisis of relevance, in which theorists have sought to develop ideas that might be of more use to practitioners than the impractical, abstract models of science.

The questioning of science in the argumentative turn also deals with the question of democratic politics. Science is a particular form of discourse that does not require another interlocutor to answer the question under consideration (Meyer 1994: 97). Scientific discourse, when used in policy deliberation, can have detrimental consequences for
democratic debate because it tends to exclude non-scientists from policy debates. Dryzek argues that the scientific model has been complicit in the technocratic rationalisation of society on the one hand, while also risking irrelevance to its audience on the other, resulting in depoliticisation (Dryzek 1993: 218). Rhetoric, in contrast, is the discourse of politics because it recognises the status of the audience it seeks to persuade (even when it is used to deceive). Indeed, when used in politics, science becomes rhetorical because it pretends to apodictically solve value questions which others have a legitimate right to debate in non-scientific terms.

However, in attempting to deal with the problematicity which comes with this critique of science we encounter a major difficulty. We want a unified theory but problematicity seems to deny unity in its very nature. Some poststructuralists, for example, would have us believe that these two concepts are mutually exclusive and that the fragmentation of reason is the very benefit that the crisis of reason brings. But isn’t rhetoric a coherent way to deal with problematicity without rejecting demonstrative reason altogether? The contrast between the contingent answers of rhetoric and the necessary answers of science poses a related question about the relationship between science and politics. Even if the scientific norm is outmoded and we are forced to confront rhetoric, the latter must be rethought as ‘normal’ practice, not the result of a flawed political process which refuses to become scientific. If we are to respond to the fragmentary trajectory of reason by developing adequate theories
of policy and politics we must address the nature of this underlying division of rationality.

3. Theorising reason: logic versus rhetoric

Despite the advances made by the argumentative turn, it presents us with a fundamental difficulty; rhetoric has been condemned as manipulative or weak reasoning ever since Plato’s attack upon sophism. Rhetoric can be manipulative but must it be so, \textit{a priori}? We need to understand this classical philosophical construction for it bears directly upon our ability to develop a theory of policymaking that successfully incorporates rhetoric as expressing the problematicity of political discourse.

\textit{i. The division of logic and rhetoric}

It was Plato who condemned the contingency of sophistic and cast a permanent shadow over rhetoric. Socrates argued that the power of the Sophists drew more from their social position than their claims to truth, so in his attack on them Plato assimilated the problematicity of rhetoric with sophistic and set this over against knowledge as irrefutable truth (Meyer 1994: 51). Here, philosophy aimed to establish the true and the good whereas rhetoric sought only the appearance of these things while remaining in the realm of the problematic. Plato grounded philosophy in ontology, in the essential, condemning rhetoric and relegating questioning to a purely cognitive and rhetorical function useful only in
discovering the truth that lay elsewhere (Meyer 1994: 50). However, Plato could not eliminate rhetoric from reason entirely because rhetoric is as much a possibility of discourse as logic. Indeed, the political institutions of ancient Athens made rhetoric a necessary component of political life (Copleston 1947: 83-4). So, Aristotle responded to the contradictions of Plato’s philosophy by according a place to rhetoric, although he did so by dividing it from logic, expelling the former (part of dialectic, along with poetics and the study of topics) to the realm of the problematic (Meyer 1995: 67, 107; see Aristotle 1991). Logic and rhetoric have been separate ever since and Plato’s condemnation of rhetoric as weakness of reason has prevailed as well (see Richards 1965: 3; Vickers 1988). Accusing one’s opponents of employing rhetoric to indicate their deceitfulness or insincerity is common in political debate, despite the obvious rhetorical purpose of the accusation.

In dividing logic and rhetoric, Aristotle formalised the division between necessary and contingent reasoning; necessity is the property of science and problematicity is the property of rhetoric (Meyer 1995: 107-8). Aristotle’s logic is founded on the principle of non-contradiction which eliminates contradictory propositions by refuting one of them, thus leaving an alternative proposition to account for reality (at least until it, too, can be proven false) (Meyer 1994: 9-10). Although we can also use rhetoric to choose between contradictory propositions, it does not definitively conclude by eliminating one alternative outright and is therefore weak in comparison to logical demonstration (1994: 68).
Michel Meyer notes that the defenders of rhetoric who cite Aristotle’s rhetoric against Plato’s condemnation fail to appreciate that Aristotle also saw rhetoric in a negative light and that he only studied it in order to separate it from true knowledge (1994: 63). So, even though Aristotle accorded to rhetoric some measure of legitimacy, he separated it from the philosophical mainstream and in so doing entrenched its inferior status.

Rhetoric is distinct from logic because it deals with syllogisms that are only probable. The bad reputation of rhetoric stems from the ambiguity of ordinary language which contrasts to the univocal nature of logic; since ordinary language is ambiguous the audience must decide the meaning and render the concepts univocal (Meyer 1986: 92). If we assume that words have a unique meaning then we necessarily condemn rhetoric, which understands meaning to vary with the context. Rhetoric plays upon the ambiguity of language and therefore instantiates the ‘double possibility’ of language to manipulate as much as to reach the truth (Meyer 1996: 355). However, such ambiguity is not necessarily negative. Ordinary language is able to make reference to the context and so ‘is capable of great, quasi-infinite flexibility’, whereas formal language is poor in comparison because everything must be specified (Meyer 1986: 92). Yanow makes this point in policy studies, noting that specifying everything explicitly may actually obstruct, rather than assist, policy implementation (1996: 229).
But if rhetoric is useful for policy and politics then why has it been so difficult to incorporate it into theory? Michel Meyer finds special significance in the division of logic and rhetoric because it marks the debasement of questioning from philosophy by codifying the radical gulf between dialectic and ‘true knowledge’:

what characterizes knowledge is the absence of all problematicity, right from the very start, as it were. That is why everything is already known, once the premises are supplied, as is the case with scientific syllogistic. By contrast, dialectic never does rid itself of its initial problematicity, and, for that reason, never will be fully assimilated with a science: their heterogeneity is truly radical (1995: 110).

In other words, Plato and Aristotle condemned rhetoric because they condemned questioning, defining knowledge as only that which eliminates questions in solutions. Dialectic (including rhetoric) is shot through with problematicity and is, therefore, secondary to ‘true knowledge’ (science) which eliminates questions by demonstration (1995: 109-10). Since logical demonstration excludes problematicity altogether, the legacy of this division between logical necessity and rhetorical contingency is the radical heterogeneity of science and dialectic. Despite the renewed interest in it, the denigration of rhetoric persists today because of this underlying division. In order to account for problematicity on its own terms and defeat the problem solving, scientific norm we must overcome the division between logic and rhetoric.
ii. Contemporary approaches to rhetoric

But what of the contemporary revival of rhetoric? Does the argumentative turn address the gulf between science and rhetoric or does it remain a fragmented, partial view of reason? In this section I examine a number of approaches to argumentation that have influenced authors in policy studies. Although my discussion is necessarily selective at a time when the interest in argumentation and rhetoric is burgeoning, it does show how difficult it is to deal with the logic/rhetoric division.

a. Perelman and the audience

Chaim Perelman and Stephen Toulmin are the most influential figures in the twentieth century revival of argumentation (van Eemeren, Grootendorst and Henkemans 1996: 53). Both figures drew on the classical tradition, seeking to extend it rather than replace it (1996: 52). In their seminal work, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca revive classical Aristotelian rhetoric, providing a comprehensive review of the techniques and strategies of argumentation, the nature of the audience, and emotive appeals to secure the audience’s adherence (1969). They clearly distinguished rhetoric from logic, opposing the former, which is the domain of the credible, the plausible and the probable, to the Cartesian definition of rationality as self-evident, apodictic proof (1969: 1). Under the Cartesian definition any discourse outside formal logic must therefore elude reason altogether (1969: 4). Perelman and Olbrechts-
Tyteca wanted to revive the rationality of contingent reasoning, defining their object of study as ‘the discursive techniques allowing us to induce or to increase the mind’s adherence to the theses presented for its assent’ (1969: 4). Varying degrees of adherence to a position are given by the audience and thus one must argue with the particular audience’s concerns in mind (1969: 20). They also distinguished the adherence of an audience from truth which is self-evident and indisputable, concluding that, although they may intersect, logic and rhetoric should be studied separately (1969: 4).

Because Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca defined sound argumentation by reference to the audience, norms of rationality are arbitrary according to the particular audience being addressed, which suggests a relativist conception of knowledge (van Eemeren et al. 1996: 119). To counteract this problem they postulated an imaginary ‘universal audience’ which provides the transcendent, Cartesian norm for objective argumentation ‘independent of local or historical contingencies’ (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969: 32). From this, ‘maximally efficacious rhetoric, in the case of a universal audience, is rhetoric employing nothing but logical proof’ (1969: 32). However, Meyer argues that Perelman did not really address the condemnation of rhetoric because ‘The definition of rhetoric by the audience and its assent is bound to maintain rhetoric in the waters of relativism’ (1994: 49). The concept of the universal audience does not resolve the difficulty because it simply substitutes the universal audience for universal
reason. Meyer concludes that it 'ceases to be an operational concept, since it can only be understood as a metaphor' (1994: 49). Such a concept could serve as a Kantian regulative ideal to give rhetoric the semblance of objectivity, however such an audience does not exist in reality (1994: 50). The multiplicity of possible rationalities in rhetoric means that, no matter how practical, rhetoric is relativist and the charge of weak reasoning persists. Without a sufficient foundation, rhetoric is arbitrary and therefore deficient in comparison to demonstrative logic, no matter how impractical the latter might be. If Perelman revived rhetoric to deal with the shortcomings of logical demonstration, then he reinstated the Aristotelian division at the same time, and therefore his recovery of rhetoric is only partial.

b. Toulmin's structural model of argument

Stephen Toulmin is the other major figure responsible for the contemporary revival of rhetoric, and the source of argumentation theory for much of the policy studies literature (see, for example, Ball 1994; Dunn 1993, 1996; Fischer 1985, 2003a; Gasper and George 1998; Goldstein 1984; MacRae 1993; Mason and Mitroff 1980-81). Toulmin asserted that everyday argumentation differs from that found in formal logic and that a radical reorientation of logic is required (van Eemeren et al. 1996: 121). The main concern of Toulmin's work is how opinions brought up in everyday life can be justified (van Eemeren et al. 1996: 121). Only the nature of the particular problems at issue, said
Toulmin, is sufficient to evaluate the soundness of arguments. Formal logic is inadequate for these problems and universal norms are non-existent (1996: 130, 133). He distinguished analytic arguments, which are rare, from ‘substantial’ arguments (Toulmin 1964: 125). For substantial arguments there is no criteria of demonstrativeness as the conclusions only *probably* follow from the premises (Dunn 1993: 265). Here, truth is defined by its adequacy to the circumstances rather than by a definable essence (Dunn 1993: 272). Dunn points to Habermas’ use of Toulmin and seeks to draw on his model of argument for enacting a critical theory of policy studies. He argues that Toulmin’s model is useful for political analysis because arguments are ‘transactions’ over which we negotiate the adequacy, relevance and cogency of knowledge claims (1993: 265-7). Dunn identifies other benefits of Toulmin’s model for studying policy: it systematically represents the structure of policy arguments; it supports a critical analysis of the ideologies, worldviews or frames held by policy actors; it becomes possible to develop a typology of tests for assessing knowledge claims; and it affirms that knowledge is created and negotiated by two or more parties (1993: 265). Fischer (1995b, 2003a) develops Toulmin’s logic further and provides an extensive framework for analysing practical policy arguments. In Australia, Marston and Watts (2003), for example, have made good use of Toulmin’s model of argument to criticise the concept of evidence-based decision making.
Toulmin distinguishes arguments pertaining to different circumstances through his concept of ‘fields’. The field or subject concerned sets the conditions of soundness to be employed in a formally valid procedure (van Eemeren et al. 1996: 133). This model provides a standard logical form for arguments, which are in turn supported by recourse to a ‘warrant’ and/or ‘backing’ derived from an epistemological field, for example, a policy frame. Because he rejected norms in favour of limited fields, Toulmin said we argue to justify an assertion restricted to, and warranted by, the criteria of a set field (1996: 135). Toulmin amalgamated argumentation with epistemology because arguments in academic fields are substantial, not analytic, and their soundness derives from the conditions of the field concerned (1996: 133-4).

However, the field concept limits the scope of Toulmin’s definition of argumentation. Van Eemeren et al. (1996: 160) point out that it is not clear how fields are to be defined or how rationality differs across the various fields. In policymaking, identifying many fields seems especially difficult, since problems are rarely fixed and our interpretation of them usually draws on many types of knowledge at once. However, Toulmin believed that argumentation was only intelligible according to a field and therefore could not be generalised across fields (van Eemeren et al. 1996: 134). The problem of incommensurability between fields also crops up because the field acts as a de facto foundation, an underlying episteme that pre-defines the conditions for knowledge. Does this make different positions incomprehensible to each other, since they occupy
different epistemological realms? Clearly this is not the case, for we can still debate very different formulations of a problem, even if they might be incommensurable. Indeed, doesn’t this suggest some deeper rationality that enables us to identify such differences? Further, if it is epistemological fields that provide the soundness of any particular argumentation, then the argument is pre-determined by that field; it is only a justification for an already-held position, which reduces argumentation to the process of discovering an a priori assertion. Argumentation is then either unnecessary or impossible if we subscribe to different underlying warrants, or it is just a technical procedure to formally articulate the logic of a field, which is itself a question that has already been answered. But isn’t rhetoric as much about invention as a posteriori justification? If we define rhetoric as the justification of propositions after the fact it is still condemned because it simply describes the problematisation of reason rather than contributing to reason itself (Gaonkar 1990).

Ultimately, Toulmin did not reconstruct reason, he described the conditions of its fragmentation. Although he found a voice for the problematicity of reason over logical necessity, he displaced that problematicity by dividing rationality into pre-determined fields, which makes reason itself arbitrary. Because fields are self-contained, he precluded the idea that we could synthesise them because they themselves are different grounds of knowledge (van Eemeren et al. 1996: 160). What happens when we face a difficult problem for which there is
no clearly identifiable field? And does argumentation really proceed in logical steps the way he describes? What happens when we question not only the backing of an argument but the very rules for logical progression, as occurs in politics all the time? This fragmented view does not help us to account for the problematicity of policy and politics because it still operates from the idea that reasoning, even argumentative reasoning, proceeds from a proposition, from the point at which we already have a result. In restoring Aristotelian argumentation, Perelman left the division of logic and rhetoric intact while Toulmin asserted the argumentative side against logic. However, neither challenged the division of the logos itself and therefore neither could restore rhetoric to a respectable position by providing a unified theory of reason.

**iii. Argumentation and principles**

In fact, both Toulmin and Perelman attempted to divide argumentation, which would be rational, from rhetoric, which would be manipulative (Meyer 1996: 354). Toulmin did it by dividing knowledge into pre-defined fields, Perelman did it through the concept of the universal audience. The idea is that argumentation can serve as a regulative ideal, a pragmatic ground for solving problems in contingent circumstances when the truth cannot be demonstrated. Argumentation serves as a regulative principle to determine agreement upon norms (Habermas is influential here) (Meyer 1996: 352). Argumentation then becomes the
process of reaching agreement upon an initial definition of a field, or norm, from which logical, rational argument can proceed. Working from a norm gives us a yardstick to distinguish positive from negative rhetoric, between argumentation that aims to solve problems and rhetoric that aims for appearance. This approach rejects relativism on normative grounds, and the task is to distinguish propaganda from genuine argument (Fischer and Forester 1993a: 3). Others have criticised this view for re-establishing force at the foundational level in a new form (Healey 1993: 239). It is also impractical – how often do we reach agreement upon norms in politics, even when we desire them?57 More importantly, this removes the persuasive characteristics of rhetoric, producing a legalistic version of argumentation. This judicial model of rhetoric cannot account for the symbolic politics of personality, found in the concept of ethos, and the appeal to the passions of the public, pathos. We might also think of the ‘rhetoric of figures’ (Meyer 1994: 74-8), so important in discursive policy narratives, and epideictic rhetoric (in praise or blame of a person), which is also prevalent in political discourse (see Aristotle 1991). So, while I appreciate the attempt to protect against relativism and ground political discourse in normative ethics, the actual effect is to leave rhetoric relativistic because it is not grounded in a principle, or to restore it only partially, which has a similar effect. While this rejects manipulative rhetoric, it makes only a general critique rather than identifying the inner workings of rhetoric: critique must commence from intricate knowledge.
Another contemporary expression of rhetoric comes from poststructuralism. Poststructuralism appeals to many people because in rejecting philosophical foundations it seems to express the problemati
city of contemporary thought. Poststructuralists argue that with the fall of the Cartesian subject that previously grounded reason, all theories that propose a structure to discourse and reality are fundamentally false and authoritarian because they impose a definitive foundation of knowledge by force. This excludes discourses of the socially marginalised. Thinking about discourse specifically, critics of the structuralist version of meaning argue that signification cannot be restricted to a singular referent nor that reference can be retired at all (see, for example, Derrida 1978). Language could always mean something else, and therefore not only is there no univocal meaning of a statement, meaning itself fails, always missing its intended target in an endless chain of signifiers. In general, poststructuralism proposes the ‘rhetoricisation’ of discourse altogether. Rather than dividing knowledge, it replaces discourse entirely with rhetoric, effecting a fragmentation from within as the very signification established by language breaks down.

Poststructuralism is a highly literary version of reason and discourse. However, the radical poststructuralist view of rhetoric is the converse of the previous example of argumentation without rhetoric; it is rhetoric without argumentation. Were signification to proceed indefinitely in a free play of meaning, then there could not be any
persuasion since it would be impossible to signify one meaning more than any other (Meyer 1995: 238). Argumentation presupposes inference (albeit contingent inference). As poststructuralism seems to be without inference there is only rhetorical discourse without argumentation. Poststructuralism sees questioning everywhere but it does not make it explicit. It cannot articulate what is positive about rhetoric, in that it also reaches solutions, even if one solution does not impose itself to the exclusion of the others. Perhaps poststructuralism has not made great inroads in policy theory due to the imperative for policy makers to reach decisions, even in conditions of uncertainty. Taking a more moderate view, concluding that language has more than one referent returns us to rhetoric and argument, whereby we must give reasons for preferring one answer over another.

What we require is a rhetorical framework that permits understanding and disagreement to co-exist, a framework that thematises contingency without eliminating rationality in the process. Politics already operates without consistency of meaning and, if anything, it is defined by problematicity and disagreement. Rhetoric deals with questions or problems, not with known or agreed-upon propositions. So, rather than taking the proposition as our fundamental unit of analysis, we should look to questioning if we are to fully rehabilitate rhetoric.
4. Questioning, rhetoric, and interpretative theory

The critique of the policy sciences is part of the extensive critique of logical empiricism in the social sciences. Realising that ordinary discourse did not follow the dictates of scientific logic, scholars responded to the problemativity of everyday communication by introducing hermeneutics and rhetoric as conceptual tools. Postpositivism encompasses a great variety of approaches but the attack on science and substitution of contingency for necessity is a common theme. Policymaking is not characterised by instrumentally rational problem solving. These critiques show that policy discourse is contingent and problematic rather than necessary and apodictic. It involves interpretative frames, dialogical and figurative discourse, and rhetoric. Interpretative theory represents a considerable advance upon the problem solving model because it expresses problemativity within its conceptual schema. This allows policymaking to be a contingent form of reasoning. It represents a considerable advance upon the previous idea that policy should solve problems scientifically.

However, articulating a legitimate place for argumentation and rhetoric is difficult because of the longstanding philosophical separation of science and rhetoric and the denigration of rhetoric that follows. So, while the argumentative turn introduced rhetoric it also brought various limitations with it; either not addressing theoretical fragmentation or accepting fragmentation as the condition of reason itself. These diverse
approaches share a failure to thematise questioning as the domain of rhetoric. In these conditions questioning, or problematicity, is supposed to be resolved \textit{a priori} by substituting a regulative ideal or it is to be embraced (as a totality) but dissolved of meaning at the same time by denying the intelligibility of answering altogether. Rhetoric has probably not received comprehensive attention because of the Platonic condemnation.\textsuperscript{58} The gulf between logic and rhetoric limits the integration of policy theory, even in the various interpretative models. Political actors do use rhetoric in practice but the division of logic and rhetoric still presents a major obstacle for policy theory. In the argumentative turn in policy theory, argumentation is introduced only insofar as rationality is compromised by problematicity. To recover rhetoric, without permitting reason to become sophistic or irrational, we require a new understanding of rhetoric; one grounded in a principle and defined by problematicity. This links rhetoric with the two levels of questioning essential to uncovering the ideologies of political discourse. Furthermore, excluding manipulative rhetoric from theory does not exclude it from practice nor does it assist us in finding answers to our twin problems: understanding political discourse and establishing an ethic of democracy.

Michel Meyer has an answer to these difficulties; he grounds rhetoric – and philosophy in general – in questioning (1994, 1995). With the crisis of foundations, reason itself has become a question. So, we must see past the idea that reason is built upon propositions and
attempt to thematise questioning as the condition of contemporary thought. We have seen that problem setting is as important as problem solving; answers can be questions, or ‘problematisations’, which suggests two levels of questioning rather than straightforward inquiry into one problem defined univocally by experience. This indicates the importance of interpretative constructions of policy and of rhetorical discourse to deal with them. In Meyer’s questioning framework the emphasis moves away from propositions and problem solving to a larger conception of discourse as problem posing. Policymaking involves problem setting and contingent solutions, it is a political discourse but is rational nonetheless. With an interpretative framework based on questioning we can still use logical demonstration to solve some problems. For others we need rhetoric because more than one solution is equally plausible. This is always the case in politics, where discourse is dialogical, or at least it should be. Michel Meyer’s philosophy of questioning, which I discuss in Part II, brings necessity and contingency under one roof. Apodicticity is one mode of answering and contingency is another, both sharing the principle of questioning. Understanding is a matter of appreciating a question, an alternative, not of agreeing upon an a priori answer (proposition) before we commence. Meyer’s problematological rhetoric also incorporates the ‘rhetoric of figures’, which does not seek to persuade but to evoke ‘identity’ and a sense of distance or closeness between individuals with regard to a problem (Meyer 1996; see also Burke 1969: 19-29). This enables us to include
the narrative approach to policy studies within a reconstructed problem orientation as well.

If we are to comprehend and critique the use of language to justify decisions in favour of vested interests, rhetoric must be acknowledged as an intrinsic possibility of language without conceding it to relativism, which would be no advance. We should build our theories from questioning because in it we find rhetoric, interpretative logic and democratic practice. We should affirm the value of questioning in our answers, so as not to eliminate the problematicity that defines knowledge today. Part of this involves recovering rhetoric, for were we to reject it altogether we would allow scientific and administrative rationality to dominate by default, allowing questions to go unanswered and power to go unquestioned. By incorporating rhetoric into a theory of discourse we can make it explicit and from there we can study it. If critical theory finds its aim in revealing the implicit power structures of society, then making explicit the nature of rhetoric in policymaking is vital, especially considering the contemporary manipulative rhetoric of ‘weapons of mass destruction’ (BBC News 5 February 2005) and ‘children overboard’ (Marr and Wilkinson 2003). Questioning is essential for critical thought and it has never been more needed in practice.

I conclude with Torgerson’s comments about the postpositivist critique of policy science. Postpositivism has proposed a form of
knowledge that escapes the technocratic vision of policymaking but it is not ‘a neat solution’ (1995: 228). It generates its own perplexity because it presupposes a domain of common understandings that ground knowledge: it ‘tends to presuppose the legitimacy of an existing context of community and tradition...[and to] obscure the strategic character of political understanding attuned to the interplay of power’ (1995: 250). In other words, the task is to construct policy theory without restricting its political nature and limiting the critical perspective valued by postpositivist theorists.

Torgerson’s statement of the problem is an excellent one, because he returns us to Dewey’s prime concern; establishing a democratic public life as well as a theory of knowledge. These twin problems motivated the origins of the policy sciences and continue today in contemporary interpretative theory. Postpositivism is not a neat solution because it is a problematological solution to the question of knowledge. I argue that without revisiting and completely remaking the idea of ‘problem’, problematicity will remain external to the scientific method of problem solving. Science, and its accompanying utilitarian instrumentalism and technical rationality, can then continue to prosper due to their ruthless efficiency (Meyer 1994: 21, 33) and service to power (Fischer 1987). Because the sources of fragmentation run so deep this is a philosophical problem for policy theory; the difficulties at the epistemological level remain even if we can study policy discourse empirically. The interpretative approach needs a unified theory, albeit
one that does not replicate past theories that presumed problem solving was the only legitimate form of reason. Therefore, in Part II, I seek a contemporary theoretical synthesis for the field in reconstructing the problem orientation on problematological grounds.
PART II

PROBLEMATOLOGY

In Part II, I employ Michel Meyer’s *problematology* to reconceptualise policy from first principles. I reconsider what a problem is and use Meyer’s philosophy to unfold a new conceptual framework to interpret policymaking in terms of question and answer. Such a project is ambitious, considering the distance between metaphysics and the focused inquiry that characterises policy studies. Hence it can only be a preliminary analysis. The first result to seek from such an analysis is to reverse the fragmentation of policy theory and conceive of policymaking in terms of the problematicity identified for it by the postpositivist critique of policy science. Here I must add some qualifications. Given that I must indicate how problematology is relevant to policy theory, there is insufficient room to discuss all the implications of Meyer’s philosophy for the many other philosophies from which policy theorists have drawn. However, the utility of the theory should be apparent in the exposition. I also offer a defence of problematology from first principles that demonstrates it is reflexively secured by its own practice; a unique result that distinguishes Meyer from other philosophers. Problematology offers us an opportunity to advance upon existing interpretative work in the field by drawing together many elements into a singular framework.
In short, I argue that problematology can reconstruct the theory of policymaking.

Unfortunately, Michel Meyer's philosophy is not well known, so problematology is certainly an unfamiliar word. This is not the only obstruction to its generalised use. It is also a radically different depiction of reason. It involves a new set of terms to understand, and an entirely new conception of judgement itself. This means we must proceed slowly and carefully. My concern is to reconstruct a basic concept of the field, policy problems. I cannot race ahead to investigate a range of mid-level theories about the policy process. For the moment we need to understand problematology from the ground up, which involves some difficult thinking. I will concentrate on the micro-level qualities of Michel Meyer's philosophy in order to explain its differences from the problem solving model. This Part of the thesis constitutes an effort to reconstruct the problem orientation: it does not offer a normative view of policymaking nor discuss particular aspects of policy analysis. The idea is to synthesise developments already made in postpositivist policy theory with the origins of the field in the problem orientation. So, apart from making philosophical points, my questions to answer about policy arising from Part I are all broad. How do we express, in theory, the problematicity of policy problems and the policy process? What is the logic of policymaking as a political rationality? What does this mean for the democratic conception of policymaking?
In Part I, I described how the policy sciences operated upon a particular conception of resolution, problem solving, and I outlined the many consequences of this for policy theory. Thinking back to the very beginning of the policy sciences, with Dewey, we saw how pragmatism as practical problem solving was a philosophical view that knowledge advanced through the practical modification of experience. He rejected traditional metaphysics in favour of the pragmatic criterion, arguing that experience is the only effective way to resolve philosophical questions. But over time theories of the policy process derived from this view became increasingly problematic and the problem solving view broke down. This critique linked the problems of contemporary policy theory to fundamental, difficult philosophical questions about the nature of knowledge, as well as questions of the best form of democracy. In this second Part of the thesis, I provide an alternative way of tackling policy theory by introducing a new philosophical perspective on the question of policy. It is at a fundamental level that our problems originate and therefore we must return to first principles in order to remedy past errors and construct a new and effective theory.

What we require is a philosophy that does not take for granted that the sole model of resolution is the dissolution of questions, such as Michel Meyer’s problematology. Meyer does not reject metaphysics, he
commences from questioning and deduces a *logos* based entirely upon questioning, incorporating the problematic as an essential characteristic of reason and expanding the scope of resolution. Meyer’s attention to fundamental principles is abstract and requires that we consider his ideas at a theoretical level. This is not the usual way we proceed in policy studies, which is often empirical and inductive. But it is necessary because we must attend to the fundamental question of knowledge in order to tackle the question of policy. It is important to take the time to consider Meyer’s unique insight and establish the strength and scope of his vision of reason.

In this chapter my task is to consider Meyer’s principle of questioning and the nature of the problematological difference. Problematology is not just a useful interpretative framework but a grounded and comprehensive depiction of reason that is pertinent to all particular sub-modalities of questioning, including policy inquiry. Firstly, I outline his argument for questioning as the fundamental principle of reason, his deduction of the problematological difference, and present a defence of this argument. I explain the value of problematology for thinking about democracy. Secondly, I discuss another major contemporary philosophical perspective, postmodernism (or poststructuralism), and argue that problematology is a better philosophy and a better alternative for policy theory. Finally, I argue that the problematological foundation provides a new basis upon which to
formulate policy theory that remedies the fragmentation that results from the problem solving view.

1. Questioning as foundation

If policy science experienced a crisis with its failure to solve policy problems, then this is one particular expression of the larger crisis of twentieth century thought in its encounter with problematicity. The crisis of philosophy was brought about by the fall of the Cartesian subject as the foundation of thought. This foundational crisis is just as important for policy theory as for philosophy since the origins of our theoretical problems are philosophical, not empirical. Moreover, we can trace the origins of policy science’s difficulties to Dewey’s own rejection of metaphysics in favour of scientific knowledge and the pragmatic criterion. Many contemporary thinkers have also concluded that reason has no foundation and that philosophy is at an end.

Michel Meyer, however, is different. He does not reject philosophy, he tries to restore its value. Rather than discarding the idea of a foundation, Meyer responds to the crisis of philosophy by seeking a new foundation. While this is a traditional view of philosophy, it is also radically different because in considering anew the question of the foundation of knowledge he does not rework the old idea of metaphysics as ontology. Instead, he aims to remove ontology from philosophy and re-ground it in questioning (1995: 9). He seeks a unified system of thought, grounded in a principle, and thus rejects both philosophical
nihilism and taking refuge in the partial perspective of science. If there is no subject to ground reason then we are forced to consider reason itself as a question, since questioning is the only contemporary reality from which we might begin.

**i. The principle of questioning**

The problematisation of the Cartesian subject means that our starting point has gone and a new one is not apparent. But far from abandoning the quest for the foundation, Meyer points out that to philosophise has always meant to search for first principles (1995: 1). In times of uncertainty, when everything is in question, the question of questioning forces itself upon philosophy, and therefore we need to reconsider which questions to ask, which questions have answers, and which are insoluble (1995: 5). Importantly, this approach must be *grounded* if it is not to simply address one question which is the equal of others, as such a view would leave the philosophy of questioning as legitimately opposable as any other philosophy (1995: 5). So, Meyer asks the question of what is foundational, from which follows the foundational principle of questioning:

> that which emerges first in the inquiry as to what is first *is questioning itself*, through whatever question is posed. That is why questioning is indeed the principle of thought itself, the philosophical principle par excellence [original emphasis] (1995: 5-6).

The answer to the question of the foundation is to affirm the positivity of questioning itself. This answer is very different to the traditional conception of metaphysics; it is not a foundational proposition that
remains out-of-the-question, but affirms that problematicity lies at the very heart of reason, the starting point from which we must commence in every case. Had the Greeks conceived of questioning in this way they would have called it, suggests Meyer, *problematology* (1995: 6).

Problematology is reflexively secured because to practice philosophical questioning confirms the answer; it is necessarily reflected in it. Questioning is primary in a way that nothing else could be: ‘what is more primary in questioning what is primary than questioning itself? Anyone who would doubt this would still be questioning’ (1995: 18). Therefore this is an irrefutable principle. In posing the question of foundations we necessarily practice questioning, which suffices to create its meaning (1995: 18). Whatever the answer about what is first *could* be, in response to whatever question is posed, it returns us to a common, underlying question and so to questioning as such (1995: 6). Indeed, it is impossible for the first answer to be anything else other than an answer, otherwise the ‘initial answer would defeat its nature as “first answer” by becoming a contradiction, since the answer presupposes something it would not assert, all the while claiming to be primary’ (1995: 6). One could affirm the autonomy of a foundational proposition from the question of the foundation, but this would not change its nature as an answer, even if it did not explicitly refer to the questioning process from which it originated. Meyer’s answer is different because he affirms the question-answer link in his answer; it is the only answer to the question of foundations that confirms its origins in a
question by affirming its nature as answer. So, questioning is essential to every instance of thought and problematology is the only philosophy that explicitly concludes this.

**ii. The problematological difference**

Does the primacy of questioning mean that answering is impossible? How can Meyer derive the nature of reason and language from a principle that merely confirms questioning? This is difficult because he must proceed directly from the question, and only the question, to the answer without presupposition, meaning that he cannot even formulate the question as some particular question, for this would be to presuppose the answer (1995: 204-5). Given this limitation, how is it possible to proceed? In discussing the question of *logos*, he says, we are already within the *logos*, we have made a speech act, answering *upon* the question even though we have not found a solution that responds directly *to* it by dissolving it (1995: 205). Such a discursivity speaks *of* the question, but is not *the* question; it has gone beyond the question even while maintaining it, and therefore establishes a *difference*. This answer cannot be reduced to the question, which remains indeterminate; thus the difference between implicit problems and explicit discourse upon those problems is the primary difference of *logos* (1995: 209). Meyer calls this the *problematological difference* (1995: 206). He stresses that this does not mean that the question presupposes the answer because the question has not actually been formulated; it is
indeterminate and presupposes nothing (1995: 205). Posing the question of the logos implies the possibility of obtaining an answer, but the question itself asserts nothing at all (1995: 205). He has reached the answer only by questioning the question, not by presupposing the answer in the question (1995: 205).

Language is a response to an implicit question, and in using it we have already made progress towards answering by explicating questions. The answer to the question of the logos is therefore that questions and answers make up the logos itself (1995: 206). Language is a first level of answering that expresses both questions and answers. Language is apocritical because it is an explicit response, an answer to an implicit question, but it is also problematological, because in answering it expresses a question (1995: 211). At a second level of answering, explicit language also conforms to the problematological difference, so that questions and answers can always be distinguished (1995: 208). Here, apocritical answers close off questioning upon a solution. These answers are also problematological in that the resolution effected by these answers permits them either to be put back into question or to serve as the basis for a new line of questioning. Even though language is marked by questioning, nothing prevents us from going further and offering apocritical answers to particular questions, even if it means we need rhetoric to persuade others of their worth. The important point is that Meyer establishes the value of philosophical answers, where answers are problematisations, and distinguishes it from science which
accumulates answers in the apocritical (1995: 11-12). Discourse on an unresolvable question is a problematological answer, and therefore a result, without requiring that answering be solely an apocritical closure of questioning.

Meyer’s philosophy is complex and his deduction of problematological reason is more detailed than I have sketched here. What is important is that he does not accept fragmentation as the new reality, as the end of philosophy. In seeking philosophical unity, Meyer’s response to the problematisation of reason is traditional even if his solution is radically different:

Philosophy should respond to periods of chaos not by echoing them, because that would amount to philosophy’s adulterating itself, but rather by trying to make sense of that which, because of fragmentation and discontinuity, seems to be meaningless. Philosophical fragmentation is a contradiction in terms (1995: 3).

Meyer re-establishes a foundation for reason, which is reflexively secured, and deduces a *logos* from this foundation without recourse to an *a priori* proposition. The problematological *logos* reflects questioning by establishing an expanded conception of resolution that incorporates problematicity within answering itself.

Meyer’s insight is beautifully simple and also consistent in theory and practice. With the principle of questioning there is no infinite regress towards a foundation situated at an ever-higher level of abstraction, as is the case for systems which rely on a founding proposition, because when we ask reflexive questions we confirm the
principle of reason by employing questioning in the practice of doing so; the principle is thus reflexively secured. Thus the question of the nature of philosophy, with which Meyer commences his inquiry, is answered by affirming questioning. Therefore philosophy is problematology (1995: 18). Again, this foundation is very different to the traditional understanding of metaphysics. Reason is not some thing that must be searched for and constructed as a foundation a posteriori. Instead he shows that to philosophise is to question. Meyer replaces ontology altogether as a defunct concept but he does not do it by rejecting the philosophical itself. By problematising the foundation of knowledge we can pose it as a question and ask the question of questioning (1995: 18). Questioning is intrinsically and necessarily practiced in posing the question of the foundation and suffices to create its meaning (1995: 18).

iii. In defence of problematology

As I noted above, the practice of philosophical questioning confirms the principle of questioning. If one thinks about it, reflexivity is the questioning of the underlying basis of one's reasoning and is, therefore, the model of questioning itself. Reflexivity poses such a great difficulty for other forms of reason because it highlights how none of those philosophies can justify themselves on their own terms by placing themselves out-of-the-question. We saw this with Dewey’s philosophy in Chapter One. But problematology is not circular because the reflexive
question is not the same as the foundational question into which it inquires. Meyer establishes a difference within questioning, the problematological difference, where the explicit treatment of the question is different to its implicit existence as a question.

What other objection might we make to Meyer’s principle of questioning? Perhaps we could reject the search for first principles as a defunct idea, seeing philosophy, at least philosophy as metaphysics, as at its end. This is the approach of poststructuralism. However, Meyer points out that once the question has been posed, to refuse it is another way of answering it (1995: 20). This, in turn, indicates that it is an answer to a question and therefore confirms that questioning comes first (1995: 20). Indeed, to assert that it is meaningless to search for metaphysical principles is internally contradictory because this ‘implies a conception of what is a meaningful question. This claim itself is nonsensical and internally contradictory, since it provides an answer to that question’ (1995: 21). It is certainly possible to dispute problematology as an answer because this is a property of the very freedom of answering. Indeed, to deny this possibility and assert problematology as a necessary conclusion would deny historical reality as well as the nature of problematological answering, which establishes problematicity rather than eliminating it. However, once Meyer has put the foundation as a question, one cannot refuse it without answering it in the process. It is necessary that we answer when we question though not necessary that we offer a particular answer. That is, it is necessary
to question but not necessary that we affirm questioning as an answer. Questioning is an undeniable necessity in every case, but because it is in the property of a question to always produce more than one answer we do not have to accept the problematological answer as the only answer. Problematology has the property of permitting itself to be disguised by the natural suppression of questioning in answering. This does not destroy the principle, it confirms it in its very practice. Indeed, because we are put in question we must answer, in one way or another. Meyer points out that other philosophies were not errors, but simply did not confront the historical conditions of today in which rationality itself has been radically problematised (1995: 10). Now that he has posed it, we cannot deny the validity of the principle.

Another key problem in philosophy and the social sciences arising from the crisis of foundations is relativism. Policy theorists have also attended to this problem (for example, Fischer 2003a: 136-8; Rein and Schön 1994: 41-5, 176). How does problematology deal with it? Relativism is a problem if we admit that knowledge is influenced by historical and cultural forces or social position rather than following necessarily from a principle that transcends particular historical conditions. Relativism arises from the failure of the idea that all questioning should be excluded in answering, that knowledge should be necessarily true rather than contingent. Traditional metaphysics required that ontology ground knowledge by establishing the necessity of all other logical relationships. A historical view suggests that
philosophy only comes up with systems opposed to one another, products of individual inspiration rather than eternal truths (Meyer 1995: 12). Hence relativism arises as a natural consequence of such thinking, evidenced by the proliferation of philosophies throughout history (Meyer 1995: 164).

Meyer points out that the relativist critique reveals the historicity of individual philosophies, which is paradoxical for these philosophies that claim to transcend history and establish an 'anhistorical' knowledge (1995: 165). At the same time, relativism fails to understand that such philosophies establish their independence by continually repressing questioning in their solutions, disguising the *interrogativity* they have in common (1995: 165). The property of answering to become autonomous from questions creates the appearance of transcendence, of independence from the historical context of questioning (1995: 22). Thus ‘The historicity of these philosophies is the repression of their history, producing the illusion that they draw their validity from and upon themselves, independent of *what* they originate in’ (1995: 164). Relativism studies philosophies one by one and thus fails to perceive the interrogativity that animates each of them (1995: 165). All knowledge is historically modulated and therefore variable and flexible; but it obeys the laws of questioning nonetheless. Anyhow, relativism is a self-refuting proposition because to conclude that all knowledge is historically determined is an ahistorical assertion. Whereas relativism points out the non-apodicticity of answering, it fails to perceive the questioning that all
thought shares in common, ‘the underlying constancy of questions which make up the philosophical itself’ (1995: 166).

Questioning is primary, and the historical context mediates the transition to a particular answer, which then appears to be ahistorical because answers become autonomous and independent from their questions (on the autonomy of answers, see Chapter Six, Section Three). Questioning and historicity form a pair. The historian E.H. Carr, reflecting upon the nature of history itself, said, ‘When we attempt to answer the question “What is history?” our answer, consciously or unconsciously, reflects our own position in time, and forms part of our answer to the broader question what view we take of the society in which we live’ (1987: 8). Although there are no neutral answers to questions because history permeates all answering, questioning is always primary, and understanding history reflects a questioning necessity that transcends any particular historical inquiry; particular historical answers may not necessarily exclude other answers, but questioning is a necessity in every case. While history conditions knowledge, we can also question what we receive from the past because questioning creates an alternative and therefore the possibility of obtaining a new result. Fischer, writing in policy theory, makes an eminently sensible conclusion when he points out that, at a theoretical level, the problem of relativism only arises in relation to the demand for apodictic problem solving: ‘Good reasons for support or rejection are the
best we can hope for. The search for definitive answers is left to the dogmatic ideologues’ (2003a: 136).

iv. The qualities of problematological reason

The historicity within problematological answering indicates the role of context in questioning in general. Although Meyer deduces the characteristics of the logos entirely from questioning and without presupposition, other, secondary questioning processes permit us to build up knowledge and move from question to answer via the context and any presuppositions that define the situation (1995: 22). In practice, reasoning operates on the basis of all the received social and psychological forces we carry within us and through which we interpret the world. Questioning adapts to the situation, so that when speaking with interlocutors with whom we share the context it is less necessary to use formal language because many presuppositions are already shared by both speakers through the context (1995: 22). Even if people approach problems from diverse positions, these positions do not entirely determine discourse. For example, Rein and Schön comment that their empirical study of homelessness did not reveal that discourse across interpretative frames was impossible, ‘because the actors’ conflicting frames did not wholly color their visions of the policy situation’ (1994: 176). In other cases we want to be more explicit and appeal to more formal rules in order to make our point clear. Legal reasoning aims at such fixed discourse, although even then context is
important in making legal judgements. However, beyond particular circumstances, questioning makes possible all discourse, even if it does not necessarily have to proceed successfully; neither understanding nor agreement are guaranteed.

Where Meyer’s work has been examined in English, some critics have mistakenly interpreted his philosophy as affirming questioning at the expense of answering, limiting our capacity to make strong discursive claims (Crosswhite 1996; Lyne 1998). Just because it is argumentative and incorporates reference to the context, problematology does not impart an entirely arbitrary characteristic to knowledge. It simply means that no answer is absolute and that any knowledge is potentially problematic because any answer can be questioned. Reason conforms to a structure: the logic of the problematological difference. The problematological difference expresses the question-answer link. Science is one modality of questioning where answering is restricted to empirical verification. In human affairs there is greater problematicity because we all have the power to question. Hence the social sciences are less ‘precise’ than the natural sciences and political discourse is even more variable. Such contingency is incomprehensible for systems of thought built up as a succession of propositions. In fact, problematicity is fatal for them, so they must fragment reason, shearing off residual problematicity in order to maintain the necessity of their own logical links. These systems must assert their necessity because they cannot establish it independently from questioning. Therefore, as the
postpositivist critics of science have pointed out, the assertive quality of these rationalities becomes a tool for limiting the scope of problems and excluding human concerns. Such systems of knowledge can become authoritarian and anti-democratic by fetishising apodictic solutions and the scientific method that reaches them. Problematology does not secure a foundation that serves as a mode of resolution for all future problems, so it does permit great flexibility in discourse. However, all the different modes of thought must conform to the laws of questioning because they are all different possibilities that follow from the initial, grounding logic of questioning. We might not be able to resolve all our questions but we can still answer to them because resolution, in problematology, is of a larger texture than in restrictive problem solving. Each new line of questioning can enrich or weaken an existing one in a dialectical questioning process (Meyer 1995: 220).

The logic of questioning makes it possible to pose questions by creating a discourse that enables us to debate them and, in some cases, to solve them. It allows discourse to be flexible in reference to the context, but also establishes rules (the apocritico-problematological link) to which discourse must conform. Problematology does not deny the existence of social norms that structure political discourse. Whatever norm we might uphold it is still the result of a question and therefore an answer; as such, norms are never totally unquestionable. They require continual reinforcement through the discursive articulation of values or through becoming enmeshed in social practices. The mistake would be
to believe that a norm can act as a substitute for a foundation in order to guarantee the necessity otherwise lost to philosophy. With the affirmation of questioning comes a fragility of norms but this accurately reflects their nature. Even though problematology brings questioning forward and infuses reason with a problematic quality, the principle of questioning establishes a rock-solid ground upon which to build rationality. Reason is therefore possible without requiring solutions to be guaranteed at the outset so problematology does not fall into a *petitio principii*, or question-begging fallacy (1995: 105). This accords with all we know about policymaking, where disagreement and adversarialism are perennial features and resolutions are still possible without collapsing into anarchy.

The principle of questioning is not against knowledge, it rather indicates the importance of the question-answer link and thematises this link in a more expansive and nuanced way. Questioning is the foundation of knowledge and in the problematological difference we find the necessary and sufficient condition which governs the *logos* in its entirety (1995: 211). Discourse is a logic of question and answer that expresses and resolves problematicity but from which problematicity can never be entirely eliminated in an ultimate answer. Even the results of science, for example, can be questioned anew through new empirical evidence or by being used to treat different questions in different contexts, such as politics. Indeed, without problematicity there would be no need for politics. No matter how much we might wish for a scientific,
apolitical resolution to our problems, we have empirical as well as ethical reasons to reject this conclusion which appears now, upon reflection, to be a normative position and not a philosophical understanding. Questioning makes it possible to answer normatively, and to argue the pro and con of such norms. However, it also guards against the dogmatic assertion of ideologies because it reveals what is necessarily problematic about them. Questioning is thus fundamental to democracy, just as it was for Socrates, whose questioning practice had political as well as philosophical intent. One task of inquiry for Socrates was to question those in power, as it should be for us today. Problematology is more comprehensive than the Socratic method because it deals equally with answering, with which Socrates was little concerned (Meyer 1995: 90; 2001a: 2). Therefore problematology establishes both the basis of a democratic ethic and indicates our responsibility to answer even in conditions of uncertainty; we must make decisions whatever the complexities of the situation, and this points us towards the specific territory of policy, which I discuss in the remaining chapters. But before that I want to strengthen the problematological conclusion by examining another significant contemporary theoretical response to the problematisation of knowledge, postmodernism.
2. Postmodernism and questioning

Postmodernism, or poststructuralism, is a highly influential theme of contemporary philosophy and social theory. Although it has not been used extensively in policy studies, many writers do draw on the concept (see, for example, Bogason 2001; Danziger 1995; Fox and Miller 1995; Gottweis 1998, 2003; Miller 2002; Schram 1993, 1995). What is postmodernism? Postmodernism is an eclectic body of work, so much so that it is difficult to define it clearly and to state which thinkers are postmodernists or poststructuralists. Lyotard described our current historical period as the ‘postmodern condition’ (1984), the consequence of the theoretical crisis of the twentieth century. Smart cites several descriptions of poststructuralism and postmodernism; a crisis of representation in philosophy, art, and politics; the ‘disarticulation of words and things’; and the fragmentation of social identity (1993: 20-1). Lyotard stated that we are now sceptical of ‘grand theory’ of any kind, especially that which makes normative recommendations about social progress or political ideologies that justify authoritarian action: the ideologies of both unrestricted capitalism and socialism have failed to solve social problems (1984). This scepticism pertains to the scholarly disciplines as well. For example, Tester describes postmodernity as a time of crossing boundaries and moving beyond the modern preconditions of sociological discourse, even beyond sociology itself (1993: 153). Postmodernists have attacked the totalising pretensions of science in particular, describing it as a problematic mode of knowledge
intimately connected with the legitimation of authority (Foucault 1991; Lyotard 1984). Policy science, as one expression of modernity, falls within this general critique of Enlightenment thought. Philosophically, the postmodern condition arose from the failure of modern grand narratives, in particular from the ‘death’ of the Cartesian subject (Meyer 1995: 5), so we say that the subject has been ‘decentred’ because it can now take on multiple identities. The identity of the subject is not pre-formed but emerges from discursive exchange with others (Gottweis 2003: 253). Identity itself has become a political phenomenon, with many contending discourses existing within each subject (Calhoun 1994: 20). Hence we recognise greater multiculturalism and other political differences previously obscured by the grand vision of a science of society in which the population was considered homogeneous, as well as the possibility of transforming individual and collective identities (Calhoun 1994). Policymaking as a political phenomenon contributes to, and is influenced by, identity politics.

Rather than reviewing all of the literature on postmodernism and policy theory, I think we can identify two broad interpretations and uses of poststructuralist concepts; 1) as a search for new theoretical constructs to continue the postpositivist critique and better express the complexity of modern governance, and 2) as a radical epistemological break from the past, a rejection of philosophy itself through the deconstruction of systematic thought. While there are radical versions of the second type in philosophy, the humanities and the social sciences,
the interesting uses of postmodern theory in policy studies have been by writers of the first type (for example Gottweis 1998, 2003; White 1999). These writers have borrowed concepts without taking the nihilistic view that knowledge is impossible. The benefit of the first type arises from the efficacy of poststructuralism as a critique of traditional forms of metaphysics (Gottweis 2003: 248) and the conception of rationality that follows from them, particularly of the idea of the Cartesian subject, while the negative consequences of the second type arise from the failure of poststructuralism to depart from propositional reasoning and explicitly theorise the positivity of questioning (see Meyer 1994: 40-5; 2001a). I think the problematological perspective can help policy theorists borrowing from poststructuralism to similarly develop new interpretative concepts without accepting an antifoundationalist doctrine, without permitting a nihilistic position with regard to values, and without accepting the idea that meaning has fragmented. Furthermore, the problematological view establishes the rules of discourse, an essential starting point for systematic inquiry into political life.

In policy studies the most productive theory inspired by poststructuralism is that which continues the postpositivist critique, questioning the rational, scientific model of policymaking. For example, Gottweis’ discussion (2003) resonates with the theme of questioning. He stresses the problematicity of contemporary political structures, noting that we now see institutions and political identities as discursively created entities, not as fixed objects which are independent of us (2003:
254). From Foucault, we learned that we should not presume government by the state is a pre-given phenomenon because this centralisation of power is a historical fact of modernity (Gottweis 2003: 255-6). Therefore we must subsume theories of the state under the larger concept of governance, a contingent part rather than a conceptual whole. Gottweis notes that Foucault’s ‘analytics of government’ extends the field of inquiry of policy studies by examining the conditions under which heterogeneous governmental technologies and practices come to dominate entire policy discourses (2003: 255; see also Dean 1991; Dean and Hindess 1998). All this shifts attention away from the state as the sole agent of governance towards a more complex analysis of politics and society. In postmodernity policymaking regimes are more fragile. With increasing political activity outside governmental institutions, contemporary ‘ideas and groups call into question established “conducts of conduct” and how conduct is being shaped and directed’ (2003: 258). Gottweis emphasises the political aspects of organisation and the struggles over these discursive creations, including the power contests between the various actors engaged in the struggle for legitimacy (2003: 254). He uses postmodern theory to thematise the place of political struggle in constructing the meaning of a policy field, noting that hegemonic definitions of reality are more often contested today (2003: 262). Part of the critique of science involves showing that rationality, even scientific rationality, is not neutral but involves power in the very creation of knowledge and the legitimation of authority (2003: 256).
All this points to the fact that government itself has been called into question both practically and theoretically, which suggests we might reconsider it in terms of questioning. Meyer writes that Derrida’s thought, for example, has contributed to problematising the traditional foundations of Western philosophy, although he does not consider questioning as such (2001a). In policy theory, Gottweis reflects this problematising movement, concluding that the ordering practices of science should not be taken for granted; ‘Instead of assuming governability and practices of policymaking, they must be posed as a problem’ (2003: 260). Even the location of governance in government ‘is being called into question and reinscribed and recoded in a process where the mechanisms of government themselves become the subject of problematization and scrutiny’ (2003: 263). Poststructuralism criticises the scientific ideal and introduces politics as a problematising force within knowledge itself; science is no longer ‘the unquestionable authority whose narratives can settle policy conflicts’ (2003: 263). Attempting to exclude politics from science is not only futile but also ideological. The politicisation of knowledge carries important implications for democracy, showing it to be a shifting phenomenon that is actively created. It also calls into question the idea that democracy is necessarily a positive form of politics, since it can just as easily ‘be a medium by which the dogmatization of identity and the elimination of dissensus are politically legitimized’ (1993: 263). Gottweis’ call for
‘reflexive government’ is surely a call for increased questioning and for appreciating the status of partial answers:

To accept the elusiveness of the search to define the ‘true’ nature of a policy problem and to come up with a generally acceptable solution for it might be a crucial step in the direction of what ultimately could turn out to be a more efficient style of policymaking (2003: 263).

In other words, we should rethink our model of resolution itself, moving away from searching for absolute solutions. Democracy is but one ‘way of responding to politics and its many uncertainties and anxieties. It is a strategy to articulate and negotiate political issues and to keep them contestable, not to deny their controversial character’ (Gottweis 2003: 264). In other words, this critique identifies problematicity as a normal quality of democracy, compared to science where the goal is to eliminate it. We now have a name for a resolution that also expresses problematicity: a problematological answer. Therefore we can distinguish political answering from scientific answering, because political answering embodies a greater degree of problematicity, political answers being what work for us and not what apodictically eliminates all other alternatives through value-free, empirical criteria. This style of theorising has much in common with postpositivist theory generally. Although they do not conceive of it in these terms, postmodern theory and new forms of political activity are defined by questioning.

The second broad understanding of postmodernism is more radical and closer to the intent of poststructuralist philosophers, such
as Derrida. This is the view that philosophy itself is at an end, since the
very structures of reason have come apart. Rorty, for example, who is
something of a postmodern pragmatist, argues that postmodern theory
is right to reject philosophy (as metaphysics), and that we can find in
Dewey and the pragmatists a practical response to replace metaphysics
if we reject his focus on experience (1982: 72-4). Rorty does not reject
intelligibility, however his anti-foundationalist position is exemplary of
poststructuralist theory’s anti-philosophical, revolutionary ambitions
(1979). This perspective rejects philosophy as metaphysics but not in
the name of science. Derrida goes further and argues that language
naturally produces a free play of discourse, an endless signification and
an infinite plurality of meaning (Derrida 1978). The philosophical texts
of Derrida and others reflect this view of language, being highly
metaphorical and abstract. Meyer vehemently rejects philosophy as it is
put forward by Derrida and other contemporary philosophers of this
genre (see, for example, Meyer 1995: 130-8; 2001a). He criticises
contemporary philosophy for its sophistry (1989: 135) and for
‘renouncing itself, so to speak, in favor of superficial topics, exhibiting a
lack of rigor which has made possible the most esoteric word games’
(1995: 2). I will not elaborate upon Meyer’s criticisms of postmodernism
and poststructuralism here (although I do find them convincing). For the
moment, I would point out that by grounding thought in a new principle
Meyer has undermined such philosophy and its contention that reason
is without structure. However, what is important here is for us to see
the relevance of philosophical concepts to the study of policy and politics.

Beyond its positive expression of contingency that I identified above, how applicable to policy theory is poststructuralism? Critics of this view of reason point out that the idea that discourse has no meaning at all is relativistic and at least as unrealistic as positivism (Fischer 2003a: 167). Such a view can hardly deal with the lack of relevance of policy theory to practice. Policy theorists have rarely asserted a radical deconstruction of meaning, perhaps because policymaking does routinely come up with solutions to problems, albeit imperfect ones. Even where the very definitions of policy problems and solutions change all the time we can still proceed without radical misunderstanding. Indeed, contemporary government is remarkably organised considering the size and complexity of modern states. Even though received understandings of policy may have been called into question, in practice we do deal with problematicity. Politics involves not only questioning but also the responsibility to act (Dryzek and Torgerson 1993: 135). Policy still ‘works’, in many cases, and we find solutions that we can live with. To theorise about politics – as both metaphorical and generative of meaning as well as practical – we require a philosophical framework that expresses contingency without denying the possibility of answering.
The key to moving beyond both positivism and the deconstruction of meaning is the foundation of questioning and the concept of the problematological answer. Politics is surely the sphere of debate over the meaning of public problems and how to solve them. If we disagree on a question, we argue about it, add to it with other questions, weaken it, and debate the pro and con of the possible answers. A plurality of meanings means a plurality of answers, which indicates contingency, but it is not an aporia (an impassable obstruction to knowledge) (see Derrida 1993). It simply entails that meaning is in question. This establishes rhetoric as a legitimate dimension of discourse because problematological answers have an equal status, as answers, to apocritical answers. Some questions cannot be solved beyond dispute but they can be expressed and then debated. In fact, as I pointed out in Chapter Four, there is no argumentation in poststructuralism, because if signification were a free play of meaning it would be impossible to indicate one answer to a question over another (Meyer 1995: 238). Similarly, while Foucault depicts a figurative picture of discourse (see Foucault 1970) he has no argumentation, which perhaps accounts for the feeling that agency is absent in his work. But while we are ‘prisoners’ of language, defined by it in important ways, we can reflect upon our boundaries as well, through questioning, even if this is difficult. Knowledge has its own inertia because we operate on the basis of presumed answers and so reality appears continuous (Meyer 2000; see also Chapter Seven). Nonetheless, it is also open to question and
therefore we are not always powerless. Even those working within an established discourse have to continually reinforce its legitimating power, and therefore can escape responsibility only by rhetorical means. Hence powerful elites have a strategic interest in arguing for particular ways of framing problems. Agency and structure are in reason, and we can understand both in terms of questioning. Rationality is still possible, so our task should be to reverse the fragmentary reductionism of science and the internal fragmentation of radical poststructuralism but without reimposing the problem solving model upon reality as the sole, unjustified criterion of resolution. By drawing on Meyer’s concept of problematological answers, we can establish what is rational and what is irrational about politics without judging it in scientific terms. This is essential if we are to understand policymaking, which is multidisciplinary.

In political theory, where poststructuralism is enjoying contemporary popularity, for example with Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Zizek (1999), poststructuralists argue that politics emerges from the failure of ontology to establish the conceptual closure of reason. Laclau and Mouffe, for example, identify the breakdown of foundationalism with an appreciation of the contingency underlying social relations as the source of politics, in contrast to scientific utopianism which searches for an essence (1985: 142-3). However, if ontology is a failed approach to philosophy then why develop an alternative philosophy based on this failure? Meyer makes this criticism of Derrida by pointing out that the
concept of ‘trace’ of the subject actually reinstates Cartesianism in a new guise, albeit one of radical negativity: ‘Is it not quite simply an insurmountable contradiction to want to declare the death of Cartesianism, while in the same breath overcoming that death by stating that the subject is a trace of itself?’ (1995: 136). He points out a similar contradiction in Lacan’s assertion that the ‘lack’ of reality is reality, asking if this does not, in fact, reveal a foundational problematicity that defines humanity (1995: 136-7). Robinson’s (2004) review of several works drawing on Lacanian theory, including books by Mouffe and Zizek, sums up the problems of this approach to politics very well. He points out that Lacanian theorists work from ontology rather than politics (2004: 261). Instead of articulating contingency, ‘lack’ is instead reified into an essence; a nihilistic, fundamental negativity (2004: 259). This actually tends to exclude politics from theory by essentialising negativity in exactly the same way as the totalising theories they reject (2004: 268).

We will not be able to theorise ‘the political’ adequately without expressing the problematicity that defines it. Despite affirming contingency as essential to reason, poststructuralist theories have little to say about rhetoric. Instead, they speak of politics in terms of the impossibility of reason (Zizek 1999) or as defined by antagonism (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Why should we speak of politics in such radical terms? When we are faced with contingency we resort to persuasion in order to reach a solution. However, poststructuralists barely speak of
rhetoric in its traditional sense as 'persuasion' because the theory derives from the idea that literal discourse is only possible by repressing other meanings. Yet we know that policy, for example, does effectively make pronouncements that function at a literal level, no matter what symbolic meaning might be attributed to it; a bus timetable, for example. Politics deals with contingency, yet it does reach answers despite this. Hence poststructuralism seems only to apply to cases of radical social disjuncture or, on the other hand, to define everything that makes sense as authoritarian. Apart from the fundamental dissatisfaction we feel about a theory that thematises politics in only a negative light, such a theory does not help us conclude anything about policy, which deals with answers as much as questions.

If poststructuralism has a critical value it is because it questions established theory and therefore has at least questioning as a fundamental property (even if it does not affirm this, because it affirms nothing), which indicates that it is possible to answer. Policymaking involves posing questions and settling upon answers. Hence, we cannot understand it without a philosophical framework that accounts for both questioning and answering. Dewey’s practical orientation is something to hold on to because policymaking does seek practical solutions. Political reasoning is not necessarily irrational, even if it can be when people employ irrational discourse to their own political advantage.
Radical postmodernism or poststructuralism is not sufficient for understanding policymaking not just because it is abstract, non-practical philosophy, but because it actually rejects philosophy. In this sense, it has much in common with positivism even though they are quite different. This is Meyer’s view of these two streams of twentieth century thought, and in their rejection of questioning he identifies a common thread (1994: 44). Science restricts rationality by rejecting philosophy in favour of solving problems empirically; nihilism (poststructuralism) rejects philosophy by saying that we have only questions, while failing to thematise this as positive, therefore rejecting rationality along with it. At the same time, it paradoxically replicates the shortcomings of ontology in rejecting it. Problematology is opposed to both of these. Meyer thematises the nature of philosophy as questioning and therefore contemporary problematicity is the condition for the restoration of philosophy, not its renewed rejection.

I would point out that references to questioning are everywhere in discussions of postmodernity and postmodernism. For example, Smart describes postmodernity as the period in which the values of Western civilisation are ‘justifiably in question’, as that which ‘called into question or subjected to doubt’ modern ideas of progress (1993: 26, 28). He cites Giddens’ description of a generalised problematicity across society, and not just of philosophy, when he noted that ‘we increasingly find ourselves “left with questions where once there appeared to be answers”’ (1993: 35). It is in the very nature of modernity to generate the
radically reflexive questioning that now encompasses modernity itself, says Zygmunt Bauman, who describes the postmodern social condition as ‘an incessant flow of reflexivity’ that produces ‘institutionalized pluralism, variety, contingency and ambivalence’ (1992: 149). Not dissimilarly, Lyotard stated that postmodernity is in fact a consequence of the modernist drive to question its own presuppositions (1984: 79). And Beck argues that the pervasive ‘doubt’ that has arisen around the project of modernity could provide the basis for a new ethics, modern identity and social contract (1997: 162). One could find many references to questioning elsewhere. So, although Western thought has always put things into question, what is new is the generalised reflexive questioning of postmodernity and the lack of new answers.

In postmodernity, questioning is not just a social condition but even extends to questioning the foundations of thought itself. Despite the differences between theorists described as postmodernists, they share in common the view that metaphysics is at an end. Along with Lyotard, Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Fish, and Rorty have all attacked foundational philosophy. The general view is that the foundation of knowledge has been called into question and no new metaphysics will ever be constructed. One would think philosophers had given up. In the postmodern critique we see the fragmentation of thought from within, of logical difference itself, which becomes marked by a ‘trace’ or a ‘lack’. This confusion is reflected in the uncertainty about the nature of postmodernism itself, which Smart says seems to be
more a series of questions than a definitive concept (1993: 12). Thus Lyotard’s ‘answer’ to the question of the postmodern is ‘that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself’ (1984: 81). Postmodernism, then, is the non-closure of reason, the irrational without which the rational could not exist.

How might we understand postmodernity in a more rational way? If the postmodern condition is a situation of generalised questioning, shouldn’t this draw our attention to questioning itself? Indeed, what is Lyotard’s ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’ (1984: xxiv) if not an affirmation of questioning as a primary stance? Despite this, postmodern thinkers have not considered questioning for itself. In fact, questioning has received very little attention at all in philosophy, which has always questioned in practice even though it has never been its central theme (Meyer 1995: 6). Philosophers in the twentieth century did pay more attention to questioning, for example, to understand meaning (Collingwood 1939, 1962; Gadamer 1979), logic (Hintikka 1999) and politics (Castoriadis 1991). But while these thinkers valued questioning, they did so in only a limited way. This is because philosophy focused on answering, via ontology, and displaced questioning to a cognitive, rhetorical role.

Despite the title of Lyotard’s paper, ‘Answering the question: what is the postmodern?’, he could not answer satisfactorily because he did not recognise the value of questioning in his own critique. Because he
could not adequately thematise questioning or answering, postmodern theory became that which paradoxically expresses progress as the impossibility and undesirability of progress. Postmodernity is different from modernity, but it also cannot be different, because difference itself has fragmented. Postmodernism neither is nor isn’t because identity is non-identical with itself; knowledge fragments from within and the cohesion of reason collapses. Under these terms conceptual confusion and a lack of meaning indicate success. But why should we accept this contradiction and mirror the fragmentation of thought (Meyer 1995: 3), now conceived of as positive, all the while denying its positivity because such an affirmation is impossible? Meyer makes the contradiction clear; ‘...how can we put as our guiding principle the negation of all guiding principles?’ (Meyer 1995: 3)

Is problematicity really unpresentable? The confusion over the nature of postmodernity is a natural result of the failure to thematise questioning as constitutive of reason. If we consider postmodernity in terms of questioning, postmodernity is the generalised questioning of modernity and problematology is the only sufficient response to historical problematisation. Postmodernity emerges from modernity as a problematological response to modernity’s questioning of itself, modifying the past without completely dissolving it in the answer.

With a rational account of postmodernity as questioning, poststructuralism and postmodernism are firmly behind us, this time
philosophically so, a stop on the path to questioning that has been superseded by it (Meyer 2001a). Problematology explicates questioning and establishes a foundation for knowledge that also permits us to describe contemporary problematicity. Problematology is a new metaphysics to replace ontology. Meyer has created a new logic and terminology that expresses the problematicity of postmodernity, a necessary quality for a successful systematic study of contemporary society (see Bauman 1992: 161). If identity has fragmented, then it has become a question that cannot be conclusively resolved because it expresses several alternative possible answers at the same time, hence it is rhetorical. The decentering of the subject makes of us ‘an irreducible problem, one for which the only answer, far from suppressing the question, reproduces it endlessly’ (Meyer 1995: 303; see also Castoriadis on identity as a ‘puzzle’ 1991: 170-1). In postmodernity, our answer to the question of identity is always problematological, and therefore always in question as much as it provides an answer. With increased questioning comes politics and so political processes operate from, and contribute to, the production of individual and collective identities. Policymaking is also a part of this questioning and produces social identity and difference as much as solving practical problems.

Only Meyer has responded to historical problematisation by confirming the positivity of questioning. Ontology may have been problematised but reports of the death of philosophy have been greatly exaggerated. Problematology is the foundation which postmodernists
had rejected as *a priori* impossible. Postmodernity is not the end of metaphysics but the historical condition of its rebirth as questioning. The question of the foundation is at the origin of every possible answer and therefore questioning is a necessary condition of reason (Meyer 1995: 21). We are also free to make this explicit or not, to pose the question explicitly to ourselves; this is the freedom within questioning (1995: 21). Philosophy, as questioning, is a creative and autonomous act, a choice which arises from the alternatives established by the necessity to question (Meyer 1995: 22). This creativity is important for the related question of intellectual responsibility, to the autonomy put in play by questioning, a position Castoriadis also affirms (1991: 164). Problematology shows that we do have the freedom to answer by refusing to acknowledge questioning, even though we imply questioning in so doing. Hence Bauman can describe how today we face these two possibilities; facing up to the contingency of the human condition, or taking shelter in partial rationalities (2000: 213). He also argues, following Castoriadis, that sociology should follow the former path and can affirm freedom only by questioning (2000: 215). If Meyer is correct in describing the attack on philosophy and the abandonment of critical and rational thought as a feature of societies in decline (1995: 27) then the postmodern philosophical rejection of philosophy is not only self-refuting but also a flight from responsibility, a conclusion upon which the many critics of radical postmodernism insist.
3. The problematological foundation and policy theory

Problematology, because it is grounded in a principle, provides a unity to reason. Meyer’s philosophy reflects contemporary problematicity without duplicating its fragmentary effects. This is quite different from science, which fragmented reason through its reductionism, and poststructuralism, which reflected the fragmentation of reason and savoured the collapse of meaning. Even though it grants a positive value to problematicity, problematology seeks a unity of thought, which is after all the purpose of philosophy; ‘Philosophical fragmentation is a contradiction in terms’ (Meyer 1995: 3). We can trace the fragmentary qualities of science and poststructuralism to their rejection of metaphysics, their rejection of the very possibility of a foundation. These theorists may have been right to reject ontology as paradoxical but it was similarly paradoxical to reject the idea of a foundation in the process. We do not have to reject philosophy to understand policy. In fact, we need it. Policy deals with questions because the foundation of reason is questioning. Since the difficulties of contemporary social theory and policy theory originate in the lack of foundations, our response should be to reground reason in a new principle. Foundations establish the rules of reason that enable us to relate one mode of discourse to another. Meyer’s foundation is different because it expresses questioning rather than resolving it a priori by imposing a base proposition that suppresses the question from which it was derived. As a consequence, the problematological logos thematises
questioning throughout its whole texture: ‘To speak, act, or think one must on each occasion have a question in mind’ (1995: 219). Policy problems do not inhere in situations themselves, but originate in the inquiry that declares them problems (Lindblom 1990: 36).

While problematology is metaphysics, it is not a return to a traditional conception of the foundational (Meyer 1995: 304). That approach sought an ontological foundation to knowledge, ‘a necessary entity...which becomes a point of departure from which all else can proceed’ (1995: 304). The foundation of questioning indicates that knowledge is possible, that there is a structure to it, and yet that we should reject the old idea of knowledge as a series of necessary statements. Instead, questioning produces a ‘pluralistic opening of answers’ (1995: 304) in which answering is necessary but no particular answer can dissolve all questions. Indeed, to express a question is already a synthesis and therefore a positive result in itself. This philosophy resonates with our experience of politics, which does not find solutions that follow necessarily and indubitably from problems. The mistake was to pose ‘policy science’ as a generalised response to the problematicity thrown up by politics. Policy involves making decisions about political problems, by political means, hence alternative solutions are always possible and questioning continually recurs, or at least it should in a vital democracy. Policymaking is thus a questioning activity, where we must reach solutions in conditions of ongoing problematicity and disagreement. Conceiving of answering in this way enables us to
articulate policymaking not as the scientific resolution of a political
problematic, as the ultimate (methodological) answer that would resolve
the question of politics itself, but rather as a problematological answer;
a questioning process that responds to public problems, gives them
voice and makes them ‘real’, which makes possible their political
resolution. In fact, only by utilising the problematological approach can
we establish the status of policy studies itself as an inquiry into an
important modality of questioning and overturn its denigrated status as
applied knowledge. Policy studies indicates how vital social questions,
the problems of the public as Dewey would put it, emerge from the
policy process itself. Therefore policy studies can make an important
contribution to political theory as well.

The question view of policy also makes apparent the limitations of
the study of policy by subject areas or fields. This is the approach of
much important empirical work but without incorporating these
disparate, partial analyses into a larger, grounded framework policy
studies will be inferior to political science. It will also become subject to
the frameworks imposed upon us by arbitrary institutional structures,
where authorities define problems for us that express their particular
views about the world.75 Similarly, we will fail as a scholarly discipline if
we take our cue from the media-defined problems of the day (as Lasswell
argued strongly). It is important that we examine individual policy fields
in detail and do work that is relevant to public debate. However, we
should not let our preference for studying particular policy areas prevent
us from inferring what activity in these fields means for the whole, for the general characteristics that encompass all policy processes. Not only would it be absurd to argue that health policy and economic policy are entirely unrelated, it would be a failure not to try to understand their common features as policies. While the specific consequences of policy do pertain to limited areas, the unifying principle and logic of problematology shows us how policy studies might reverse the past fragmentation that has prevented us developing better theory.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, considering the ubiquitous questioning of postmodernity, our problem today is perhaps that there is not enough questioning. This applies to all sides of policy debates, including both the public and the state. In many cases, political elites continue to suppress questioning, direct it in ways that serve entrenched interests, or dissuade others from introducing new problems. And while policy regimes have failed to respond to some public demands, the public itself continues to look the other way in the face of important questions. In the two instances of manipulative rhetoric I cited in Chapter Four, the ‘weapons of mass destruction’ and ‘children overboard’ cases, the public was well aware of what was likely deliberate deceit by the holders of authority (Allard 2004; Marr and Wilkinson 2003), yet we did not see mass mobilisation to question the legitimacy of the decision makers. If policy makers seek to persuade us, we are also willing to be persuaded. Power is clearly a two-sided equation, and rhetoric plays a critical part in its dynamic. It is essential
that we incorporate rhetoric into our analyses in order to identify why discourse is persuasive and to distinguish discourse that is genuinely oriented towards treating questions from that which is only a justification for decisions that have already been taken.

Problematology finds its power in the foundation of questioning. Understanding policymaking, which is a mode of resolving political questions, requires an interpretative framework that thematises the link between question and answer without dissolving one into the other. Problem solving is not impossible in problematology but it is limited to particular instances and applications and these solutions are themselves often problematic. In a democracy, each person is a questioner. The foundation of questioning consecrates as a universal property the right of each person to question, the freedom to put this into practice, as well as the responsibility to justify ourselves in the face of questioning (Meyer 1989: 135). But in order to survive we must live with each other, which throws up its own difficulties. Social problems arise from the problems of collective life and so individual problems also pertain to the whole.

Policy science seemed a promising way to resolve political questions. Political questions have multiple solutions that cannot be resolved apodictically. These solutions appear weak compared to science, which defines knowledge as the abolition of problems in their solutions. So, Lasswell proposed the policy sciences as a scientific
discourse to eliminate public problems, to solve the question of politics. ‘Policy’ is then associated solely with answering, just as science sees only answering over questioning. Policy science, conceived as problem solving, must then create theories which either suppress problematicity or eliminate it \textit{a priori} by dividing it from knowledge so as to permit the development of scientific theories. As a result, policy theory fragmented its own field of inquiry in various ways. Globally, it divided politics from policy, while at another level it divided the policy process into stages analogous to scientific experimentation. As we know, policy does not work like this – we might think it authoritarian if it did. Lasswell’s ‘policy sciences of democracy’ is possibly beneficial when science is used \textit{for} policy, but science of policy is an epistemological contradiction in terms. We also witnessed a fragmentation into policy fields, as though the nature of policy generally could be discovered by dividing it into many different, unrelated problems of the environment, or health, or the economy. Each would represent a separate field with its own specific discourse and logical relationships. This meant scholars could be relevant to public debate and converse with the state but it only exacerbated theoretical fragmentation. Finally, this conceded too much authority to the institutionalisation of fields of inquiry by the state, allowing it to define inquiry for us.

This latter point is another reason why the scientific model tends to support institutionalised power. By permitting our problematisations to be made for us, we can avoid our responsibility by looking the other
way, accepting *authority* as the best argument for maintaining the status quo (Meyer 2000: 225). This is why science tends to force politics into a static box rather than allowing it to be a dynamic process – because the answers to questions are accepted in advance. Reason, conceived of as a series of interrelated propositions, does not deal well with the advent of new knowledge, with paradigmatic shifts in meaning, or with political mobilisation, for example, when new social movements change politics and society in fundamental ways by raising new questions. Active democracy is inventive questioning; change only comes through questioning and positive, passionate engagement with public problems. But active questioning is also a choice, i.e., engagement versus ignorance. Problematology does not deny the existence of norms but nor does it require the *a priori* adoption of a norm to provide Cartesian thought with the necessity it lacks. Problematology reveals the ambivalence of politics, something we know only too well in practice but have not been able to establish logically since classical philosophy condemned the problematic. Because questioning is primary in every instance of thought it opens up to a multiplicity of answers (Meyer 1995: 304), so when we communicate our problems to others, and take on their problems, we create the ‘community of inquirers’ that was fundamental for the pragmatists, Peirce and Dewey (Bernstein 1966: 134).

Policy science was a historical answer to the question of politics that failed on its own criteria – to apodictically resolve policy problems.
It was only a partial description, at best, as well as a normative idealisation. As a result, policy science and the problem orientation were called into question. This reveals the importance of questioning, grounding it in the philosophy of questioning. Questioning policy thus becomes the purpose of policy theory. Questioning characterises both practical policy inquiry and our scholarly inquiry into policy inquiry. The problematological foundation thus establishes both the epistemological consistency of, and the difference between, theory and practice.

While questioning is necessary for thought, there is no guarantee that those in power will respond to questions. Authorities can suppress questioning by disguising the multiplicity of possible answers, or by creating processes that give the appearance of questioning when, in fact, the question has already been answered, i.e., ‘evil’ or manipulative rhetoric (Meyer 1994: 155). States can too easily secure their legitimacy if questioning is absent. Therefore we must be alive to the possibility of deception, a critical purpose for academic inquirers into policy. Scholarly criticism is surely a mode of questioning that examines political questioning, and questions those in power who pretend to be beyond question themselves. If we can no longer ‘speak truth to power’ (Hoppe 1999; for the original definition of policy analysis as ‘speaking truth to power’, see Wildavsky 1980), then we can certainly ‘question power’ – and this should be our new maxim.
By commencing from questioning we have moved directly from philosophical foundations to considering what philosophy means for understanding policy. This is the converse approach to that followed by Dewey, who rejected metaphysics, opposing it to public problem solving. Problematology is fundamentally different from pragmatism. Problematology sees inquiry as a constitutive component of reason, whereas for pragmatism inquiry is just a tool to find knowledge that lies elsewhere (in experience). Using problematology, the philosophical approach defines policy inquiry in terms of questioning rather than problem solving. This is the essence of my thesis. What remains is to elaborate Meyer’s conception of the problematological link and what this means for policy theory.

What is a policy problem? Let us return to the idea of problem itself, as Dewey did, but this time I shall adopt a problematological approach. With the foundation of reason established as questioning, we can now move on to Michel Meyer’s problematological version of the question and answer relationship. Firstly, I return to policy problems and argue that we should take the question, not the hypothesis, as the starting point for theorising about policymaking. I explain how problematological answering differs from problem solving via experience. Next, I present Meyer’s conception of the dual problematological and
apocritical characteristics of answering. I describe policymaking as a mode of political questioning distinct from scientific questioning. I also discuss policy frames in problematological terms. Thirdly, I explain how the logic of questioning makes answers autonomous and thus permits problem solving as well as problem posing. Finally, I revisit the ‘problem orientation’ as a problematologically-grounded concept. Throughout, I discuss the implications of understanding policy in problematological terms.

1. Commencing from questioning

Dewey believed that problems are properties of experience, which is primary. There is an initial stage of discovery but rational thinking truly commences once the solution is already known. Experience acts as a reductor of questioning so that thought can proceed methodologically from a hypothetical solution to its practical justification. With the focus on problem setting and the contingent qualities of political discourse we can no longer understand policy problems purely in terms of experience or conceive of the policy process as progressing instrumentally towards a known solution. It is easy to see why policy has been thought of in terms of solutions and why the commonsense understanding of policy as action upon the world to change it for the better has prevailed; the ideal of problem solving action does describe what we would like politics to be. However, my discussion in Part I highlighted how problematicity
persists in theory and practice. Policymaking deals with problem setting as much as problem solving; contingency invades discourse about even the simplest policy problems; and argumentation does not cease even after policies have been implemented. To rule out the problematicity of policymaking in favour of problem solving would be to rule out the majority of the action. Such an approach no longer has power as an organising concept nor any relevance to the real world. It is time, as Kuhn would say, to shift paradigms.

Meyer argues that we should abandon the propositional view of philosophy and instead commence from questions. In policy studies, therefore, we should seek to build our theories upon problematological concepts rather than hypotheses.76 Rather than progressing from problem to solution via experiment, a series of questions characterise policy and politics, and answers are often only partial. Recourse to experience as the arbiter of what constitutes problems and their solutions does not describe the reality of the policy process, a process in which values, emotions and symbolic language play an equally important role as instrumental action in generating meaning. As I pointed out in Chapter One, Dewey’s theory of inquiry is itself the result of an inquiry. Questioning, therefore, is prior to experience, not the other way around. We should not accept a reductor of questioning to define our understanding of reason, be it ontological, positivist, or pragmatist. All these philosophies commence from solutions rather than questions. When all is called into question we must expand our
theoretical field of vision to consider questions as our fundamental unit for constructing theories.

What, then, is a problem? Dewey described the source of problems as situations that are ‘in some fashion uncertain, perplexed, troublesome, if only in offering to the mind an unresolved difficulty, an unsettled question’ (1971: 100). Some problems appear obvious, but others do not come to us readily defined, such that ‘It is not clear problems, but diffuse worries, that appear...the situation is such that the problem itself is problematic’ (Rein and White 1977: 262). So, we have a question about a question. At this stage we do not have a solution in mind, but simply a desire to discuss what worries us. We may not yet wish to do anything about it in practice, so we cannot define it in terms of action. Indeed, we may not even be sure that it definitely is a problem. Something within us moves us to speak or act in response to our concerns (Meyer 1995: 209). We cannot say the situation defines the problem because the same situation or concern may appear differently for different people. In policymaking, the concerns of different members of the public, organisations, or public officials may be very different even regarding what appears to be the same situation. Some individuals may not be moved at all to declare something a problem. Indeed, some situations may be meaningless for us unless others ask us to consider them as a problem. A problem is implied by our responses to it, by our desire to give it voice as much as to resolve it. With the ultimate solution not in sight and the problem itself in question, can we find meaning in
the situation, as Dewey described, by referring to the possibility of finding a ‘solution’? We cannot, and therefore we must find a different way to articulate what occurs in setting problems.

For Meyer, ‘question’ and ‘problem’ are equivalent terms (1995: 208). It is important to note his point that we need not consider a question as simply a linguistic formulation (1995: 208; see also 1986: 117). He refers us to ‘expressions like a question of life or death, or a question of money, or even to weigh a question [original emphasis]’, in order to appreciate the conceptual import of questioning beyond semantics, although it clearly refers to this as well (1995: 210). For example, an answer can be an action. If my problem is to stop a draught in the room, I might put a request to a student in imperative form, ‘Close the door!’, and her cooperation answers my question (see Meyer 1986: 116). Even at the level of semantics questions need not necessarily be linguistically marked. For example, we could ask a rhetorical question which is really a disguised assertion, such as ‘Is he not dishonest?’ (1986: 116). Or we could make a statement with a rising inflexion at the end to indicate that it is a question. Or someone might express an answer that in fact raises a question despite itself, such as ‘I have full confidence in the Prime Minister and do not intend to challenge for the leadership.’ What is important in each case is the logical relationship between question and answer that creates the meaning.
Now let us look at Dewey’s contention that questions can be limited to what is found in experience. Leaving aside the problems of Dewey’s idea that even the meaning of art refers solely to experience (1934) and his negative attitude toward literature (1971: 106), firstly we appreciate today that politics is much more than practical problem solving. We debate values without reducing them to what they mean for instrumental ends. We can also, without ever acting upon experience, respond to a question by maintaining it or even by rejecting it as a question. Meaning also has a figurative dimension that changes with the situational context and the questioner who seeks meaning. Experience is important, but meaning cannot be tied down to experience alone. Policy discourse creates narratives about the world and our place in it as much as it leads to practical solutions, so it pertains to questions of identity as well as deliberative questions. Furthermore, even when we do act upon experience, the process of inquiry and the means by which we bring the solution about are just as important to us as the end result. In politics, questions of means are equal to questions of ends.

Secondly, is it true, as Dewey argued, that problems exist only when there is a hindrance to action? Even when we encounter an apparently settled situation in which we know what to do, when matters are routine, it does not mean there is no problem. Rather, it is just that previous answers to the same or similar problems suffice to solve our present question and we can act without conscious, directed inquiry. For example, if I need to get to university in the morning I am faced with
a problem. But because I have caught the bus successfully many times before I know that the same actions I took previously will, most probably, resolve my problem today. In fact, my responses become so routine that I go to the bus stop 'without thinking' about it. When I first went to university, I had to inquire as to the bus route and the timetable. That does not mean that the problem, once solved, is gone forever. In fact, I face the same problem every day and resolve it in the same way. The world is always new so it always presents a problem, even when the situation is so familiar that we act without thinking of it as a problem and simply respond to circumstances without explicitly posing the question to ourselves at the time (see Meyer 2000: 216-18). The routine actions and processes we use to help us deal with new problems are still answers even though they have become detached from their original questions (see Section Three, this chapter). For example, organisations are often less focused on goals than the practices validated by their institutional forms which govern how questions about organisational activity are put (Colebatch 1995: 155). One question examined in policy studies has been what factors support policy actors to shift from acting routinely to reflecting upon the underlying ways in which they frame problems (Schön and Rein 1994). Although Dewey stated that true rational action involved conscious, reflective thought, he acknowledged that some social action took place without conscious inquiry and problem solving (see Dewey 1971: 107-9). Routine problems do not need to be consciously posed as problems because they are easily
solved. They pose problems nonetheless because in encountering them they present a difficulty for us to which we must respond (Meyer 1995: 280). For Meyer, every instance of thought pertains to a problem, or question, from the mundane to philosophical and scientific inquiry.

How do we know there is a question in such cases? The presence of the answer, the response, indicates the presence of a question. Answering makes questioning what it is (Meyer 1986: 129; 1995: 214). Questions can easily be hidden in the answer because it is not necessary that we pose our problems in question form. Often we do not declare the question first, but proceed straight to the answer because that is our goal (Meyer 1986: 126). The answer implies the presence of a question to which the answer responds. The question itself is unstated, but there is a question nonetheless. Even though statements appear to be autonomous and independent they are in fact solutions which respond to a question. A hypothesis, for example, is a judgement that is not entirely free of problematicity, it is a ‘hypo-thesis’ that presupposes a reality susceptible to many interpretations (Meyer 1995: 85). Empirical verification is then a secondary questioning process that justifies the hypothesis. But the hypothesis is already a result of questioning. It seems independent only because it has resolved a prior question (‘discovery’ is the term for this stage of scientific inquiry). The same applies for social action. Wagenaar and Cook note that an action brings both problem and solution into being at the same time (2003: 148). An action is a response, and therefore can be understood as an answer to
an implicit question. Thanks to Austin we can compare action to speech. He showed that even linguistic statements are not neutral descriptions of the world because to speak is also to act (Austin 1975). Meyer’s insight is to show that language in general is an answer (whether posing a question or proceeding straight to the solution), a speech act made in response to an implicit question (1995: 205). The explicit linguistic response indicates the presence of an implicit problem at the same time, hence nothing can be affirmed without raising a question and thus the possibility of a debate (Meyer 1986: 131). Statements or propositions appear to be independent assertions but, in fact, every affirmation pertains to a question and expresses both the question and the resolution. It is just that the questions which move a speaker or actor often remain hidden and only the answer appears (1995: 208-9). In other cases we respond by formally posing a question, such that a question can also be an answer. For example, setting a policy problem responds to social concerns without necessarily proposing a definitive solution to them.

For Dewey experience was the primary reality, so he could reject questions which did not pertain to experience as non-knowledge. However, his own inquiry was the result of a non-empirical inquiry, indicating that questioning is primary and the questioning of experience secondary. If questioning is prior to experience, then experience is in fact a result of questioning. That is, questioning ‘constructs’ experience itself by posing it as an answer. For Meyer, questioning is central to all
inquiry, including science. But it is not just a cognitive device, a starting point from which to discover an independent reality. This is the traditional conception of ontology, in which knowledge is obtained by reference to what is, independent of our inquiry into it. Instead, the foundation of questioning shows that the question-answer pair, the problematological difference, has a constitutive role (Meyer 1995: 212). Facts or opinions must be preceded by questions, therefore such facts or opinions are answers. For Meyer, reality itself has no meaning without inquiring into it and making it a response to our questions. Whereas Dewey thought meaning resided in experience, Meyer shows that posing and answering questions generates all understanding, whether it be scientific, pragmatic, philosophical, literary or otherwise. Understanding the world is an active questioning process and therefore our knowledge is never passive. In science, for example, observation is no more passive than experience (1995: 280). Neither has any meaning without questioning. We should not, therefore, reify experience into an essence, as though it were reality itself (1995: 280). This is not to say that reality would not exist without us, but simply that experience is an interrogative method for discovering reality; 'no reality can avoid being put forward as a response and, because of this, refers, even if only for an instant, to an underlying question' (1995: 280). Posing the question creates the world for us; 'Questions have a factualizing function, one of phenomenalization of their objects: they play a transitive role' (1995: 282).
Because answering pertains to questioning in general, rather than only to experience, we need not restrict answering to practical solutions. For example, in the problematological view one way of answering a question is to reject it as a question. For the instrumental view of reason such a response is not verifiable by experience and is therefore irrational. However, policy makers often solve problems by rejecting them as problems. Similarly, we can interpret government inaction upon a problem as an answer by explicitly putting a question to it, converting its inaction into a non-responsive answer and thereby forcing it to take responsibility for it. Ignoring a problem is one way of making it go away, and therefore political actors must actively mobilise to force authority to respond to their questions. Also, a poor policy that has no ameliorative effect upon a problem is still an answer and has meaning because of this. This separates the question of meaning from that of evaluation.

In focusing on questions and answers rather than experience we immediately expand the scope of the problem orientation. Policy deals with practical solutions to problems but it is also more than this. The problematological view is more problem-focused than the problem orientation of Dewey and Lasswell because it does not apply a reductionist criterion to the problem by considering it only in terms of instrumental solutions. It also serves a better critical function because it brings inaction and other responses into the frame of analysis. And, as I have already noted, it extends the definition of answering to encompass partial, or problematological answers (see Section Two, this chapter) as
well as solutions, enabling us to express the problematicity of political reasoning in rational terms rather than as a residual element of problem solving.

What is a policy problem? A problem is a worry, or concern. But people are able to solve many problems on their own or between themselves without reference to any higher authority. A policy problem is something we are concerned about that we refer for collective deliberation. A problem for an individual citizen can be a policy problem, but is so only because solving it involves collective resources and therefore implies the rights of other individuals to the same consideration. Hence there are two questions in any policy problem - the problem, and the question of whether it is a policy problem. This latter is especially important in understanding the structuring effects of politics on policy problems. In public policy the state is the key mediating authority that deals with public problems. Making something a policy problem creates a relationship between state and society. Problems are not fixed, but constructed by many actors, including the state. I deal with this aspect of policy problems in Chapter Eight. For now, we simply need to acknowledge that questions, including policy problems, are results. Policy problems express social concerns interpreted through experience, collective values, institutional constraints, political mobilisation, and so on.
Far from being a weakness demanding scientific resolution, the proliferation and persistence of political problems is a positive quality of democracies. The scientific, problem solving view sees policymaking only as the elimination of problems. In reality, the purpose of politics is to generate problems as much as to solve them. Good political cultures constantly throw up new problems and question the efficacy of past solutions. They also actively question even during the process of policy development and implementation. Widespread and pointed inquiry ensures detailed deliberation over questions. Although this is clearly not systematic, as in science, it is thorough insofar as it fosters social cohesion by mediating conflicting political interests via the policy process. What is important to note is that when we take questioning as our foundation, recurrent problematicity is far from a negative feature. Rather, it is a normal state of affairs. Even if we cannot eliminate a question absolutely, when we are working towards resolving it, politics is functioning well. In order for policy theory to retain its pretence to necessity it had to exclude the problematic elements. The consequence of that decision is theoretical fragmentation. Hence politics, which involves argumentation, contingency, interests, and negotiation, became ‘dirty’, a contaminated mode of discourse. The purpose of reason was to eliminate problems and to do so by standardised, unproblematic means. Developing scientific methodology was, therefore, the initial goal for the policy sciences. When we adopt the problematological view, we can thematise politics as legitimate reason and appreciate what is valuable
about the partial, temporary solutions it obtains. We can thus
distinguish politics and science as different modes of dealing with
questions.

2. Problematological answering

i. The logic of questioning

Thinking involves posing questions in response to our implicit worries
and concerns, and this is Meyer’s first result. In other words, questions
are themselves answers, the results of questioning. As I described in the
previous chapter, these are problematological answers. Inquiry produces
problematics that enable us to relate to each other and to the world.
Because we can debate the nature of a problem without necessarily
having a final resolution in mind, we have a question about a question.
Problem setting is already a partial answer, an intermediate stage as
important as the solution to which it might ultimately lead (Meyer 1995:
210). The problematological answer demarcates the solution-to-be-
reached, without which the solution would not make sense (1995: 210).
Thus we have two interlinked levels of questioning in every case –
explicit discourse that expresses questions and the possibility of
answering upon those questions.

This means that questions can be answers, and therefore the
model of resolution as dissolution is insufficient to describe how we treat
questions in reality. This is a major point, and the key to Meyer’s
reasoning. Meyer states that, since ‘everything that is explicit is an answer, nothing prevents us from answering on a question, and not simply to it’ (1995: 210). Hence answers can express various aspects of problems without necessarily eliminating them. Problematological answers are still answers – they are simply not answers that close off questioning upon a solution. Rather, they respond to a question by elaborating upon it, answering the question in so doing and creating meaning even while they keep it alive at the same time. Problematological answering describes much political discourse, especially when problems are complex, when they affect a wide range of interests, and when values are involved in the debate, as they always are in politics. Discourse, including policy discourse, is a continuous questioning process in which each ‘new line of questioning can enrich an earlier one, which can thus be brought to completion, weakened, or used for other purposes’ (1995: 220). Policy problems and solutions, far from being perfectly defined by experience, only emerge at a global level as a product of many different questioners and lines of inquiry.

Were we to hold that the only mode of resolution is the elimination of questions much policy discourse would be meaningless, or at best pre-rational, because its answers are so debatable. This would make it inferior compared with scientific problem solving. By thematising questioning in a positive light using problematology we can distinguish politics from science and give it a positive value. In fact, deliberating over problems brings questioners together over a shared problem.
Therefore discourse about policy problems has a secondary effect in bringing together a democratic community of inquirers. Theorists of deliberative democracy (for example, Dryzek 2000) understand that process is as important as outcome because it has this contiguous purpose. This reminds us of Habermas’ goal of creating a civil society in which sincere, critical discourse flourishes over purely instrumental reason. The policy process has meaning far greater than its practical consequences because even when the process fails to solve a problem it still creates a democratic community. Beyond this question of democracy, policy is problem posing as well as problem solving – it creates problems as a result of inquiry. Unlike science where the method of justifying answers is consistent, questioning persists in politics because the rules of progression from question to answer are themselves often in question. Political institutions, such as parliament and the law, are flexible and amenable to modification during the policy process.

If questions can be answers, then we need a new terminology to demarcate this answering from the problem solving form we know from science. As I explained in Chapter Five, the explication of a question is a response and, being a response, it is an apocritical answer. Because it expresses a question the answer is also problematological. Explicit language is born of the problematological deduction, it ‘contains the problematological difference within itself’ (1995: 214). That is, there is a difference within the explicit dimension (1995: 210-11), the second level of questioning, that mirrors the problematological difference between
implicit and explicit questions. Importantly, an answer cannot be both problematological and apocritical for the same question, otherwise answering would be circular (1995: 211). An answer is apocritical for the question it resolves and problematological for a different question. Whereas problem solving conceptualised answering as an absolute resolution and dissolution of the question, the apocritico-problematological duality of the logos indicates that any answer can become the subject of a new questioning process because it is also problematological. We shall see the consequences of this rule in supporting the dialectical/dialogical treatment of questions.

There are two main possibilities for discussing questions (Meyer 1994: 54-7; 1995: 220-3). If we put a question directly to an interlocutor our answer is explicitly (formally) problematological. For the speaker, the apocritical aspect of the answer arises in making the question explicit, since her problem is to express a question for which we do not have a ready answer. We then leave it to our interlocutor to suggest an apocritical answer that solves our question. However, we need not formulate a question first before moving to the answer. Often we simply state the answer to a question, since our purpose is to submit the answer to our interlocutor so that she may offer her assent or call it into question. In this case the statement is an apocritical answer that responds to an unstated question. The answer is problematological for the listener because it is not clear to which question the statement responds; it poses a question for her. Our answer is apocritical for us,
though it is problematological for the interlocutor, who must determine which question it is that the statement answers (see Chapter Seven for a full explanation of the problematological view of meaning). In both cases, one questioning process is linked with another to generate meaning. What is important here is that the dual characteristic of answering makes it possible to link questions together, creating a synthesis. It is not necessary that some out-of-the-question criterion, for example, experience, ground the meaning of discourse a priori. The logic of questioning makes communication possible because it links questioners together.

The two levels of questioning – the question of the question and the possible solutions to that question – are always present, even if the first level is only implicit. For example, a government agency might respond to reports of increasing street crime by paying for more police to patrol the streets. This solution reflects an implicit understanding of the crime problem as one of a lack of policing rather than of joblessness, or drug abuse. We can refer any particular answer back to a larger problem frame within which the problem it responds to sits. We can even interpret the unintended consequences of policy decisions as reflecting a broader, unintentional and unconscious framing of problems. This is how we identify social forces at work in particular policy decisions that express narratives beyond the intentions of the policy makers. Values, ideologies and paradigms arise from particular solutions without needing to be explicitly formulated before questioning takes place, nor
interpreted only on the basis of a limited field that defines problems separately from one another. Policy solutions need not directly reflect singular value positions because we can always relate them to different questions. Value questions pertain to the first (problematological) level of questioning, hence value questions cannot be scientifically closed off.

Policymaking is a questioning process that creates problems and solutions at the same time, defined by the problematological mechanism. This is why policymaking is not just applied science, it is *generative* in its own right. We create problems implicitly through explicit action without necessarily being conscious of this larger question-answer relationship. This means we can act without being entirely sure of what the greater problem is and without breaking it down into separate, analytical questions (although we might choose to do so). We need not divide questioning in practice from theoretical questioning in an epistemological sense, except to note that they are both modes of questioning that proceed in different ways. Further, because policymaking enacts both the problem and solution at the same time we need not divide the policy process into two broad stages of problem formulation and resolution. Although there are two levels of questioning in every questioning process, this does not mean that they must follow each other in a linear progression through time. This is the propositional method which progressively builds up solutions, copying science which reports only successful results. Politics does not proceed in this way, therefore the 'stages' model of the process is inaccurate if we
exclude the first level of questioning from it. Hajer (2003a) points out that questioning does not cease even when policy decisions have been made and implemented (see also Wagenaar and Cook 2003). In policymaking, solutions can be questioned at any time. If they are not, this is as much a matter of choice or an effect of political power as of the instrumentality of the solution. Policy thematises the public will by producing problems and by seeking solutions. By theorising about policy problematologically we can do much more than look for better ways of instrumentally working upon existence; we can better understand policymaking as a questioning process and assess what this means for important questions of social and democratic values.

Policymaking is a global questioning process. Every answer is, in some respects, problematological, because beyond the question it answers it raises a further question for others who have an interest in the matter at hand. Hence questioning never ends, with each resolution offering up a new question. The logic of questioning is fundamentally dynamic, contrary to the static logic of propositional reason. Policy is about seeking answers to questions, but policy conceived as a series of static, linked propositions is not adequate to describe the complexity of events. Because resolution is problematological, settling upon an answer is a matter of choice and persuasion also comes into the frame. For the purposes of policy theory, what has become most important is the difference between question and answer that arises out of the global process, the many activities that take place in and around the policy
process. Meyer says that the questions emerge from the process of questioning and the resulting answers are rarely demonstrative, but are answers nonetheless (2000: 208). The questioning process itself constructs the difference between question and answer, problem and solution. This difference is fundamentally problematological, and only ever instrumental or scientific in a secondary, derived way. The problem is constructed over time, rather than pre-existing, such that seeing the global problem requires a hermeneutic inquiry.

ii. Political questions and scientific questions

In rethinking the problem orientation, problematology identifies links between particular questioning processes and larger political questions. The ‘practical’ view focuses on outcomes but limits the problem in order to apply methodological, administrative rationality to it. This makes for sophisticated scientific models but it is unrealistic and irrelevant to the complexity of policy questions and the political dynamic involved in treating them (see Tilly 1995). Nonetheless, policy studies is important for understanding politics because it does not limit itself to studying institutional structures or the ideologies of political actors. It takes into account the political effects of the many administrative operations involved in developing and implementing policy. Ideological understandings will not tell us everything about real-world political interaction. Indeed, ideologies themselves are not comprehensible without understanding how they are partly created through practical
questioning, through the techniques such questioning employs and the outcomes of decisions. Policymaking is complex and the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. By seeing a global questioning process instead of limiting the problem to an analytic construction we lose problem solving precision but gain better understanding and greater relevance to policymaking in the real world.

Social science does serve an important critical function by pointing out when decision makers act in self-serving and politically expedient ways. However, it is insufficient for understanding politics itself, which is more ambivalent. Policy science works from a more defined operational base and permits rigorous inquiry. But if that inquiry is not relevant to practice then it also misses the critical mark by declaring all politics irrational simply because it is politics. In pursuing a reductionist strategy science becomes the study of trivia or, ironically, of abstraction (albeit technical rather than philosophical) in order to permit the use of sophisticated techniques. By factoring out politics, scientificity potentially serves as a justification for bureaucratic processes that have become ideological – self-justifying technical-legal procedures. If politics is more nuanced than science then we require a more nuanced theoretical framework to understand and criticise it.

Problematology starts from the question-answer link. While permitting a much greater degree of interpretation of what the problem is, it enables us to reverse the reductionism and fragmentation of
science by interrogating the policy process at a global level, which is political. Conceiving of policy as a global questioning process provides unity to policy theory, bringing it closer to political theory and thus cementing the scholarly status of the field. It does this without foregoing its orientation towards political practice. Theoretical results are important for understanding practice and uncovering new possibilities for practical inquiry. Policy is practically oriented not because it is a separate mode of rationality to philosophy but because the problematological difference makes it possible to resolve questions by practical means. However, it is not necessary that answering be practical. The practical orientation only comes as a secondary result of questioning and is paradoxical if theorised as a self-contained rationality. We should not oppose theory to practice; they are both subsumed under the logic of questioning.

Posing problems is a result, which has important implications for conceptions of democracy as well as epistemology. Policy theorists have already sought out other sources that express these interlinked aspects of questioning. Fischer draws on Freire’s (1973)\textsuperscript{81} concept of ‘problematization’, noting its difference from problem solving (Fischer 2003a: 216; 2003b: 225). In discussing ‘citizen inquiry’ (2003a: 209) Fischer elaborates on what an expanded institutional form of policy deliberation would mean for democratic politics and for the potential solutions reached. He describes technocratic problem solving as the antithesis of problem posing (2003a: 216).\textsuperscript{82} Problem posing is generative
and connects immediate concerns with larger social processes, whereas problem solving is closed and linked to restrictive analysis and knowledge dominated by experts (2003a: 216-17). Hence he links postpositivist epistemology with democratic processes, arguing for ‘the creation of institutional and intellectual conditions that help people to pose questions in their own ordinary (or everyday) languages and to decide the issues important to themselves’ (2003b: 225).

Defining the problem posing stage as a form of answering equal (but different) to apocritical answers confirms that there are multiple ways to pose problems. We need not accept problems as we receive them from tradition or from scientific experts. Michel Meyer’s problematology gives us a way to articulate how making problems explicit, i.e. problem setting, constitutes a logical difference, and therefore that such a form of answering is equally important as scientific problem solving. Problematology explains the difference between types of answering, the problematological and the apocritical. Meyer thus distinguishes the value of philosophy, which continually produces problematisations, from science, which resolves its questions apocritically (although philosophy is foundational and makes science possible). This is also relevant for policy theory because politics both poses and resolves questions, and does so in a unique way, which I elaborate in Chapter Eight. For now, problematology shows us that setting problems is already a result, an answer to a question, and therefore a synthesis. This puts politics on an equivalent level to science because both pertain to questioning. We
should not judge philosophy and politics for being shot through with problematicity since they deal with questions in different ways. Furthermore, because politics and science have questioning in common we can relate one to the other and construct multidisciplinary inquiry upon their common foundation.

The policy sciences understood policy as hypotheses and consequently excluded political reasoning. Lasswell’s first pole of the policy sciences was to scientifically establish hypotheses of the solutions to social problems. The second pole was to implement them scientifically by a process divided into propositional stages. Hence management and administrative science were as important as other social science disciplines. Politics was part of neither stage (in theory, if not in practice). If it played a role at all it was in the process of problem setting, analogous to the role played by intuition or inspiration in scientific discovery. Even then, politics was a compromised rationality. It was up to science to verify and rationally administer the policy solution, as well as evaluate it for its practical effects, fulfilling Dewey’s pragmatic criterion. Policy science failed not because human nature is imperfect or because politics is irrational, but because science is only a partial rationality and not the whole of reason. The policy process is a response to political questions, so policy discourse involves a series of explicitly problematological and apocritical answers.
Now that we have a new conception of answering we can judge policymaking on new terms. Rather than seeing policy solutions that are re-problematised as failures caused by poor evidence or imperfect, non-scientific processes, policymaking naturally produces problematological answers. Lindblom (1965) notes that accepting partial solutions is normal in politics, where problems are complex and solutions revisited in light of new circumstances. We should not assume that questioning must proceed from problem to apodictic solution, even if we might choose to judge the solution by its practical effects. This would still make science the ultimate form of rationality because of its efficiency in resolving its problems. In fact, there is a continual interplay between the two levels of questioning, problem setting and problem solving, an interplay that creates the complex texture of policy discourse.

**iii. Policy frames**

In making the transition from implicit to explicit questions we refer to the context. A range of contextual factors from our unconsciousness, socio-cultural forces, and various institutional and political constraints affect what appears to us as problematic. Received ways of interpreting the world and acting upon it enact broad historical forces in ways we do not always perceive. Hence historical and sociological studies are important in revealing what it is that moves us, what we consider to be problems and how we go about solving them. In short, context is important. The first level of answering draws upon a ‘frame’ in making a
transition from an implicit concern to an explicit problem. Similarly, we can reflect upon the way we make such a transition – Schön and Rein’s ‘frame reflection’ (1994) – to reconsider our presuppositions and propose alternative problem frames. When social interaction is complex, when we might perceive many implicit questions lying behind social action, we can propose more alternative problem frames. The implicit and the explicit relate to each other continually, and this is what makes for the richness of social inquiry.

Understanding framing in terms of problematological answering also deals with the problem of incommensurability. The elements of a frame, or paradigm, constitute the presuppositions of any particular questioning process. Therefore they define the world in very different ways, making broad interpretations of problems incommensurate with other problem frames. We should understand frames as problematological answers instead of propositions that fix an epistemic position. Frames are problematological answers, they are open-ended even though they delimit the problem at the same time. Frames are incommensurate because they are answers and necessarily exclude each other. At the same time we can relate one frame to another because they share a common root in a question. In the example I mentioned in Chapter Four, the excessive use of illegal drugs might be seen as a legal problem or a medical problem. If we strongly support policies derived from one position we would probably disagree strongly with those derived from the other, but each paradigm is potentially
understandable by all the proponents. Incommensurability indicates opposed frames, distinct problematological answers, but not an a priori obstruction to understanding. In the problematological view, different frames can be understood as alternative answers to a broad question of interpretation, answers to the question of the question, if you like. That is, they are answers at the first level of questioning. They are closed in one respect, since they are answers which resolve questions of interpretation. They are also open because they are problematological answers and therefore do not close off questioning entirely. Alternative frames are opposed because they are alternative answers to the question of the question. We can understand different frames because understanding is a matter of relating alternative answers through a question, and not of placing ourselves within a particular propositionally-defined frame.

Understanding pertains to questioning and not solutions. This means that understanding is possible without agreement. As in the above example of drug abuse, alternative frames can exist simultaneously and become the subject of a debate. Hence, we need not pose argumentation as a pre-rational stage of discourse at which we must agree upon a normative starting point if rational discourse is to follow. Argumentation is related to comprehension but is not the same as it. This produces another important result. Because we can logically relate the two levels of questioning through the problematological difference, we can relate discourse within accepted paradigms to extra-
paradigmatic positions without epistemological obstruction (even though this may be difficult and we may well encounter opposition). This is because answers can be linked to questions other than those they originally answered, a property I discuss in the next section of this chapter. This accords with research which argues that paradigm shifts are gradual changes which nonetheless produce major new ways of seeing problems, not radical epistemological breaks (Capano 1991: 62).

3. The autonomy of the answer

Beyond problematological problem setting, we need to consider how the apocritical aspect of answering establishes results as autonomous and independent. That is, we need to understand how problem solving is possible. At the first level of answering, making a problem explicit transforms its previously implicit nature, establishing it as a question to consider. At the second level of answering, explicit answers suppress what is problematic at the first level by closing the question upon some particular solution (Meyer 1995: 211). This is usually what we mean by answering, i.e., problem solving, where an answer eliminates the question. Meyer explains how the apocritical aspect of an answer detaches itself from the question, becoming autonomous:

an apocritical answer, which suppresses the question it resolves on the ground that it is no longer a question, also suppresses its own appearance as answer; and, by doing so, it becomes autonomous in regard to the question it meant to solve. It does not assert itself as an answer, nor does it stipulate the question it answers. It merely says
what it says, without saying that it says it, and without proclaiming itself as an answer (1995: 211).

Answers, being apocritical, detach themselves from questions, no longer appearing to be answers and thus becoming independent results.

Apocritical answers do not appear to be answers, but statements, or propositions. What is in question has been resolved, such that answers become detached and autonomous from their questions, producing the independence of the answer. The conjugation of the verb 'to be' indicates that a question has been resolved in the answer (1995: 214), and not the essence, the 'being,' of the external object in reality. The outcomes of questioning thus appear to be objective even though they are in fact subjective results (1995: 213). In resolving questions answers become autonomous, directing our attention to their objects, thus 'phenomenalizing' the world (1995: 215). The answer gives the world constancy and identity by making what was in question no longer so (1995: 215). The autonomy of answers gives them their own validity beyond the context in which they were obtained (1995: 216), enabling us to give form and consistency to the world. Similarly, our individual identity and outlook is constructed from the many judgements obtained through our experiences that are stored in our consciousness, judgements we usually do not question (Schutz 1972: 81). We construct reality through answering questions. It is not necessary that answering be pre-ordained by experience; it is one way of resolving problems but not the only way (Meyer 1995: 279). Because language employs the
problematological difference it can make meaning via fictional answers just as easily as truth. Human beings build narratives, stories about the world that explain it and to which we continually refer when we are faced with new questions. Policymaking activity is a process of rhetorically constructing narratives that explain the world, giving it and ourselves a figurative identity (see Fischer 2003a; Hajer 2003a; Stone 1988: 109-16; Yanow 2000). Metaphorical language, which is ambiguous, thus plays a crucial part in creating new meanings and dealing with new problematisations, even in scientific discovery.\textsuperscript{84} Symbolic language is equally important in policy and politics, both for generating new meanings or blinding us to the new by reinforcing established ideas (Yanow 1996:152; see also Edelman 1964, 1971).

Every answer, says Meyer, possesses an apocritical and a problematological characteristic. But how can apocritical answers also be problematological if they resolve a question by suppressing it? In fact, it is the autonomisation of the answer that produces the problematological effect. How? To understand the meaning of a statement we must link it to a question. Because questions are often left implicit the meaning of a statement may not be entirely clear. When confronted with a statement we interpret it by understanding it as an answer to an unstated question (1983: 68). For example, ‘It is one o’clock’ can be a response to a request to know the time or, in another context, it can mean ‘Let’s have lunch’ (1983: 70).\textsuperscript{85} Or, in another context, it could mean ‘Take me to the station’ or ‘It is time to conclude
your seminar’. It is precisely because the answer is independent from a question that the answer poses a question for us. As I explained above, answers cannot be problematological and apocritical for the same question. That is, because an apocritical answer does not state that it is an answer, a question exists as to which question the statement answers. This is not the same question as the original question, which would be circular – it is a different question (1995: 211). Hence the independence of apocritical answers evokes the problematological effect, introducing another questioner or a new line of questioning (1995: 220). Its dynamic quality makes it inherently dialectical. If we apply this to a policy example, we would say that a local government decision to provide paper recycling to residents also means an increase in jobs. Thus it relates to the employment problem as well as the environment problem. It also increases the budget, which pertains to a fiscal problem. This impacts on many other actors who have a stake in these questions. At the same time, business interests might interpret and attack such expenditure as inflationary, regardless of its environmental problem solving power. Answers become established results, amenable to use in other problematisations for those who either challenge the solution or relate it to some other question. Policy problems can be studied independently but nothing stops us linking their solutions with other questions because answers are not restricted to the questions from which we initially derived them. If that were the case then discourse would proceed in an endless circle around a self-contained problem. The
policy process is a dynamic, complex linkage of questions and questioners.

Every discursive exchange is a synthesis of questions. Meyer sums up: 'an apocritical answer, repressing its answerhood, also reveals the problematological link to a question as a question whose answer consists of finding that to which what is said is an answer' (1995: 212). Answering resolves a question but in doing so poses another question. Answering makes the world appear as an independent, objective reality by suppressing the question and directing attention to the object of the answer, while at the same time making possible a further question; it 'both raises and expresses the question of which question it answers' (1995: 212). This is the problematological link which associates questions with answers, and is the defining characteristic of problematology. That is, 'An answer is apocritical in regard to the question which gave birth to it, and problematological in regard to another one' (1995: 212). I will say more on this effect in Chapter Seven. For now, we need to note that every apocritical answer which closes a question is amenable to being put back into question by an interlocutor, no matter how objective it appears to be. Hence, we cannot contain questioning or ever finalise meaning, but we can establish results nonetheless.86

Meaning is a question-answer relationship (Meyer 1983, 1995). The problematological difference is not the same as the concept of
problem solving that we have inherited from science, where questions exist only as a technique for revealing problems external to discourse.\(^8\) Resolving a question establishes a result, whether that be a description of the world or a statement of opinion. Propositions, hypotheses, or statements have meaning because they resolve a question and become independent from it in doing so, not because they correspond to some external, true reality. Hence a lie can have meaning just as well as the truth – deceptive rhetoric is clearly a possibility of discourse. The propositional view of meaning has also been attacked by others, notably Collingwood, who criticised his colleagues for seeking the meaning of language by removing statements from their context. Collingwood viewed propositions as having meaning only insofar as they respond to questions (1939: 33). A statement, said Collingwood, is a \textit{response} to a question within a particular context (1939: 31). Assertions do not arise from themselves; every assertion responds to a question (Meyer 1995: 133). Statements appear objective only because they resolve a problematic and thus achieve a result.

In the question-answer link, problematological reasoning has a \textit{dynamic} property (1995: 216).\(^8\) The apocritico-problematological link enables us to answer a question, the answer then being problematological for another question or another questioner (Meyer 1995: 212). Policymaking, as one modality of questioning, is a \textit{dynamic questioning process}. As with all questioning, linking one question to another via the medium of an answer enables epistemological progress.
It creates an independent world out of our own inquiry but at the same time never loses its origins in that inquiry. It permits us to obtain results but also denies the possibility of a final solution because any answer can always be called back into question. In policymaking this is especially important. It enables us to deal with complex problems where action upon one problem affects the status of another. It means policy can be made equally by complex, decentralised networks as by a unitary, central agency (Atkinson and Coleman 1992; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003b). It is also central to democratic practice where many people need to communicate and construct mechanisms to deal with their questions under conditions of uncertainty and disagreement. Because of the problematological foundation we can import scientific solutions into political debate to make them part of a larger policy inquiry, but without imposing restrictive standards upon it. Hence science can contribute to political questions without entirely determining political processes or solutions. Democratic questioning produces great complexity and also new syntheses, and is therefore ‘intelligent’ (Lindblom 1965). Policy solutions and policy inquiry are highly problematological; the reality of policymaking is that it is not a series of ordered steps but ‘a complexly interactive process without beginning or end’ (Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993: 11).

The autonomisation of answering gives the world constancy and identity, permitting us to operate within it in a routine and semi-systematic way. The concept of the apocritico-problematological duality
of answering adequately describes both the consistency and flexibility of reason in a comprehensive logic grounded in a foundation. This is also what permits us to establish recurrent processes for treating a range of questions. Government bureaucracies, for example, are partial answers – institutionalised mechanisms established to deal with prior questions but which have become autonomous from them. Hence they have autonomy to deal with new problems without direct recourse to the citizenry each time. This also, of course, presents a danger and so we limit their powers to raise new questions and to enforce solutions. Paradigms of knowledge are also answers; large scale problematisations, broad approaches that permit us to frame a range of problems in a consistent manner. Paradigmatic answers carry their own inertia and are difficult to overcome but because answers are problematological we can always question them anew and propose an alternative. Despite their independence, answers are never entirely free of problematicity. At the same time, this does not take away the fact that establishing the problematological difference creates meaning and allows us to understand and act in the world by making it the object of our inquiries. Because policy deals with decisions it is apocritical. It also poses questions and is therefore problematological. Policy pertains to both questions and answers, so we cannot adequately understand it outside of this dual characteristic.
4. Problematological policy theory

My discussion has gone part of the way towards reconstructing the problem orientation in problematological terms. Since Lasswell, policy theory was primarily focused on answering because we had no problematology to articulate a constitutive role for questioning. Answering was understood primarily as problem solving. This created many theoretical divisions, including between policy and politics, politics and administration, and politics and science. Just as Dewey identified the need to reconstruct philosophy in light of changed times (1957: vi-viii), so the problematological reconstruction is now necessary to express the problematicity of the problem orientation. Problematology recovers what is positive about questioning, expressing many of the themes of the postpositivist critics of the problem solving view. The problematological difference makes it possible to link the problem posing aspect of discourse with its problem solving aspect in a consistent way. Hence problematological policy theory takes proper account of the dynamic logic of questioning created by the many questions and questioners involved in policy deliberation.

Ubiquitous problematicity characterises our postmodern condition. Nowhere is this more apparent than in politics, where decisions are often disputed and where progress seems so difficult to achieve. If policy theorists have discovered the political in policymaking, then it is because they have taken account of problematicity. This is not
a negative result. It indicates that questioning is important and suggests we take it as our object rather than eliminate it through the hypothetico-deductive method applied to policymaking. We cannot answer the question of politics and policy by suppressing problematicity \textit{a priori}. The only adequate answer is one which expresses the contingency of political reasoning in the answer itself while still making it possible to find a solution. Problematology is a logic that expresses the positivity of problematicity, that understands it as a natural quality of politics and not the condition of its poverty. In criticising the aporetic view of knowledge proposed by the poststructuralist philosopher Derrida, Meyer concludes:

In order to express positively the question without reducing it to some answering, we must give room to a difference between the answers which express and maintain the questioning process, and those that close it upon some solution. Hence, the distinction between the problematological answers and the apocritical ones. We should stop seeing the problematic as the doubtful or as some obstacle, but rather as the starting point of thought. To formulate a question is a first step towards its solution, and not a hindrance (2001a: 3).

Despite the many uncertainties of policymaking and difficulties of theorising about it we need not reject rationality altogether and lapse into a nihilist position. Nor need we reject theory as too abstract and take refuge in the remnants of logical empiricism simply because it conveniently produces results. Indeed, notwithstanding their extended critique of the ‘rationality bias’ of policy science, postpositivist policy theorists have not rejected rationality in the fashion of some in the social sciences, possibly because we can always find ways to progress
political debate even if we cannot resolve all our collective problems. They have insisted, in fact, that less certainty produces better solutions and more democratic processes. The complexity of postpositivist theory, as I described it in Chapter Four, is a more sophisticated, more accurate depiction of the policy process, and also more relevant to the reality of practical policymaking. I believe problematology is the answer to what policy theorists (and social theorists in general) of an ‘interpretative’ mind have been searching for over many decades; a systematic approach to social inquiry that is different from logical empiricism. Whereas policy science repressed questioning in favour of answering, problematological policy theory extends the problem orientation to find the meaning of policy in the question, in the complete sense of questioning and answering described herein. This reconstructed problem orientation expresses questioning but accounts for answering just as well, which goes on constantly in policymaking despite problematicity. The contingency of policy discourse does not make it irrational, it only makes it different from science. With problematology we can see that rhetoric is necessary for policy deliberation because questioning is the condition of political discourse.

So, by reconstructing policy and politics via problematology we have a basis from which to incorporate this problematicity without abrogating the necessity to make decisions. Policymaking involves both questioning and answering, where both express a degree of contingency. This is precisely why it has been so difficult to understand the
relationship of social science to policy, and to distinguish policy from politics. The traditional Lasswellian problem orientation of the policy sciences was grounded in a partial theory of questioning. It could not deal well with the greater degree of problematicity that characterises the social sciences compared with the natural sciences, nor with the problematicity expressed even more strongly in politics. The more problematicity increases, the more difficult it is to make a decision, yet make a decision we must, even if that decision is to keep debating the question.

In the next chapter I extend upon this discussion of the problematological difference by describing the tripartite properties of the problematological logos – hermeneutics, dialectic, and rhetoric. This links Meyer’s logic with key themes of interpretative social science and unites them with the reconstructed problem orientation.
Having described the nature of the problematological difference, we can now examine its texture in greater detail. In this chapter I outline Meyer’s problematological conception of key aspects of interpretative theory; meaning, dialogue, rhetoric and practice. This applies to meaning in general, and therefore also to policy theory. There is a voluminous literature on these topics in philosophy and the social sciences, so I cannot relate problematology to all questions of interpretative social science. Instead, I provide a basic outline of his logic of questioning and explain how this relates to the reconstructed problem orientation. It is important to commence from this fundamental level because Meyer’s ideas are distinctive and address fundamental questions of understanding. I hope readers will recognise the pertinence of these questions to many of the current debates in philosophy of the social sciences. I divide the chapter into two main parts; I outline the tripartite characteristics of the logic of questioning in the first section, and in the second, the problematological conception of practice. Meyer’s views on these key ideas allow us to extend the reconstructed problem orientation by linking it with the ‘interpretative’ strand of policy theory. Again, this is preliminary work, but I want to articulate the comprehensiveness of Meyer’s ideas at a fundamental level.
Problematology provides a framework within which to interrogate policy from the micro-level of dialogue to the global level at which we might theorise across policy fields. In particular, it lays the groundwork for the future empirical study of policy rhetoric in terms of the problem orientation.

1. The tripartite conception of the problematological logos

Writing in policy theory, Fischer notes that we may never develop an integrated postpositivist perspective on policy analysis (2003a: 17). However, I believe Meyer's philosophy does incorporate many key elements in a unified, consistent vision, which is also grounded in a principle, as I explained in Chapter Five. It cannot prescribe practice, which will always depend on the context. Problematology is very different to past foundationalist philosophies in that it does not claim to establish an indisputable starting point that dictates all other inference, i.e., by a logic of necessity. Rather, because it is grounded in questioning it permits the great variety of results established by the existence of multiple answers. However, Meyer does establish a new set of rules, which will at least help us theorise about the rhetorical nature of politics without conceding any ground to irrationality by showing how questions and answers logically relate to each other. Here, he also provides the grounds for criticism of political rhetoric. In this section I describe the tripartite characteristics of the problematological logos. This provides a
unified interpretative framework in terms of the reconstructed problem orientation. I use some examples from policymaking in this chapter, but the discussion remains at the level of fundamental theory only.

i. Dialectic/dialogue

Policy problems arise from the problems of collective life. A problem becomes a collective concern if it exists for more than one individual, and indeed if we recall that each individual is a questioner, this means that a policy problem is already a synthesis of questions. In the previous chapter I described how the problematological quality of answering gives rise to the possibility of questioning any answer. Reason is inherently dialectical because answering makes it possible to link questions together, just as I do in this thesis. Similarly, questioners can communicate with each other by adding one questioning process to another; language is equally dialogical. People ‘construct’ social problems by questioning each other. Take the unemployment problem, for example. Unemployment means many things to the unemployed, including reduced social standing, shame and financial hardship. Conversely, unemployment benefits employers because it makes for a competitive labour market, low wages and larger profits. But under-use of resources damages the economic well-being of society at large. Then again, unemployment benefits the organisations (and their employees) paid to provide services to the unemployed, while for others unemployment increases fear of crime if they perceive the unemployed
themselves as threatening. Political problems are complex, as I discussed in Part I, and we cannot reduce them to analytical questions which take only a yes or no answer, as in science. Any single social problem is made from the many different questions of many different questioners, so it makes little sense to define problems univocally by experience; they are dialectical constructions.

Because problems are socially constructed, there are many perspectives upon a problem and upon what to do about it. Therefore, contained within the dialectical construction of policy problems is a second question of the relationship between the questioners. In order to function, societies require that a diverse range of social actors cooperate. Coordination problems are greater in democracies which permit more players a legitimate interest in political decision making. As I stressed in previous chapters, it is important to note the contingent quality, the problematicity, of political activity. Even where there is a shared context of interpretation we cannot assume that the social ‘stock of knowledge’ (Schutz 1972) is enough for people to agree on the definition of problems, nor on what to do about them, nor that their interests are similar. Each participant in policy discourse, be it an individual or organisation, has the ability to question the nature of the problem and the solution sought. Questioning is the foundation of knowledge, therefore political discourse is dialogical debate on questions where the processes of deliberation between the actors are just as important as the problem under debate.
How does dialogue work? The problematological *logos* unfolds from the apocritico-problematological duality of answering. As I described in Chapter Six, every answer is apocritical, since it is an answer. But it is also problematological because it cannot be cut off from interrogativity (1995: 219). An apocritical answer suppresses a question, giving it its independent quality by becoming autonomous from the question it resolved. That answer can then be the subject of *another* questioning process, either by the same individual or by another questioner (1995: 220). Each answer, becoming autonomous from the question it resolves, evokes the problematological effect to become an object of questioning for other interlocutors, to serve as the basis for another problem or as a stage towards reaching a solution (1995: 220). I use the individual answers to my questions as the basis for other questions, thereby linking questions together to pose a thesis. I communicate these results to a reader, who then questions their validity and uses them as the basis of her own questioning process. The apocritico-problematological link is the key to problematology and what makes it different from the propositional link which presupposes a logic above and beyond the propositions involved. By operating at the level where answers have already been obtained, propositional logic suppresses problematicity rather than expresses it. This is why problematology is dynamic and creative, whereas propositional logic is not. Problematology explains what we already know; that policymaking is inherently a *process*. 
Answers not only resolve questions but are *dialectical* in doing so (1995: 220). We link questions together via the medium of answers. When one person conducts the interrogation, it is dialectical. In the natural sciences, for example, an individual scientist asks questions of the world which she solves empirically. The objects of her inquiry do not respond with their own questions. The social sciences are more problematic because the objects of inquiry have the agency to question things themselves. In politics collective problems always involve two or more questioners, so it is always *dialogical* (1995: 220). When two questioners are involved in dialogue, 'each will in turn be the respondent as well as the questioner, confirming the materialization of the problematological difference by the contextualization of the roles of questioner and answerer' (1995: 220). Communicating with others is dialogic, and in each case a question is under discussion (1995: 220).

Questioning is a creative act, not a passive technique to reveal a reality fixed by experience. Because questioning is foundational, we can question any decision at any time no matter how established it seems. Questioning does not stop upon the making of a policy. It goes on permanently in politics at all stages of the policy process. For example, implementation is not neutral administration but actively shapes policy itself (Palumbo and Calista 1990); it is a mode of questioning that is constitutive of the problem as well as the solution. Policymaking establishes a process that permits the participants to create a problem and work towards a solution from varying perspectives. The
characteristics of policy processes arise from the questioners involved and the interaction between them. Policy processes can be highly legalistic and structured or highly deliberative and fluid. Reductionist science is of little use in understanding how we treat a political question where a plurality of questioners are active at once and where political actors have the agency to ask new questions. Science presumes that questioning is univocal (or at least approximately so). Therefore it is not equipped to understand the differences between people, and it is the greatest differences between us that we must express and deal with to maintain a stable society and also to permit change. By thinking in terms of questioning we can see that collective inquiry also raises the question of the questioning process, which is political. Science presumes the question of process to be decided in advance by recourse to method. It sees politics as a residual, inferior form of questioning that only complicates matters (see Chapters Two and Three).

What holds at the micro-level of questioning also applies to relationships between disciplines more broadly. Thinking back to Lasswell’s two poles of the policy sciences and the relationship between social science and policy, we can reconstruct this relationship as dialectically linked modes of questioning. Scientific inquiry and policy inquiry are different modalities of questioning but can nonetheless be linked by the dialectical properties of the problematological difference. Science produces autonomous results which can be used in new ways for policy inquiry. The policy question need not be the same as the
scientific question because deciding what to do about a problem is different to understanding it, even if we could suppose a common interpretation. This means that scientific results can serve rhetorical purposes in policymaking which might contradict the intentions of the scientist, taking the research findings beyond their acontextual constraints and used in a partial way in political argumentation. ‘Misuse’ of science is always possible in politics, just as is its productive use. Policy problems cannot be contained within a scientific analytical structure nor would we wish them to be, since effective political solutions must mediate a multitude of questioners as part of the questioning process.

As each answer gives rise to a new question and involves more questioners it builds up a complex deliberative process. The result of this is discourse around a problem, such that the problem itself is a product of multiple questioners and multiple lines of questioning. As Meyer points out, ‘The reality of our questioning shows that questions emerge in the course of the questioning, and that the answers that emerge have no demonstrative qualities, but are answers nevertheless’ (2000: 208). The answers of such a process are almost always problematological, not apodictic. Inquiry need not be constrained by a fixed problem, which Dewey supposed was set by experience. This is why we find a conflict between Dewey’s desire for an active, democratic polity and scientific decision making. In the collective questioning of politics we create the questions through the questioning and we create
the community of inquirers at the same time. To understand how these two questions are linked is to understand the policy process as political inquiry. Political resolutions are especially partial, with the many answers gaining varying degrees of adherence. The solutions adopted (whether by agreement, inertia, or political force) form the presuppositions for future questions. Thus policy deliberation also constructs its own context through an accumulated series of partial answers that refer to each other; it is autopoietic. These partial answers usually remain the subject of dispute, but discourse proceeds because problematological answers are still answers and these answers become the reality to which people refer. This does not have to be the ‘truth’ because we obtain answers by opinion as much as by appeal to the ‘facts’. Policy discourse attains stability through successive, autonomous answers without necessarily eliminating competing points of view or entirely resisting modification. Policy discourse can, and does, shift radically at times, when we find that new problematisations have emerged clearly from the old, which is then considered passé and a new paradigm ushered in.

Questioning processes produce a complex and dynamic picture that continually resolves and re-problematises by virtue of the problematological difference. In fact, the questioning process generates its own dynamic; policymaking is a creative activity set in motion by questioning. Answers must be taken up or left to stand through human choice which arises from the property of agency we hold as questioners.
In politics and policy this is expressed through a collective questioning process in which the process itself is always in question from all sides, or at least potentially so. This is very different from the propositional view, which externalises problematicity from a self-contained system of linked propositions. This latter view is an *a posteriori* construction of scientific justification (Meyer 1994: 133) which has little to say about discovery, creativity, or politics.

**ii. Hermeneutics/semantics**

Meyer conceives of meaning as a question-answer relationship, from the simplest semantics through to interpreting history and literature. As Dewey pointed out, when we approach the world we question it. An interlocutor in a conversation, a reader of a text, or an interpreter of society is a *questioner*. Thus ‘The meaning of a discourse is provided by the problematicity it deals with. When someone speaks of the meaning of a sentence, for example, he is referring to *what is in question* in the sentence’ (1995: 223). This is not the limited view of meaning as problem solving. Answers have meaning because they are both problematological and apocritical (1995: 223). Meyer explains this more fully in *Meaning and Reading* (1983). When we address someone else we either put a question directly to them for them to solve or we simply proceed straight to an answer for them to judge (1983: 26). As I noted in Chapter One when I pointed out that problems are already partial answers, in both of these cases we have already made an answer, a
partial one in the first case and a complete one in the latter (1983: 26-7). The former utterance of a question is already a partial answer, and therefore apocritical, but it is also explicitly problematological in that it formally puts a question. The latter case is formally an apocritical answer, because it is a resolution, but because it is problematological it also raises a question for the listener. Utterances, whether put in the form of a question or statement, have meaning because they both answer and raise questions. Form, says Meyer, is only a secondary means of encapsulating that difference (1983: 26). It is the fundamental difference between the apocritical and the problematological answers that generates meaning.

To understand the meaning of a discourse, we must understand the question with which it deals. Comprehending meaning is a hermeneutical questioning process (1983: 141-68; 1995: 223). To extend upon the sketch outlined above, consider a conversation between two interlocutors. Speaker α has a problem in mind that she wishes to make the subject of a dialogue with β. She makes an assertion, giving an explicit answer to a question that occupies her mind. She does not need to state the question, but rather she simply presents her answer to her own question as an assertion (or proposition). The answer is autonomous from the question she had in mind. It is not necessary to formally state that it is an answer. This answer is apocritical for α because it resolves her question. But because it does not state how it is
an answer, it poses a question for β. That is, because the answer is *problematological* it poses a question for another questioner. She must then find the question to which α’s answer responds in order to complete her own question-answer link and ascertain the meaning of the statement. β must search the context for clues so as to find the question to which the answer presented to her responds. Once she understands how α’s answer is an *answer*, then she understands its meaning. This could be easy, in the case of a context shared by both questioners, or more difficult, for example when a layperson tries to interpret complex scientific research. β’s questioning process ends when she finds the question to which the answer responds. Discovering this question (i.e., a problematological answer) is the apocritical answer to β’s hermeneutic inquiry. That is, the answer to her inquiry is the implicit question to which α’s answer responded. She substitutes an answer for the proposition presented to her and thereby comprehends α’s discourse. It is important to note that this second questioning process is not the same as the first one; it does not simply duplicate it. Rather, the dialectical properties of answering make it possible for the second speaker to interrogate and decode the meaning of the discourse of the first: ‘It is because the answer is both problematological and apocritical that it has meaning’ (1995: 223).

No matter which point of view we adopt, comprehension occurs by substituting one problematological answer for another, producing an
apocritical result (Meyer 1995: 224). Understanding takes place via a hermeneutic process which links two questioning processes together via the medium of an answer. The answer to the second line of questioning, the hermeneutic inquiry, is *problematologically equivalent* to the initial assertion (1995: 224). Thus we understand and empathise with others by taking on their questions as our own (1995: 224).

Rationality does not consist of knowing the answers in advance nor of only obtaining apocritical answers (as in traditional ‘problem-solving’) but is rather a questioning process. We understand discourse by understanding how it is an answer to a question; ‘Giving or acquiring meaning consists of substituting for an assertion which poses a problem an answer which states what is in question in the assertion, and which shows in what way it is an answer’ (1995: 224). This process of substitution establishes an equivalence between the two questioning processes. Importantly, this equivalence is not literal, but *problematological* (1983: 153; 1995: 224). In other words, discourse does not have meaning because it corresponds to some fixed, singular external reality, it is produced by questioning and by making one answer equivalent to another. Hence meaning can be figurative as well as literal, and fiction and art have meaning just as well. This accords with many views of social inquiry which point to the importance of metaphor and other figurative forms of understanding. Inquiry synthesises two related questioning processes; one understands when
one answers one’s own question by seeing what is in question in a discourse.

In dialogue, each person stands in for the other by taking on her problem, producing shared knowledge (1995: 222). We do not have to reconstruct the exact mental process of the other in order to understand her, but rather the apocritico-problematological duality of answering enables us to discover the meaning of her discourse through a process that substitutes one answer for another. For Meyer, every instance of communication is hermeneutic, even the simplest of cases where what is in question is clear and we instantly comprehend the problematic. It is, of course, possible that a listener might not be able to understand how an answer is an answer. In which case she might ask her interlocutor to pose the question explicitly in order to ascertain what is at stake, or perhaps indicate how it answers another, more familiar question. If we cannot question a speaker or author directly we must look for other clues. Certainly, a listener may incorrectly interpret what is in question, or interpret it differently and hence reach a different understanding than intended by the first speaker. This is especially the case with the passage of time in which historical variations make interpretation more problematic; or in examples such as policy discourse where a multitude of questioners interact, each bringing their own ideas and concerns to the debate. But the essential point is that discourse has meaning because it deals with questions. Meyer’s theory is more comprehensive than other theories of hermeneutics, such as Gadamer’s, which pertain
only to limited problems of historical inquiry (Meyer 1983: 145-6). Meyer’s theory does not only apply to interpretation in difficult situations: it is a theory of understanding in general (see Meyer 1983: 141-68). Every instance of understanding involves the hermeneutic discovery of meaning via questioning. This is so in all cases, regardless of whether there is great difficulty or the meaning is obvious (1983: 147).

It is important to note here that meaning does not arise from agreement about the answer. Agreement is certainly possible, however people often disagree in politics but still understand each other and act collectively in spite of conflicting norms. For example, one person might explain unemployment as arising from structural problems in the economy while another attributes it to character weaknesses of the unemployed. Nonetheless, they understand each other. They need to be in agreement that the fact of unemployment exists (see Meyer 1996: 344), however they do not need to be in agreement as to the explanation of that fact, which in this case also pertains to norms of individual and collective responsibility as well as a theory of social structuration. These are two alternative answers to the question of unemployment, which then become the subject of a debate. If we deny their ‘answerhood’ and consider them autonomous propositions independently of the question to which they refer then they appear to be incommensurable, in the radical sense of term that implies epistemological untranslatability (Hintikka 1999: 228; see Chapter Four, Subsection Three). In such a
case it would be necessary to agree upon the answer before one had found it, making inquiry unnecessary. In practice we communicate despite our differences. The problem of untranslatability is theoretical, only arising if we conceive of meaning in terms of independent propositions which represent mutually exclusive epistemological positions – radically separated ways of knowing. Understanding is a question of seeing how an answer relates to a question. Certainly, conversational norms are important in communication, and we need some presuppositions upon which to commence our questioning. But we do not require consensus upon those norms in order to communicate, only that we understand what is in question so we do not talk at cross purposes. Norms themselves are often the subject of questioning in politics. We can understand one answer in relation to an alternative answer, disagreeing with the first answer yet still comprehending it. We may not even be entirely sure of our own interpretation of the question, yet we rarely fall into total semantic rupture. And if we do, we ask further questions by reference to what we already know. The problematological answer is the key concept here. It is a partial resolution that advances discourse and makes comprehension possible without closing off questioning altogether. Apocritical problem solving is a secondary level and not the sole condition of comprehension, which substitutes one problematological answer for another. Thus we can distinguish comprehension, at the problematological level, from political agreement upon solutions, at the apocritical level.
Interpretative theorists stress the place of context in the meaning of discourse. In policy studies, Yanow refers to the idea of ‘tacit’ knowledge, from Polanyi (Yanow 1996: xiii; see Polanyi 1967). Tacit knowledge is contained in the myths and narratives that structure social reality, the background knowledge and values that people share and that is not often explicitly expressed (Yanow 1996). In problematology context also plays a key role. The participants in dialogue utilise the context in treating questions: ‘Context is the problematological differentiator; it embodies the participants’ knowledge and their knowledge of the other’s knowledge (or their own knowledge) as to what is still in question and what is already resolved’ (Meyer 1995: 222). This includes all the relevant presuppositions and socio-cultural variables, such things as institutions, organisational cultures, economic conditions, and constellations of political interests. The context informs the questioners about their relative distance from each other (1995: 222). Meyer states that form and content vary inversely according to the information supplied by the context (1995: 222). When the context is significantly shared between the participants there is less need to formally stipulate what is in question. But a hazy context requires greater formal specification of the question; ‘Form constitutes the information which the context fails to provide’ (1995: 222). In argumentation, or non-formal reasoning, inference is not constraining because answers are partly inferred from the context which need not be made entirely explicit (1994: 96-7). In policymaking, established legal
and institutional structures form the constraints within which policymaking takes place, but policymaking is much more than the application of legal rules. The properties of the problematological difference mean that language is necessarily flexible and amenable to a figurative reading. Therefore we must look for symbolic meaning just as well (as I argued in Chapter Four).

Recall how in the previous chapter I cited Meyer’s simple example of meaning as a question-answer link in the statement, 'It is one o’clock' (1983: 154). While this responds literally to a question of the time, we need not restrict it to its literal meaning, because it can also mean ‘Let’s have lunch’ or ‘Let’s go’ or ‘We still have time to keep on talking’, depending on the context in which it is uttered (1983: 154). While the statement is a literal answer to the question of the time, it is in fact a figurative answer to an implied question, ‘What do we do now?’ (1983: 155). Metaphor works in a similar way, it ‘literally asks for a non-literal reading that will be the final answer’ (1983: 155). Answers thus implicate other questions and answers via the context. Indeed, literal and figurative meaning do not cancel each other out, nor are they different in nature; the difference between literal and figurative meaning is a difference in function (1983: 155). Hence we can interpret individual answers as responding to questions at a global level, as a whole text, for example in literature where the meaning of a text is a figurative implication embedded in each of the literal sentences (1995: 254). Understanding policy discourse at a global level is a similar
process, where meaning is not a simple aggregation of literal answers. The meaning of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts if we understand the larger question that it figuratively implies.\textsuperscript{97} Hence interpreting policy is not simply a matter of relating policy measures to their corresponding practical effects; it requires interpretation as a figuratively-implied explanation of many smaller questioning processes.

In policy inquiry each contribution to dialogue or action changes the context, which then offers up new meaning. By adding to, weakening, or resolving a questioning process we dialectically establish the context for each new question as we proceed. As I said above, social action is autopoietic. Hence implementing a policy changes the context and the meaning of further implementation activities. Conceiving of the policy process as hypothesis testing is inadequate because the meaning of policy shifts all the time as each action adds to the context. At the same time, this constantly poses new questions so we cannot excise politics from administration. And we must theorise about policy at a global level, beyond the intentions of the individual actors and beyond a literal reading of rules and regulations.

Meyer reconstructs rationality in such a way as to reveal the legitimate place of problematicity without concluding that meaning is impossible. He shows how discourse can be highly problematic, highly figurative, and still permit answering. If the question is complex and obscure or if the participants do not agree on a solution, debate will
progress without reaching a definitive conclusion, remaining instead at the level of problematological answering. This should remind us of much political discourse. Even the most mundane policy solution is problematic for someone and might potentially be linked to another more difficult question for which there is no obvious answer. In other cases, people accept what seem to be highly controversial decisions based on untrue premises without question. But understanding still takes place in both cases. It might be considered a sacrifice to lose the ideal of a true, literal discourse; but what does truth have to do with making policy decisions where many practical alternatives are plausible and values are involved? Discourse is flexible, and unfortunately permits deceit and falsity but it also permits us to debate values, i.e., what particular decisions and means of reaching them imply for humanity at large.

All this responds to questions of understanding policymaking that I discussed in Part I. Firstly, it means we can interpret meaning beyond the intentions of actors by interpreting the social and psychological forces that operate unconsciously in their thinking and are reflected in their discourse and actions. Intention can shed light on meaning but it is not what provides it (Meyer 1983: 76). We must discover another’s intention by interrogating it in relation to the context (1983: 76). We can interpret meaning as the result of rational choices of which actors were perfectly conscious or we can extend it beyond the simple re-creation of an actor’s intentions to seeing hidden social and psychological forces
expressed through it. This takes us beyond the rational actor model of instrumental problem solving where there is no figurative meaning and actors operate towards known ends.

Secondly, because answers are autonomous they need not be restricted to one question. Speakers can offer an answer that they think answers our questions but that also disguises their real concerns. In politics, actors hide their true intentions all the time in order to advance their own interests, persuade others, and avoid censure. This is what makes it so difficult for political actors to exhaustively interpret the meaning of each others’ discourse and to predict strategic manoeuvres. Thirdly, the question-view of interpretation applies to non-verbal action as much as to language, where an action constitutes a response (an answer) to an implicit problem. An action thus poses a question for another actor who seeks the problem to which it responds. That action may have been the product of a conscious, intentional strategy, or it may have been simply routine (see Section Two, following). Whatever the variety of communication, from the simplest semantical matter to the social scientific interpretation of society or understanding a work of literature, comprehension takes place via hermeneutic questioning and meaning arises from the relationship between the problematological and apocritical characteristics of answering.

Our ability to relate questions to other, figuratively implied questions makes it possible to theorise about policy at a global level. We
hermeneutically interrogate policy discourse as a construct of many individual questioning processes and activities. This reflection is important because it takes us beyond policy as day-to-day practical problem solving and the idea that the outcome of complex social interactions conforms to some pre-defined intention. Even within problem fields the scope for interpretation is large. The unemployment problem, for example, involves macro-economics, the dimensions of the labour market, the nature of the welfare state, the activities of the unemployed, non-government services that provide welfare support, bureaucracies that monitor the activities of the unemployed and administer payments, employers' and employees' organisations, social research about unemployment, and so on. All of these interact in highly complex ways. Our interpretation of the problem at this global level looks for meaning by questioning what is implied behind these many smaller processes. But more than this, it means we can theorise about policy processes across different policy fields and therefore develop better theory. We look for the symbolic characteristics of policy systems as a global questioning process which responds to implicit forces as an answer responds to a question. Only by relating particular policy questions to global questions about politics and society can we establish policy studies as a legitimate area of scholarly inquiry. We cannot achieve it by limiting policy problems to their practical effects; we must link policy practice to political theory to extend its meaning beyond its status as applied knowledge.
iii. Argumentation/rhetoric

The third characteristic of problematological discourse is the rhetorico-argumentative dimension. From the discussion above, we can appreciate that hermeneutic interpretation and argumentation are connected. When interpretation is problematic there is more than one plausible answer to a question. When we cannot prove answers demonstratively by eliminating all the alternatives but one, questions remain open and there is a chance for debate (Meyer 1994: 96). We must argue in favour of one answer over another by providing reasons, i.e., answering a question through an answer to a different question. Rather than conceiving of argumentation as a weakness of reason, such problematicity is a fundamental possibility of political discourse in which we seek solutions to difficult questions in conditions of uncertainty and where many questioners participate in the debate. It is important to note that Meyer does not confine argumentation to a preliminary process of establishing a founding propositional norm, after which follows a logic of necessity. Such a view construes argumentation as pre-rational because it presumes rational discourse commences only from known solutions. By incorporating contingency within problematological answering, Meyer expresses the rhetorico-argumentative dimension within the logic of questioning itself. Problematicity – and rhetoric – is no longer a residual element of discourse. Meyer overturns the Aristotelian division of logic and rhetoric by subsuming both necessity and contingency under the foundation of
questioning. Hence discourse can progress through problematological answering without having to eliminate problems scientifically as it does so. Political rationality is a means of treating the complex problems of collective life, a discourse which is argumentative through and through.

How does Meyer conceive of argumentation and rhetoric? Whereas the traditional conception of the *logos* deals in the truth of propositions already established, the problematological conception of rhetoric deals with *problematicity* (1996: 336-7). As I discussed in Part I, policy science ran into difficulties because the problem solving approach was not able to comprehend or express the problematicity that characterises the political activity of policymaking. Therefore policy theory should turn to questioning, and to the problematological theory of rhetoric in particular, because politics deals with the problematicity of collective social life. Meyer explains that rhetoric does not deal with the truth value of a particular thesis but concerns ‘the problematicity affecting the human condition, in its passions as much as in its reason and its discourse’ (1996: 337).

Rhetoric does not deal with justifying the truth value of assertions but with problems to be solved (1994: 50). Meyer argues against the propositional view of rhetoric, instead casting opposing propositions as equally possible alternative answers to a question (1994: 49). The argument is the answer to a question raised in a given context (1994: 96). Such reasoning is non-constraining because an alternative answer
is always possible. Argumentation allows us to deal with contingency when multiple solutions confront us, as is nearly always the case in policy deliberation. While discourse is argumentative in that it can always be questioned, it does not mean that an actual ‘argumentation’ occurs in every case. One makes an argumentation when there is inference (1994: 98), i.e., when one links two questioning processes together or when a listener makes an inference about her interlocutor's utterance. Here, the audience perceives an argument because it must judge the adequacy of an answer (1994: 98). Because the inference is made via the context, the answers of one speaker do not constrain her dialogue partner to hold the same interpretation since some element is left to the context (1994: 96-7). That is, the flexibility of the problematological inference which allows answers to be related to new questions also permits participants in a debate to infer discursive norms and other presuppositions from the context without their being made explicit (see ‘tacit’ knowledge, above). Meyer says ‘there is argumentation the moment the explicit and the implicit are related’ (1994: 97). An utterance evokes or implies a question and serves as an argument in favour of an answer to it (1994: 97). When interlocutors share the context much information can be left implicit and inference is more flexible. This means that the speaker can give an answer to a question she thinks her interlocutor will agree with, even though the answer might serve her own interests in answering a different, but disguised, question. This property opens up the possibility for synthesising
potentially conflicting interests through reaching a mutual solution that satisfies (or partly satisfies) these different interests. Relating the implicit dimension via the explicit also makes it possible to seduce or manipulate others. Whatever the intentions of the speaker, the importance of the context means that an interlocutor may not accept the answer as originally proposed, so there is always the possibility of a debate.

Meyer defines argumentation in terms of the dialogical treatment of problems. An argument will be more convincing if it is thorough and answers all the relevant subquestions to a problem (1994: 51). Science is convincing because it treats questions thoroughly (1994: 51). Meyer defines persuasion as ‘the fact that the locutor has answered the questions raised by the audience, or those the audience has in mind’ (1994: 50).

For example, in politics, this might include appealing to the particular interests of the audience. So, while politics does not scientifically validate its answers, we might say that it can be rigorous in a dialogical sense, uniting many people by creating a shared discourse around a problem.

Effective argumentation does not function according to the same, comprehensive explication of results as science does. Arguments that immediately lay out the answer to a question leave the audience little choice except to agree or disagree (1995: 223). Arguments that explicitly state all their components are less convincing; ‘an argument is all the
stronger when the addressee is free to reject it’ (1994: 51). That is, ‘The force of an argument varies with the freedom left to the individual’ (1994: 51). Argumentation that permits the audience to draw the inference on its own ‘transfers’ (non-dogmatically) the speaker’s view to it (1994: 51). Therefore policy discourse that lays things out in programmatic form is unlikely to be convincing for laypersons. When used in policymaking, science, for example, often fails to transfer inference because laypersons are not involved in reaching the answer themselves, which is presented to them as a fait accompli. This form of monological political discourse can turn the public away from politics; they feel alienated by not being able to participate in the political process. Monologic discourse presupposes that a hierarchical relationship exists, ‘a distribution of power which compels listening or other types of deviation related to an inflated ego’ (1994: 97-8). Thus the link between the use of science in political discourse and depoliticisation of the public should be conceived rhetorically. On the other hand, in situations where listeners have some political agency, a speaker must be careful to be relevant to the audience’s questions lest she disinterest them and they ignore her (1994: 97). This indicates how important it is to compete for attention in agenda-setting and how policy makers must attend to the problematics of other powerful stakeholders when defining problems and making decisions (Kingdon 1984). Great power resides with political actors who are able to frame the questions for debate.
In one sense, rhetoric is the counterpart of argumentation; the two are related because we argue in order to persuade (1983: 73). In rhetoric we anticipate the reaction of our audience and seek to please them through language, we adapt our discourse by anticipating the audience’s reactions to bring them around to our point of view, to the answer we desire them to reach (1995: 223). As I noted above, rather than declaring an argument directly we seek to ‘induce’ the assent of the audience by the use of rhetorical devices to please and seduce them. Hence policy makers appeal to the public through rhetorical techniques, putting forward simple ideas and symbolic figures that appeal to common values (doxa) and cultural identity. The necessity to obtain public assent can obstruct the consideration of difficult problems, for example problems that challenge common values. Decision makers might, therefore, put forward simple, populist solutions, such that policymaking reinforces past patterns rather than changing them. When the audience is large and indeterminate the speaker will have less knowledge about listeners’ opinions and use less explicit and vague language instead (1994: 95). The flexibility of the problematological link permits speakers to imply other questions in which the audience might be interested without debating them explicitly. Indeed, the independence of answers means we can relate an answer on any particular question to a larger, implicit value or ideology. This is why critical theory seeks to explicate the common values underlying a discourse to permit critical reflection on social norms and support political change.
Having grounded philosophy in questioning and established the rhetorical possibilities of discourse, Meyer attends to the distinction between positive and negative rhetoric. In Part I, I discussed the longstanding historical denigration of rhetoric in contrast to the logic of necessity. This led Plato, and philosophers since, to condemn rhetoric as pure manipulation. However, we cannot understand politics without thematising problematicity, which opens up the possibility for manipulative rhetoric. Indeed, who could deny that much political activity does involve manipulative or deceptive discourse? Persuasion is central to politics, and manipulation by appeal to self-interest and populism is equally as possible as arguing sincerely and explicitly for a solution one believes best. Rhetoric is gaining more currency in political theory, even with those who might reject it on normative grounds. For example, Dryzek notes that Martin Luther King, Jr. could never have moved a white audience to the civil rights cause without the emotional appeal of his rhetoric (2000: 52). While being cautious about rhetoric, Dryzek does argue against its rejection by some theorists of deliberative democracy, including Habermas (2000: 51-4). No matter how reluctant we might be to admit it, given the importance of symbols in contemporary media-politics, a critical theory of politics and society cannot do without a thorough and nuanced view of rhetoric. Meyer concludes that ‘To reproach discourse for being manipulative boils down to reproaching discourse for being’ (1996: 356). Since we cannot rule out
negative rhetoric *a priori*, our scholarly task must be to understand and expose manipulative rhetoric where we find it.

Meyer distinguishes positive from negative rhetoric by how each deals with problems. Negative, or ‘evil’ rhetoric ‘plays on the unjustified abolition of something which remains problematic, because it only offers problematic answers’, for example manipulation or propaganda (1994: 155). He contrasts this with *positive* rhetoric, which ‘exhibits the questions and puts forth arguments in favor of or against the chosen solution’ (1994: 155). Positive rhetoric ‘does not abolish the interrogative by its reply, but on the contrary it explains the problematic without ever overshadowing it within arguments and replies’ (1996: 353). Positive rhetoric also involves the study of rhetoric, including unmasking methods of ideological manipulation that veil interrogativity in order to support further questioning (1996: 354). This fulfils the critical function we seek in a vigorous scholarly discipline and democratic culture. No matter what the illusion of a discourse, we can question it and uncover the problematic and its proposed solution (1996: 355). This distinction in terms of questioning overcomes the difficulties of Perelman’s and Toulmin’s revival of Aristotelian rhetoric (explained in Chapter Four), which attempted to separate argumentation and rhetoric by positing argumentation as rational and rhetoric as manipulative (1996: 354). Ultimately, the difference between positive rhetoric that persuades and negative rhetoric that manipulates is a matter of attitude, a manner of interrogating (1996: 355). Thorough, pointed questioning is a necessary
precondition for distinguishing the former from the latter. Our political institutions and culture are still some way from achieving this, I would think, so we need to better understand rhetoric in order to devise better institutions and promote a more active and effective political culture.

But rhetoric is more than just persuasion. Rhetoric also includes the construction of narratives through figurative language (1996: 330). Common to the many definitions of rhetoric, says Meyer, is the communicative relationship between self and other (1996: 333-4). People meet each other through rhetoric and express their identities and differences, finding communion or repelling one another (1996: 334). This is common for literary forms, for epideictic rhetoric, and for political or legal argumentation. He provides a general definition: ‘rhetoric is the negotiation of distance between men with regards to a question or a problem [original emphasis]’ (1996: 334). This involves the full range of rational debate and the emotions, such that the traditional distinction between logos, ethos, and pathos collapses (1996: 342-3). Narratives serve to explain events and affirm social identity by and for social actors. Yanow points out that figurative symbols also serve social cohesion by metaphorically holding ‘competing values in a tension of temporary resolution’ (1996: 189).

This also suggests the converse side of rhetoric, the role of the persuaded and seduced. Meyer points out that just as important as the will to seduce or manipulate is pathos, the will to be persuaded (1996:}
356). He says we are often aware of the double meanings of figurative language and how we use it to gloss over conflict, which is not necessarily negative because it gives us a degree of liberty in many situations (1996: 356). Rather than condemning rhetoric as a one-way attempt to deceive, he works from the dialogical possibilities of discourse, concluding ‘that accepted manipulation is based upon a double language of which we are not dupe, and to which we resort when we have a differing point of view, so as to avoid us having to resort to open confrontation with the other’ (1996: 356). Even though rhetoric can serve the truth it can also deceive, but whatever the manner of its usage, it permits us to exercise our critical judgement (1996: 356-7). Our willingness to eschew questioning and to accept the answers given to us seems the most pertinent question for contemporary political inquiry, and leads into the next section on the passions.

This discussion of Meyer’s tripartite conception of the *logos* has been only a sketch of problematology. It remains at the level of fundamental theory. This is a prelude to more extensive inquiry about policymaking, involving all the ‘mid-level’ theories such as policy networks, policy transfer across constituencies, and trends in policymaking such as ‘evidence-based decision making’ and deliberative democracy, among others. What I hoped to show in this section is the relationship of interpretative theory to the reconstructed problem orientation and to
outline the rationality at work in problematology. It is a consistent philosophical framework and a set of terms upon which to base future policy studies. I have also only briefly mentioned Meyer’s synthesis of rhetorical genres, which provides a powerful interpretative framework for studying policy discourse. In articulating meaning as a synthesis of questions we can assess whether policy discourse is truly dialogical, and takes on the views of many participants; or if it is hierarchical, an elite, specialised discourse that discourages democratic participation in the questioning process. A related task is a disciplinary one; to incorporate the reconstructed problem orientation with interpretative theory, uniting contemporary trends in policy theory with the origins of the field in the problem orientation of Lasswell and Dewey. It provides us with an interpretative structure in terms of questioning that also permits a significant degree of agency (see Turnbull 2004a), which is essential to politics. It is an interpretative framework for problematic times but it is also based upon a philosophical foundation, which makes it comprehensive.

2. Practice as questioning

There remains much to do to reconstruct the problem orientation of the policy sciences on problematological and interpretative terms. In Part I, I discussed criticisms of the ‘rational actor model’ which presumes that the participants in policymaking make conscious, strategic choices
according to set criteria. I introduced the concept of practice as a form of unreflective knowledge that is equally important in policy activity. Understanding unreflective social action, therefore, poses a problem for the problem solving model that I must also deal with.

The possibility of routine social action introduces the question of ‘practice’. The literature on practice is large and complex, to say the least, so again my discussion here is necessarily limited. But we can deal with it effectively by putting it in context and revisiting my discussion of Dewey from Chapter One. In developing the problem orientation, recall that Dewey located problems in experience, distinguishing situations which presented a dilemma, an obstruction, from those that did not inhibit action; ‘Some inhibition of direct action is necessary to the condition of hesitation and delay that is essential to thinking’ (1971: 108). The former type of situation is a state of doubt that stops us in our tracks, giving us cause to reflect, while the latter does not do so and therefore a problem does not exist; we simply act ‘without thinking’, without questioning. The difficulty here is that this rules out much social action from our field of analysis, action that is automatic; from an individual tying her shoes in the morning to the organisation that behaves in routine ways without reflecting upon its modes of operation despite the possible benefits of doing so. Moreover, is it true that there is no question in routine activity? In fact, every situation is new for us, therefore we face a question even if we can solve it instantly. Dewey relegated inquiry to a secondary role, defined by
experience, which means that situations only become problems when experience itself evolves. But we know that different people can hold different interpretations of the same situation, and that politics is a creative realm where conflicting interpretations meet to produce new problems out of what others assume poses no question. We know that situations are not naturally problematic, but it is questioners who make them so.

So, even when we act in routine ways, 'without thinking', are we not still solving problems? In Chapter Four I raised Bourdieu’s example of a tennis player who anticipates where to position herself on the court (1998: 82). The player operates not on utilitarian calculation but on intuition built up over many experiences of performing the same actions and is thus able to anticipate where her opponent might hit the ball. In such a situation the player still has a problem to solve, which is to hit the ball and win the point. She might not reason it out as a question but her action is certainly an anticipatory response to a forthcoming problem. So, seeing as though we have rejected Dewey’s claim that experience is primary, this suggests that both conscious inquiry and routine action both pertain to problems and therefore we can understand them both in terms of questioning.

Dewey united inquiry and routine action in experience but we have seen that this position is not sustainable. Indeed, were we to retain Dewey’s distinction between non-problematic action and theoretical,
directed inquiry, this would pose a considerable difficulty because it would oppose theory to practice. The latter would have to be a mode of rationality that bears no relationship to theory, in which case we could not inquire into it and therefore we could not understand it. That is, it would make ordinary action and reflective inquiry incommensurable.

We require an interpretative framework that moves beyond the rational actor model of inquiry to account for the reality of social action as practice, one that does so without radically dividing practice from reflective, theoretical inquiry. How do we make the transition from routine action to reflective inquiry? Understanding policy paradigm shifts is already an important question in policy studies (Hall 1990; Schön and Rein 1994), but we must understand it in a new way at a philosophical level if we are to move beyond the old theoretical paradoxes.

Meyer’s principle of questioning pertains to all rational thought, including practice; we necessarily practice questioning even if we do not reflect upon it as such. In this section I discuss Meyer’s theory of practice which links routine action to conscious reflection in problematological terms. In doing so, he takes us beyond the rational actor model by incorporating the passions within his conception of questioning. This is only a brief discussion of his main work on the subject, Philosophy and the Passions (2000). I do not comprehensively present his argument nor do I draw extensive conclusions for policy
theory. My goal is simply to address the philosophical difficulties I identified in Dewey’s theory of inquiry and extend the dimensions of the problematological reconstruction of the problem orientation to deal with the question of practice; to articulate how both maintaining the status quo and reflecting upon and changing it involve the passions within the logic of questioning.

i. Practice in question

How does social practice differ from the ideal of rational, directed inquiry we inherited from the problem solving view? Firstly, social action only sometimes proceeds by finding a theoretical solution to a question, verifying the results through experiment, and then programmatically implementing the solution. Bourdieu argues that the idea that social actors have sufficient reasons for everything they do is a construction of academics, for whom such reasoning is normal; it projects their own practice on to that of non-academic social actors (1998: 127-40). This ‘scholastic point of view’ is not the norm for most people because such abstract contemplation is detached from the problems posed by the necessities of everyday life (1998: 128). Imposing such a view on social action risks destroying the logic they wish to describe with the logic they use to describe it (1998: 82, 130). It is a serious mistake, says Bourdieu, to put ‘a scholar inside the machine’, because we will fail to understand what it is that characterises social action for the actors themselves (1998: 133).
Opposed to this, Bourdieu proposes that social actors have a ‘feel for the game’ which enables them to act without being conscious of their actions (1998: 80). They internalise previous encounters with the world into their *habitus*. Their *habitus* is their disposition towards the world accumulated through many prior social encounters (1998: 6-8). This enables them to respond to new situations by anticipating what is going on without explicitly ‘knowing’ it as a conscious, calculated response (1998: 79-80). To the reduction of action to conscious calculation, he opposes practice as an interconnected relationship between agents and the social world (1998: 79-80). Agents act without rationally calculating all the alternatives in every situation and without posing the objectives of their actions as ends known in advance (1998: 90). The concept of *habitus* (1998: 86) also explains why social patterns persist so strongly; so much of our way of being in the world and our identity is embodied in our dispositions that it is difficult to reflect upon and change them.

Our problem, then, is to account for the reflective mode of thought alongside the practical mode. We must do this without imposing the former upon practice, instead understanding their unique characteristics and differences and how we might logically relate one to the other. Indeed, for us to theorise about practice there must be some common element between these two modes even if, as Bourdieu notes, they are different in important respects. If, in many circumstances, we have a ‘feel for the game’ that permits us to act in routine fashion and for activity to flow quickly and smoothly, then we also want to reflect
upon more difficult problems and seek new solutions to them. For Dewey this latter quality was most needed in public life and it is still our rationale for scholarly inquiry today. Bourdieu said that in reflection lies the possibility of freeing ourselves from the hold that our *habitus* has upon us (1998: 79). Thus his political program was to establish the social conditions that would support reflective inquiry by permitting universal access to universality, enabling us to ‘escape the alternative of populism and conservatism, two forms of essentialism which tend to consecrate the status quo’ (1998: 137). But this is a secondary question I do not deal with here. I simply note that the relationship between routine action and reflective questioning, which so preoccupied Dewey, remains a key theoretical and political problem today. So, to understand it and apply it to policy studies, we must pose the logical relationship between practice and theoretical reflection as a question.¹⁰⁴

But before that it is important to note, here, the related question of the quality of democracy. Dewey’s and Lasswell’s problem solving model was also to serve as a democratic force. The appeal of the means-consequence logic suggested by Dewey, and presumed in much policy analysis, is that it shifts the focus of inquiry towards evaluation. Evaluating policy in terms of its problem solving effects¹⁰⁵ provides an important standard by which to evaluate the state’s actions and hold it to account. The practical focus of Dewey and Lasswell provides a standard to evaluate the efficiency of decisions and to hold decision makers accountable for what they do, which at least spurs them to
provide rational explanations and redress their failures next time around. This goes to the democratic ethos of Dewey’s philosophy. Unfortunately this does not necessarily help us theorise effectively about policymaking because it conflates the question of evaluation with that of meaning, where we understand meaning only to be the outcomes of intentional, instrumental action, such that all policymaking is programmatic action towards a known end and can be evaluated as such.

Even then, we will not be able to evaluate policymaking without understanding its complexities as both a social practice and an arena in which we encourage rational reflection upon problems. We need to account for some human action as instrumental and goal-directed, and include less precise situations where the ends are unclear. We need both routine practice and the reflective, theoretical mode of reasoning to co-exist to have a successful polity which solves problems efficiently but which can also reflect upon more troubling problems when necessary. Nor should we impute a model of action in which theory is entirely separate from action because policymaking involves both. We can no longer impose dispassionate science as the ideal quality of human political action because that would destroy the very characteristic of political deliberation, where people passionately debate values and beliefs and pursue their interests as much as they seek instrumental ends. Practice incorporates and expresses human passions, which science excludes. To eliminate these from a theory of practice would be
to deny a fundamental characteristic of human nature and leave unquestioned the ideological function of upholding dispassionate science as the only form of reason. We should not omit the passionate response *a priori*, as science does, but rather bring it into view in order to make it explicit and allow us to say what is desirable and undesirable, what is moral and what immoral, what is acceptable and what excessive about political practice.

How does Meyer’s problematology deal with the relationship between practice and reflective questioning, and how does he accord a place for the passions in so doing? What is the *difference* between intuitive practice and explicit reflection upon problems in problematological terms? This is important for reconstructing the problem orientation on problematological grounds; to redress the limitations of Dewey’s version of inquiry; to incorporate an important dimension of contemporary interpretative policy theory; and introduce *pathos* without which we cannot understand practical political engagement.

**ii. Practice, the passions, and questioning**

Meyer (2000) points to our failure to thematise questioning as the source of theoretical difficulties in developing a theory of consciousness that explains the relationship between the intuitive practice of experience and theoretical reflection upon it. By assuming that reason must result in apodictic solutions, philosophy has sought to domesticate
the passions by resolving them in a universal, rational end (1996: 56). Instead, Meyer explains and provides a place for the passions in terms of questioning, for passion is the alternative itself (2000: 7). Rather than seeing the passions as something that must be overcome in order to attain reason, Meyer explains the utility of a passionate way of acting.

He articulates an ambivalent theory of the passions as an essential aspect of human nature that has both positive and negative qualities. He rejects the idea that rationality is entirely opposed to the passions, instead according the passions a legitimate place in reference to the problematic (2000: 225). Our passions affirm our individuality as well as our relations with others, and so they both divide us and create our common identity (2000: 47). We cannot do without them, so although they can be dangerous it is imperative we understand them:

> it is necessary to understand human passions, rather than denying them, in order to achieve a social equilibrium, that is, a kind of common denominator between us which allows us to live together. The regulation of passions rests upon our knowledge thereof (2000: 47).

Recalling the Aristotelian separation of logic and rhetoric, Meyer points out that Aristotle also separated the passions from logic, such that science could ignore them (2000: 36). But in dividing logic and dialectic Aristotle did allocate a place for the passions, which he made ambivalent, in contrast to Plato (2000: 32). Human beings live in contingency, not necessity. Because our ends are not pre-given to us we must look for them; we are *agents* because we must *act* to attain our ends (2000: 46). Because human beings live within choice and
contingency we lead a political life, in which passions are necessary but must also be regulated (2000: 43-6). The problem solving view of knowledge, where rationality is that which is resolved into an autonomous proposition, has always been threatened by passion and the task of rationality has been to suppress the passions by establishing the necessary order rather than leaving a choice (2000: 43-6). He argues that by failing to thematise questioning Aristotle sought to limit the passions by articulating action in terms of an already known solution, hence ‘to “rationalize” them as a means of dominating them’ (2000: 45). Pathos, explains Meyer, has always been opposed to logical necessity because it is the human condition, the expression of contingency that results from our ability to choose our ends, in contrast to nature which simply ‘is’ (2000: 43-6). In order to recover a place for human passions and to understand human action, Meyer says it is imperative to overcome the division of passion and reason, just as we must overturn the division of logic and rhetoric.

What does this mean for understanding action in terms of questioning? Because Aristotle said we must choose our destiny, the ends which are external to us, we require a means to reach our goals (Meyer 2000: 46). The practical syllogism\(^ {108}\) ‘retraces the movement: we move from the ends to the means: I want to heal, therefore it is necessary that I take some medication, with the premise which “validates” the practical syllogism, affirming that all medication aims to reestablish health’ (2000: 53). Meyer quotes Aristotle when he says that
we only deliberate the means to establish an end and not the various ends themselves: “We deliberate not the ends themselves, but the means to attain them” (2000: 53). So, the ends of practical reason are already given, and the decision is about the means to reach the solution. However, Meyer points out that Aristotle is contradictory because he also admits that we do, in fact, discuss the ends (2000: 54). The difficulty arises because Aristotle does not want to admit contingency. He affirms that ends are ‘indisputable’ while nonetheless implying that ends are variable because we discuss them (2000: 54). We desire the ends, which are pre-given, but universalism disappears because we have different desires. Hence, for Aristotle, passions are necessary to desire our goals but they must be moderated lest they lead to excess (Meyer 2000: 54).

Aristotle is torn between human contingency and natural necessity, so he creates a picture of human action that reflects this division. He tries to limit contingency by stipulating that the end be given in advance in order to domesticate the passions. Action involves either means that progress towards a known, external end; or action is an end-in-itself; i.e., the end is immanent in the act (2000: 54). This is the well-known and much criticised distinction between poiesis and praxis (for an extensive critique of the vagueness and contradictions in Aristotle’s reasoning about practice, see Markus 1986). Meyer sees in the vagueness of this distinction that Aristotle ‘is torn between two opposite conceptions of human nature’ (2000: 55).
Meyer argues that the fundamental difficulty comes from the idea that we should have the answers before we proceed, either through some immanent, necessary quality or by knowing the external end in advance of seeking it. He points out that inquiry rarely proceeds towards a pre-established solution (2000: 207). Instead, to restate Meyer’s description of inquiry; the ‘questions emerge in the course of the questioning’ (2000: 208). As I have already concluded, this is certainly an appropriate description of policymaking, which in practice always proceeds in conditions of uncertainty. Uncertainty might be a challenge for policy theory but it is by no means a fatal obstruction if we adopt the question view.¹⁰⁹

Now, having articulated that the difficulty of thematising the passions arises from the idea that we must already know our ends in order to act, the theoretical question is one of understanding human nature in such a way as to account for how approaching problems in a routine way is useful, how this differs from reflective thought, and how thought can proceed in conditions of uncertainty where we do not know the end we seek in advance. Philosophers have rejected the unitary model of consciousness behind the rational model, so Meyer instead proposes a dual structure to consciousness, in which passion is inscribed within its questioning faculty.

To replace the unitary Cartesian model of consciousness, Meyer proposes two distinct levels of consciousness related as a whole through
the problematological difference (2000: 215). At the first level, we approach new problems by interpreting them as already solved on the basis of our previous answers; ‘Every new problem is viewed on the basis of questions that have already been resolved, and apprehended as a function of answers that were brought to bear upon them in previous times’ (2000: 216). Even though every situation is always somewhat new for us and therefore poses questions, we put these new questions as rhetorical questions, reconfirming our answers and thus ensuring that the world appears stable and continuous (2000: 215-6). This mechanism of ‘rhetoricisation’ is the source of prejudices, where we rhetorically abolish problems as we encounter them because we wish to live with a sense of peace and security (2000: 216). The second level, reflexive questioning, is a reply to the first level of questioning (2000: 215). While we can simply do what we do without explicitly questioning it because we operate on the basis of previous answers, we can also ask questions about our own activities such that the second level of questioning is logically related to the first level. In questioning, ‘there is still some equivalence between the direct experience of objects and reflection after the experience which notices it’ (2000: 215).

How are the two levels of consciousness related? Meyer gives the example of a greengrocer absorbed in counting his daily takings (2000: 215). He does not see himself reflexively as he counts, but rather he is engrossed in his practice. If we asked him what he was doing, he would reply “I’m doing my cash.” He wouldn’t have given any attention to the
matter of what he was doing, nor would he realize this, which suggests that there is a difference between these two activities’ (2000: 215). The first level links us directly to experience and the second level is a response to the first level which notices what has been accomplished afterwards (2000: 215). The second level of reflection is a reply to the question of the first level and the whole is defined by the problematological difference. Meyer shows how we can relate theory and practice as a whole through the problematological link.

Even though we face new questions all the time we desire continuity and security so we make everyday questions rhetorical, abolishing problems as we find them (2000: 216). This process of ‘rhetorization’ is what the consciousness gives itself to assure its identity and external coherence (2000: 218). Meyer deduces that rhetorisation requires passion to function; by making new questions rhetorical we do not need to ‘think’ about everyday actions. We do not need to reconstitute the world each time we encounter it. We would be in a state of permanent confusion if we had to (2000: 217). But Meyer points out that we do not consciously make questions rhetorical, because we must act as though questions are not, in fact, questions (2000: 217). So, the unconsciousness covers up the process, annulling problematicity and giving us the impression of permanence by performing an unconscious resolution that disguises the rhetorisation of new questions (2000: 217). The unconscious resolution is ‘the rendering rhetorical of the process of making rhetorical, which annuls the problem at hand’ (2000: 217). On
one hand this is a positive effect, allowing us to develop routines for complex actions and to obtain a sense of security, but it is also the source of all our prejudices and the blindness of the unconsciousness, where we see only what we want or expect to see (2000: 216, 218).

Thinking of policy theory, we appreciate how much policymaking activity occurs without conscious reflection, in which political actors operate according to habituated responses. They encounter new situations and approach them on the basis of past solutions which have become internalised. This forms their *habitus*, their disposition to the world made up of implicit presuppositions, ready answers that form the basis of how they act in and interpret the world. It is clear that established practices survive by inertia in the persistence of paradigmatic policy frames. They even persist unquestioned among scholars whose job is to ask reflexive questions and challenge accepted ways of thinking. In policymaking, where time is limited by the urgencies of decision making, there is even less opportunity to reflect, a constraint further complicated by the multitude of actors involved. Even if one powerful decision maker were able to soberly reflect upon a question, what about the others she would need to do the same for the reflexive movement to be generalised? This reveals the extent of the problem of collective deliberation and why appeals to populism and conservatism, as Bourdieu described them (1998: 137), so persuasively reinforce the status quo against painful, sober, reflexive inquiry. In many cases people not only want to remain within comfortable
boundaries, they are passionately committed to doing so because it securely affirms their identity. We encounter problems as though we have a ready-made answer by the ‘passionate’ rendering rhetorical of those questions: The problematological analysis attempts to show that we prefer to not have to ask too many questions’ (2000: 224).

But although passion is the source of prejudices, Meyer stresses that we should not see passion as pure dogmatism that obstructs reason, ‘but rather as a simple response...Passion is, and remains, that which deals with the problematic as though it were resolved’ (2000: 224). Common sense gives us the comfort of repetition and also permits us to act in ‘practice’ without excessive demands for verification. Passion permits us to be pragmatic, to operate efficiently and quickly within contexts which are known to us. At the same time, this tends to support ‘the argument of authority [which] is still the most widespread rhetorical structure. We have faith before doubting’ (2000: 225). Ideologies also work in this way. An ideology resolves all questions automatically, justifying both sides of a question no matter what the apparent conflict (2000: 228-9). Problem setting often involves such an unreflective procedure by predetermining the phenomenon as one type of problem rather than another, e.g. ‘To speak of x as a crime, or as one’s duty, is not the same thing, and yet it is the same x in both cases’ (2000: 231). An example is the question of asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat; is the question one of helping refugees or deterring immigrants?

During the 2001 Australian federal elections, the government
constructed a picture of asylum seekers as potential terrorists, as too wealthy, and as uncaring for their children (Maley 2004), labelling them ‘illegals’ and ‘queue jumpers’ (Marr and Wilkinson 2003: 38). This political tactic played to Australian people’s longstanding fear of northern invasion by boat (Marr and Wilkinson 2003: 38). Their resentment of asylum seekers – which was unstated during the election campaign but implicit in the context – decided the question and the government was re-elected with an increased majority. So, ‘In the determination of the observed fact, passion is already present, that is, the idea that guides the qualification of the fact that is in question’ (2000: 231). Interpreting the facts takes place through passion. In the example of asylum seekers, the first formulation contains a more generous reading of their character and their actions, while the second formulation expresses a will to condemn and exclude them in the very formulation of the problem. The latter view denies any alternative and closes off the question ideologically, simultaneously rhetorically instantiating an ‘us and them’ dichotomous identity. This process of closing off questions indicates that rhetoric is the discourse of passion in regard to the ideological treatment of questions.

So, despite the inertia of accepted solutions and our desire for consistency we can and do question reflectively. In reflection we differentiate passion and reason, becoming conscious of the rhetorical nature of questioning which also brings to light our own particular point of view (2000: 219). Meyer states that there is no exact moment when
accepted solutions come into question (2000: 216). Establishing the conditions for ‘frame reflection’ in policymaking has been an important topic in policy theory (see Schön and Rein 1994). Indeed, one key problem of politics has been how to create a stable polity with efficient and consistent governance, but that also supports critical questioning and change at the same time. When is change desirable and when is it more important to affirm stability and coherence? This is a classic problem of political theory. Politics is the domain of arguments between people on this question and the source of violent reactions against that which resists putting things into question (Meyer 2000: 216). An excess of questioning might lead to social instability but a lack of it can lead to stagnation and failure to perceive major social threats, as well as failing to accommodate demands for legitimacy by new social groups. Policy makers have a responsibility to be alert to new problems of the people and to seek solutions to them, but also to do so in a way that carries everyone along with the questioning. This is the dilemma of legitimation. Whatever the case for moderate or adventurous rule, reflective questioning is essential in politics for without it we could not articulate nor respond to social change and we would be condemned to repeat history.

But passion is not just that which absolves us of questioning. It is also the site at which accepted solutions become the object of reflection. Meyer states that pain prompts us to reflect upon accepted solutions. Where we experience pleasure we seek repetition, but ‘pain operates as a
difference which threatens the equilibrium of these orientations, put[s] them into question and brings on instability’ (2000: 249). Passion makes us conscious that the status quo is unacceptable, it puts the question of whether to make reality rhetorical or to pursue an alternative (2000: 253). Reflection is not just a sterile process of uncovering the truth underneath the passionate illusion; passion modifies our identity itself when it prompts us to reflect (2000: 254). Reflective questioning is different from unreflective questioning but they are related through passion. Identity, for Meyer, ‘is the quest itself, nourished by the alternatives which follow along in train’ (2000: 255). Policy inquiry, as a form of questioning, contributes to our collective identity by creating the community through the questioning processes we employ, the solutions we propose and the outcomes we reach, as well as those we fail to pursue, preferring instead consistent answers that we passionately but unconsciously reassert each time in order to maintain our identity in the status quo. Hence we create collective social values through political activity. As far as policy studies takes practices as a key focus of inquiry, the task is to understand how such values are expressed and renewed in particular policy processes and under what conditions we find more opportunities for reflexive questioning to change them.

Let us take another policy example. Policy concerning Indigenous Australians in recent years has been conducted in light of a national debate about Australian identity among intellectuals and the public at large (see Bonnell and Crotty 2004; Brett 2003: 183-217). Revelations
about the devastating effects of the widespread forced removal of Australian Indigenous children from their parents for adoption by white families – described by a Commonwealth Inquiry as a gross violation of human rights amounting to attempted ‘genocide’ (Dodson 2004) – provoked great public distress. The Report of the Inquiry called for a national apology (Dodson 2004). On one hand many Australians supported making an apology and reconciliation with the Indigenous population in general, thinking a formal apology an important, symbolic gesture. At the same time, many other people resented feeling guilty about the fate of Indigenous people and lashed out angrily in reaction (see the rise of the right-wing One Nation party; Brett 2003: 192-3). This sentiment was linked to working class resentment of Indigenous welfare recipients (Brett 2003: 192). The Prime Minister, John Howard, refused to make a formal apology on behalf of the nation. In part, this was consistent with his own philosophy (Brett 2003: 199). However, he also played upon this for political ends, tapping into the resentment that middle Australia held towards intellectuals who advocated an apology (Macintyre and Clark 2003). In his rhetoric he decried the ‘black armband view of history’ (borrowed from the historian Geoffrey Blainey, who argued that left-wing historians had been too critical of Australia’s colonial history) and denied that the contemporary Australian government should issue an apology to Indigenous people for past wrongs (Macintyre and Clark 2003: 3). The Howard government successfully positioned a block of working and middle class voters
against the Opposition Australian Labor Party by identifying the ‘black armband’ view with the ‘elites’ – progressive intellectuals and their political supporters in Labor. In this and other policy areas, the Howard government has rhetorically constructed Australian identity in a new way and reinforced its own political power at the same time (see Chapter Eight on rhetoric, social distance and legitimation). Political tactics play upon latent divisions among the population, inciting the passions – guilt and resentment – to support policy measures. This, in turn, is linked to the struggle for political power.

The passions are ambivalent, intimately entwined with both the desire for consistency and reconfirmation of our old values as well as the pain we experience that prompts us to question the status quo. In practice, we often act on the basis of prior experience. This is entirely sensible and efficient in many cases. Effective policymaking systems do not require continual reflection or empirical verification because they establish structures and routines while being sufficiently flexible to support all the freedom and variation of everyday life and adapt to changing circumstances. But policy systems should also permit more concerted reflection upon established problems to overcome the inertia of history. This was Dewey’s goal for politics and also that of Lasswell. In the current circumstances of continuing global conflict and looming environmental crises, such reflection is ever more necessary, even if it is painful and disrupts normal practice. Questioning, as Dewey said, is born of worries and troubling situations so we must understand the
passions as the very condition for creative questioning. Science can help us solve problems, but passion is essential for political inquiry.

This extends the problem orientation to include situations Dewey had defined as already solved by experience. The problematological view enables us to relate routine practice and reflection upon that practice, opening up great new possibilities for inquiry into policy. We cannot exclude the passions from politics because they are intertwined in the questioning process. Science is not sufficient to prompt the reflective thinking about social problems advocated by Dewey, nor does it explain how we avoid asking difficult questions. Consider the recent example in the United States in which the White House refused to allow anyone to photograph the coffins of dead American soldiers returned from Iraq (Milbank 2003). This is a rhetorical strategy to avoid the likely passions such photographs might arouse, along with the questioning of foreign policy that would likely accompany it. People know this is the government’s intention – that it is a deliberate rhetorical strategy to minimise discontent – nonetheless it seemed to be effective because the public’s passions were not provoked significantly against the tactic (at least not sufficiently to mobilise comprehensively against the government). People are seemingly willing to be deceived or seduced. They ‘passionately’ submit to the deception played upon them by not forcefully raising questions.111
There are two sides to the political equation and we cannot explain the relationship between them without passion and rhetoric. If we condemn decision makers for engaging in 'pure' rhetoric then we do not fully appreciate the power and rhetorical effect of political discourse, how it raises or quells the passions. Nor will we appreciate the dialogical nature of political discourse. The Platonic condemnation of rhetoric does not address the realities of politics, the intersubjective relationship between state and citizens mediated through rhetoric, where even exposing an attempt to deceive does not automatically rouse the majority from its acquiescence and passivity. We must bring rhetoric and the passions into view in order to understand why political mobilisation can be forestalled and why people willingly, if not entirely consciously (they 'know' without 'knowing') participate in their own deceit. Political passivity may be an inherent structural feature of culture in capitalist economies (the Frankfurt School), or a tendency of particular dominant political discourses, but it can also be a strategic goal of elite political actors. Whatever its explanation, political action is a contingent phenomenon because it is a (rhetorical) property of questioning: we can choose to explicitly question authority or remain (passionately) passive, allowing ourselves to be seduced by power and thus complicit in legitimating political choices by allowing authority to choose for us. To again cite the example of capitalism, consumer society 'seduces' rather than compels us. One might argue that power lies not always in overt force but also in the subtleties of seductive rhetoric.
Although this chapter stayed at a philosophical level, it has fleshed out the problematological orientation in important ways. Firstly, I outlined how Meyer’s tripartite conception of the *logos* provides us with a new set of terms to understand the reconstructed problem orientation. These are interpretative terms, uniting the dialectical, hermeneutical, and rhetorical aspects of reason in a singular logic of questioning. This accounts for the dynamic quality of policymaking, establishes the comprehensiveness of the interpretative view by showing how comprehension is a hermeneutic procedure, and overturns the Aristotelian division between logic and rhetoric by incorporating the rhetorico-argumentative dimension as a fundamental characteristic of rationality. Secondly, I introduced Meyer’s problematological theory of consciousness, which does two things: it shows we can understand routine practice in terms of questioning and therefore problematologically relate it to reflective, conscious inquiry; and, in doing this, it establishes a place for the passions. This is quite different from science, in which the question-answer difference is contained entirely within experience and closes itself off from rhetoric and the passions. Meyer shows that we need to thematise the passions in order to understand social action, which in turn opens up the possibility of regulating them. This takes the problem orientation beyond the ‘rational actor’ model, giving us a new logic by which to interpret social action and to seek ways to support the greater reflective questioning desired by Dewey. All
that remains is to express the final political dimension of the problematological conception of policy in the question of legitimacy.
Finally, I come to the question of legitimacy. Why pose this question at the end of my thesis on policy problems? Because the historical problematisation of policy and politics has involved an increasing problematisation of the legitimacy of policy processes, political systems and institutions (Norris 1999; Pharr and Putnam 2000). Now that the long post-war boom has ended, economic prosperity in the West is no longer guaranteed (not to mention the great economic problems facing the developing world). Governments must deal with the legitimation problems raised by persistent unemployment and business cycles that fluctuate with the rapid international flow of finance. Ensuring prosperity is a basic task for governments but this is not the only problem upon which their legitimacy hinges. A characteristic of modernity is that it produces an ever increasing volume of social issues and pressure upon the state to take responsibility for them (Heller and Fehér 1988: 115). This greater burden is linked with increased scepticism about the state's ability to solve these problems. Increasing policy knowledge, even when it is scientific, has not solved legitimation problems in the way imagined by the policy sciences, leading only to greater uncertainty and potential challenge (Hajer 2003b). Although social science is still in great demand as an argumentative tool, in policymaking it has become less authoritative. Further, the immediacy
of the media means that any problem can escalate into a legitimation problem very quickly. After years of public sector reform there is now greater scrutiny of public officials’ performance, for example, in the provisions of the New Public Management reforms (Hood 1995); legitimation questions penetrate the sanctity of the bureaucracy itself. This has more closely linked the theoretically neutral bureaucracy with the political demands of the government.

Inglehart (1999) describes the postmodern political world as characterised by declining respect for authority and increasing support for democracy. Conservative commentators in the 1970s argued that a ‘crisis of democracy’ was developing that would lead to the breakdown of civil order and make authoritative governance impossible (Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki 1975). Alternatively, others argue that extending political participation through ‘deliberative democracy’ will create a more vigorous democratic political culture and at the same time legitimate policymaking (see, for example, Dryzek 2000). While Western democracies may not have experienced a legitimation crisis, the legitimation ‘problems’ described by Habermas (1976) still pose difficulties.\textsuperscript{113} Even where neoliberal reformist governments have pared back the welfare state, the public continues to rely upon the state to take responsibility for problems and the legitimacy of governments is more frequently in question.
Legitimation has similarly become problematic in policymaking. Hajer notes that with the reduced authority of contemporary institutions and the growing importance of networks across territories and cultures, we must consider anew the legitimacy of policy interventions; ‘in the new political order formally legitimate decisions are questioned by stakeholders from outside the polity who feel they have a legitimate say themselves’ (2003b: 183). In the new institutional context, modern states must share the exercise of policymaking with actors outside the state while still attempting to exercise ultimate control (Atkinson and Coleman 1992: 155). Governments must continually keep an eye on the legitimacy of their authority throughout their term of office, otherwise the proliferation of interests in pluralist democracies can fragment the basis of a government’s support. Formal, institutionally-warranted legitimacy is not enough to guarantee the consent of the public, which uses informal means as well as recourse to institutional mechanisms to challenge policy decisions. Informal reasoning, argumentation, becomes necessary for treating legitimation questions, i.e., both challenging and securing legitimacy is rhetorical. The question of legitimacy permeates every policy problem. Institutional arrangements are important but we must look beyond these to incorporate the informal mechanisms of political culture within the frame of policy theory.

The process of legitimation is, therefore, a question for policy theory. The task has already been put by Hajer; ‘the issue of
legitimacy...has to be related to the process of policy making as there might not be the possibility to refer to the “umbrella” of formal political institutions for legitimacy’ (2003b: 191). In light of this new political order, says Hajer, we should consider the question of legitimacy in regard to Lasswell’s ideal of a policy science of democracy, which requires us to rethink the ‘policy orientation’ and the ‘problem orientation’ as well (2003b: 181, 189). Legitimacy is now in question so we can consider it through the reconstructed problem orientation in terms of questioning.

The question of legitimacy has been fundamental for political theory since the Athenians executed Socrates for asking too many questions and Plato proposed a philosophers’ dictatorship in response. Many political theorists have referred to the ‘question’ of legitimacy and legitimation ‘problems’ (see, for example, Connolly 1987: 74; Habermas 1976; Lipset 1960: 80). Despite the prevalence of questioning in political theory about legitimacy, no-one has yet posed the question of legitimacy as a question. With democracies more prevalent today, the activities of new social movements and declining respect for traditional authority and institutions, the legitimacy of politics and policy has been put into question to a greater degree. Even the authority of science has been problematised. The historical conditions now exist for us to think of legitimation as a question, i.e., in terms of questioning as such. More fundamentally than historical circumstances, it has not been possible to
think of legitimation in this way because we have not had a philosophy of questioning available to us until now. We can now approach the question of legitimacy and policy problematologically. Again, Hajer’s description of the historical situation is apt: ‘Uncertainty, then, is the inevitable by-product of ever more complex interventions in nature...The recognition of what we may call “certain uncertainty” could be the basis for a different approach’ (2003b: 186). What is ‘certain uncertainty’ if not the affirmation of problematicity and therefore a problematological response?

While it is not possible here to deal with the question of legitimacy in the scope it deserves, in this final chapter I approach it in terms of questioning. Firstly, I propose that the relationship between state and society is problematological. I do this by returning to familiar ground with Dewey and his discussion of the problem of government. I link policy problems with the problem of maintaining a check upon the power of the state. I then discuss the correlate of this problem, the ability of non-state actors to move legitimation questions through political mobilisation. I reconceptualise the ‘problem orientation’ as a synthesis of policy and legitimation questions. In the second section, I discuss the dimension of legitimacy that arises directly from discourse itself. Thirdly, I elaborate upon these aspects of legitimation as they play out in the strategic practices of policymaking. Finally, I consider the implications of the problematological view of legitimacy for democratic
policy deliberation and I reflect upon the future contribution of problematological policy inquiry to social and political theory.

1. State and society: the problem of government

For many of our problems we do not need the state. We simply act on our own to solve them. However, a great many social problems are either dealt with by the state or regulated by public policy in some way. If we think of how the state maintains a climate of law and order, ensures the market operates effectively, and provides basic public infrastructure, we appreciate how few problems are made without some policy at least setting the context for social action. Even if the state does not deal with a problem entirely through its own institutions – when it delegates responsibility to non-state actors and institutions instead (e.g. the market) – it is the still the state that bears responsibility for the problem as the coordinating actor. To understand policy, therefore, we must consider the relationship between state and society. While we could draw on the ideas of many philosophers and political scientists, it is worthwhile returning to the origins of our own field in Dewey because he framed his discussion of government as a ‘problem’.

i. State and society: the ‘political difference’

Our collective problems are complex. Because we disagree about them we refer them to a higher authority, the state, which deals with
problems on behalf of the citizenry. Public policy is the treatment of collective problems via the state. State and society are different. Coicaud describes this as the ‘political differentiation’ between the governors and the governed (2002: 26). The logic of legitimacy rests upon this differentiation (2002: 26). Dewey wrote that states do not simply exist but are ‘created’ by the public; creating a state is one of the key problems of human beings living in association (1927: 32). The problems of organising representation of the people and regulating their associations through law and political institutions follow no a priori rule of logic (Dewey 1927: 57). We always have a choice about them, therefore the arrangement of the state poses a question.

Now, if we consider state and civil society to be different ontologically, then we face the dilemma of drawing artificial boundaries between them. This reifies both entities and makes it impossible to theorise the subtle influences each has on the other. The state is a social phenomenon; in reality, state and society are intertwined. But then how are we to understand their differentiation? If we think in terms of questioning we can deal with this difficulty. Dewey said we ‘create’ the state. What is a creative act? For both Meyer and Dewey, knowledge proceeds through inquiry. But for Meyer questioning is constitutive; it is a creative act that constructs the world as a response so that we may gain knowledge about it. By a process of questioning, the public creates the state and its institutions to deal with the problems posed by our collective life. The state is a general response to a range of public
problems. Law and public institutions are mechanisms by which we deal with these problems. The state thus forms a partial answer to the problems of the public. Being put in question, the state has a responsibility to answer.

State and society stand in a relationship defined by the logic of question and answer; it is a dialectic created and sustained by questioning. The difference between state and society, therefore, is problematological. The state is a problematological answer to public problems, a first stage that permits us to deal with the complex problems of collective life. The state cannot be ontologically different from the society that created it and that is a part of it. Rather, it arises as a response to a questioning process that makes it different from civil society, but also a product of it and therefore part of it. The creation of the public, the community of inquirers, simultaneously emerges from this differentiation as well. By asserting their difference we affirm the identity of each in relation to the other. State and society are co-creations, standing in a question-answer dialectical relationship through political activity. Just as the public can weaken or strengthen the state, the state can enhance or restrict the role and functioning of civil society.

What is the logic of this relationship? The public creates the state as a partial answer to its collective problems. Because it is an answer – it is apocritical – the state has autonomy. The autonomy of the state stems from its ‘answerhood’, i.e., its independence from civil society. The
public, to varying degrees, authorises the state to consider social problems and invests it with powers to enact responses to them. However, the state is not entirely autonomous from the public since it is not the sole answer to all political questions, at least not in a democracy.\textsuperscript{116} Because it is a partial answer, the state is also a problematological entity. Giving the state authority to treat problems poses the question – via the problematological effect – of its legitimate use of that authority. That is, we create the state as a general answer to collective problems, which poses the question, for us, of the activities of the state. The public inquires into the state’s responses to problems. Various mechanisms enable the public to question the policy decisions and processes of the state. For example, the public elects members of parliament and scrutinises government through parliamentary debate and discussion in the public sphere. Further, the public and the state itself can reflect upon the nature of the state and amend its powers.

The power of the state and the possibility for changing it stem from its problematological nature. Because they stand in a problematological relationship, the relations between state and society are defined by the tripartite characteristics of the problematological logos; dialectic, hermeneutics, and rhetoric. Firstly, state and society interact dialectically, each changing the nature of the other. This is not a propositional relationship, in which two distinct entities clash or where one overcomes the other (aufhebung). It is a problematological
relationship defined by questioning. Furthermore, the dialectic between them does not follow an inexorable historical logic of necessity. Because they are defined by questioning, their interaction is contingent. Each policy problem posed and responded to by the state impacts upon society. The community of inquirers in civil society is changed by policymaking. The community also debates problems and the state’s policy responses to them, and considers whether the state might be changed for the better in light of its decisions. In the current historical climate institutional arrangements of all kinds – particularly the welfare state and the regulation of the global economy – have been called into question, so institutional forms cannot be taken for granted as ossified, automatic mechanisms for dealing with problems. Instead, we see a greater dialectical interaction between state and society as we question the status quo, seeking new institutional forms to deal with new social questions.¹¹⁷

Secondly, the hermeneutic aspect of the logos applies to the state-society difference. Following on from the problematisation of established political institutions, public policy is not entirely prescribed in legislation or other institutional rules. Recent reforms have seen policymaking decentralised from the state to networks of governance in which many players participate, including some outside the state (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003b). Theoretically, we know from interpretative theory that the meaning of policymaking cannot be restricted to a literal
interpretation of the law and pronouncements of the government. Policy has meaning far beyond problem solving. The public *hermeneutically* interprets the actions of the state, questioning its intentions and the symbolic meaning of its decisions. In a more pluralist society with a larger array of social cleavages and different constructions of identity, even within nations the context for these interpretations varies significantly. Even from the state’s point of view policy analysis is a hermeneutic activity around complex problems (Dryzek 1982). Therefore politics is often a contest over the meaning of policy problems that involves mobilising others in support of particular interpretations. For example, does the war in Iraq signify American tyranny, the guarantee of an affordable oil supply, protection against terrorism, or the liberation of the Iraqis?

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the relationship between state and society is *rhetorical*. Each engages in argumentation with the other, putting each other in question in turn. The public tries to persuade the state to acknowledge certain problems and take action upon them, while the state attempts to persuade the public of the rightness of its policies. In many cases, the state has the power to resolve questions by force. But even then it must justify itself. This can be open and sincere communication or it can be manipulative discourse. The state has greater power so it presents more dangers. However, members of the public can also manipulate the state for negative ends,
for example by allowing themselves to be seduced by populist rhetoric. Also present in this relationship is the figurative, non-argumentative aspect of rhetoric, where policymaking serves as a larger narrative the state constructs about itself and our identity as a community, a race, a nation and a global society.

Having established the rhetorical relationship between state and society, we can thematise the link between Dewey’s twin concerns – the problems of the public and the problem of government – as rhetorical. Policy problems involve two related questions; the policy question and the question of legitimacy. What is the relationship between these two questions? The relationship between an explicit question and a different, implied question, says Michel Meyer, is argumentative:

When two questions are at stake, as in the case of presuppositions where a second question is indirectly (implicitly) answered, in the act of directly answering the first question we have a reason or an argument located in the relationship between the two questions. Broadly speaking, this relationship delimits the field of argumentation (Meyer 1983: 70).

Meyer gives the example of the problem of going out for a walk (1983: 69). While the statement ‘The weather is fine’ merely gives information about the weather, it is also an argument pertaining to the question of going for a walk because it serves as a solution to this implied question. That is:

An argument is a reason to opt for a certain answer or solution to a question or problem other than the direct question which the argument serves to answer. In other words, argumentation is a problematological notion dealing with implied questions. It relates the explicit to the implicit (1983: 69).
The state responds to policy problems. In doing so, it *implies* that the question of its legitimacy is also solved. That is, the policy decisions of the state are arguments for the state’s legitimacy. Good policymaking is a reason – an argument – for a government’s right to govern. The state attempts to *persuade* the public of its legitimacy via its policymaking.\textsuperscript{118}

There is argumentation, therefore, in every policy inquiry, not just in the complex or controversial problems.

At a meta-level of the dialectical interplay between state and society is a question about the extent of the state. How much should it intervene in civil society? What should be its range of responsibilities? What are its obligations towards the citizenry? And, of course, the other side of the coin; what are citizens’ obligations to the state? The historical study of institutions tells us much about the answers to these questions in different countries. Institutions are the results of previous answers to these questions, solidified in law. This is why the most heated political contests occur over changes to institutional forms; the very rules that structure policymaking and the state-society difference. Political culture is just as important. Social processes generate norms that structure approaches to problems. They also generate social cleavages that feed into politics through political organisations, for example, political parties and the church. However, neither institutional nor cultural responses are resolved into fixed, unchanging forms. They are answers that solidify through usage, however they are problematological because we can, and do, question them. Even in the courts, where answers to judicial
questions are highly regulated, each decision re-establishes or modifies the law, which changes incrementally. Through the parliament we can make more radical changes to institutional forms and still more radical changes through constitutional referenda. We *argue* about the appropriate nature of the state through the decisions it makes. We *interpret* the meaning of aggregated policy and process in terms of larger questions of citizenship, democracy and justice.

**ii. The problem of government**

What is the key issue in the question of legitimacy? Dewey notes that creating a state poses another problem. In giving the state the power to deal with public problems, the public loses some control. Public officials have the opportunity to subvert their authority for private ends and class interests rather than for solving public problems (Dewey 1927: 81). Here, the problem ‘is that of transforming the action of such [individual] hands so that it will be animated by regard for social ends’ (1927: 82). This gives rise to the ‘primary problem of the public: to achieve such recognition of itself as will give it weight in the selection of official representatives and in the definition of their responsibilities and rights’ (1927: 77). Political mechanisms that regulate the selection and behaviour of public officials seek, firstly, to mitigate against ‘the possession of rule by accidental and irrelevant factors’ and, secondly, to ‘place an effort to counteract the tendency to employ political power to
serve private instead of public ends’ (1927: 83). Dewey states the problem as follows:

The essential problem of government reduces itself to this: What arrangements will prevent rulers from advancing their own interests at the expense of the ruled? Or, in positive terms, by what political means shall the interests of the governors be identified with those of the governed? (1927: 93).

Each decision made by the state corresponds with the related question of whether the state acted legitimately; in accordance with the public interest.¹¹⁹

The problematological effect invoked by creating the state also poses the question of the state’s powers. Not all political actors agree upon the inherited structure of the state. Those that see themselves as the losers from a decision can question it, or the process by which it was reached. They can mobilise forces to challenge the decision at an election, in the parliament, or in the courts. Dewey noted that, for Mill, the answer to the problem of government was frequent popular elections (1927: 93). Elections check the actions of officials through their fear of being held to account at the polling booth. But Dewey knew this was not enough. An active, democratic community of inquirers is necessary for thorough policymaking and to keep the state accountable to the public interest. Even when a policy process is formally legitimated by the parliament through a government’s electoral mandate, people can pursue informal means such as a media campaign or various forms of public protest. Workers can strike, employers can withdraw capital, citizens can write letters to newspapers. There are many mechanisms to
raise questions of the validity of the actions of authorities and to resolve these questions one way or another.

Policymaking is a dual questioning process; the public treats questions by creating a state that simultaneously poses the question of the power of that state. Therefore we must reconstruct the ‘problem orientation’ by concluding that all policy problems involve two problems; the policy problem and the problem of legitimacy. The state is a problematological answer to collective public problems; it is autonomous, and therefore has power because it is the ‘answerer’. To varying degrees, the public authorises the state to take charge of its concerns; to acknowledge problems as policy problems; to decide their order on the agenda; and to initiate progress towards a solution. Legitimation problems arise for the state from public questioning of the state’s treatment of public problems. The first question is the policy question and the second, which emerges out of it, is the question of legitimacy. The public puts the state’s actions into question via the question of legitimacy.

This last point is important. When the public disputes a policy decision, this not only involves arguing an alternative solution but forcing a challenge to the legitimacy of the government that enacted it. Policy argumentation is pursued through the question of legitimacy. The possibility of withdrawing legitimacy encourages the state to heed public concerns. The problematicity of a policy largely depends on the ability of
its opponents to raise a threat to the legitimacy of the government (or at least to one of its agencies) in regard to the problem. Conversely, policies we might think are highly controversial can be passed without great debate; perhaps because the public is inattentive; or because the decision taps into the interests of powerful stakeholders and key electoral constituencies that approve of the policy and can guarantee the legitimacy of the government that advocates it. Legitimating policy is rarely straightforward and often requires extensive persuasion. The key point is that policy argumentation pertains to legitimation questions as much as to the policy problem itself. Furthermore, these questions are linked by a rhetorical logic that is both argumentative and figurative (in that the answer to one question implies the answer to another).

**iii. Mobilisation and legitimacy**

Politics is a collective enterprise, so legitimation is at least a two-way equation. Legitimation questions must be addressed by the state which the public ultimately decides upon through elections. Policy makers must legitimise their rule in the face of those whose cooperation, acquiescence or defeat is necessary to maintain it. These might be other agencies of the state, powerful non-state organisations or the mass of voters. If we commence from the fact that states already hold considerable political power, to challenge their legitimacy requires countering forces to *mobilise* the people, either through institutional means, such as elections, or via less formal means, such as protest.
movements or developing advocacy coalitions (see Sabatier 1993; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999). Political mobilisation pertains directly to the question of legitimacy because legitimation is grounded in the mass of the people. If they move against a state decision then the legitimacy of the state is literally put in question. When faced with an intransigent government, people who disagree with a policy decision can raise an objection by arguing the merits of an alternative. However, they only effectively challenge it by mobilising collective forces against the legitimacy of the state (or at least by their potential to do so). In putting the state’s legitimacy in question, they also put the policy in question. This is why commentators evaluate policy with an eye to the next election, to a constitutional court’s interpretation of new legislation or to the reaction of the market.

While the ‘political difference’ establishes the identity of state and society, in practice these are not unitary wholes. Unless the entire state apparatus is under threat, individuals or groups usually mobilise around one issue and the arms of the state that deal with it. Political mobilisation adapts to the institutional arrangements of a state and the individuals that occupy key positions of responsibility. Many actors compete for the government’s attention. Some groups support a government’s view, others argue against it. For complex problems there are numerous positions with many coalitions among the stakeholders. Power and influence is also distributed unevenly among the stakeholders. The ability to make one’s concerns heard and garner
enough support to make the government listen and act in response to such concerns varies considerably. Mobilising an effective political challenge is especially difficult for those on the margins of society who lack sufficient material resources and knowledge of specialised policy discourses. Such individuals and groups have little power to question the legitimacy of authorities that ignore or suppress their concerns. The treatment of a policy problem is intimately linked to the nature and effectiveness of mobilisation around the problem. Some problems impact on the legitimacy of the state more than others. Argumentation around a problem is not separate from political mobilisation but is expressed through it. That is, mobilisation implies a view of the legitimacy of the state. Furthermore, mobilisation and its effects are pertinent throughout the policy process. The contest for legitimacy interacts with policy inquiry at every stage of the policy process.

Social movements are important in producing major policy change. They bring new issues to the political agenda by mobilising people and resources in support of new problematisations. They also challenge established processes for treating problems. For example, the green movement aims for a policy process that is democratic, participatory and non-instrumental, as much as advocating for outcomes that benefit the environment (see Torgerson 1999). What is not often appreciated is the importance of their problematising role. If we consider politics to be about solutions then we cannot understand
the full dimensions of social movements, which often struggle for years before affecting government policy. However, by appreciating their role as problem setters we see that social movements are creative in posing new political questions through mobilisation. We should evaluate their success by how well they mobilise to call the legitimacy of prevailing ideas into question and establish an alternative problem frame.

The problematological view demonstrates the importance of an active community of inquirers by placing before it the dual questions of policy and legitimacy. The public can accede to authority, allowing the question of the state’s legitimacy to be solved by default, or it can actively question that authority. If we are to support the vigorous democracy Dewey envisaged, understanding the links between institutional forms and political culture and how they impact on policy processes is an important question for policy studies. Much of the stability of political regimes arises from the difficulty of mounting challenges to established authority. In mobilising around a problem, people put in question the government’s right to govern, which is otherwise institutionally guaranteed. To effectively mobilise a legitimization challenge, even on a small scale, activists must excite the passions to prompt questioning of the status quo. As I noted in the previous chapter, people desire stability and are often persuaded by the argument from authority. People have a passionate desire to maintain trust in authority for it avoids the discomfit induced by questioning.
Connolly noted that this desire for collective self-deception about authority is recognised by politicians who seek to manipulate the public. This is exemplified in Nixon’s recorded comment to Haldeman as the evidence of his corrupt conduct in the Watergate hearings came to light; “They want to believe, that is the point isn’t it?” (Nixon, in Connolly 1987: 76). To revisit an example I raised in Chapter Four, recent experience in the United States and Australia regarding the ‘weapons of mass destruction’ argument for waging war against Iraq suggests that, for many people, realising that a government has made a major mistake and possibly exaggerated its interpretation of the evidence (to offer a generous interpretation) is not enough for them to immediately declare the legitimacy of that government at an end. However much we might condemn it, rhetoric intervenes in the equation between interpreting the facts and the policy response. How much questioning is there in politics today and how effective are the mechanisms by which we call the legitimacy of governments to account? To make a question of legitimacy ‘stick’ requires mobilising effectively against authority, something which is rarely easy or quickly realised. Indeed, questioning authority poses its own risks. It is confronting and opens oneself to questioning or attack in return. Trade unions, and ethnic and religious minorities everywhere would attest to the consequences of mobilising against political power. The problem of government cannot be solved apodictically but it can repeatedly be questioned.
iv. The problem orientation as a synthesis of questions

Every policy is an answer that responds to a problem and resolves – if only temporarily – the question of legitimacy as well, thus reaffirming the political difference. In doing so it binds the community together in collective responsibility for the decision. For the policy sciences, the problem orientation was entirely defined by experience (scientifically/pragmatically; see my discussion in Chapters One and Two). In the problematological view, policymaking is a political synthesis of questions. Despite the contingency of its discourse, politics produces apocritical answers by securing policymaking in the resolution of legitimation questions. In politics, establishing legitimacy is as important as solving problems because we require some level of social order. Making a decision is sometimes as important as making the best decision because it draws together otherwise conflicting interests in the process. Scientific answering is not dialogical (even if debates about scientific theories are) and cannot perform this function. Certainly, many policies may not receive universal support. The institutional mechanisms of resolution in these cases are not based on consensus; the state has the right to use force to implement its decisions (Weber 1948). Nonetheless, each new policy decision, or each re-enactment of an existing policy, re-establishes or renews the political difference and the collective responsibility expressed therein. Policy decisions thus create the character of the state and the character of the society for which the state makes decisions. There might be those who disagree...
with decisions and continue to question them. However, they can do this while still being implicated in the resolution of the related question of state and society, expressed indirectly through the legitimation of the state.\textsuperscript{120}

Beyond its effect upon existence (as Dewey defined it), policymaking has an additional, indirect (figurative) effect that contributes to the identity of both state and society. Policy decisions stand for a community, affecting how it sees itself and how others see it. For example, the welfare state changes society by redistributing income among the population. The relative proportion of resources that flow to different sections of society affects the material distribution of wealth. More than this, these proportional allocations and the mechanisms by which the state makes them impart a figurative meaning that contributes to class and national identity. Hence we see differences between social classes in different types of welfare states and weaker or stronger support for state intervention in the economy (see Esping-Anderson 1990). In other words, policy creates meaning as much as it distributes resources. Accrued policy decisions construct narratives that reflect the ideological outlook of the state. Hence we speak of the ‘character’ of a government and of a nation. These narratives both respond to and construct social norms.

Within the policy sciences, legitimation has been treated separately from day to day policymaking, as though politics could be
separated from policy. Policy science sought to eliminate politics by putting the entire burden of justification on the empirical, or practical, verification of policy solutions. However, in politics, empirically verifying results is not enough. Ultimately, decisions are grounded in the process of legitimation, from coercion to consensus. The only way to quarantine the 'rational' view from politics would be to think of policy as a neutral stage that proceeds from the point where the political system established the legitimacy of institutions and mandated the decisions of a parliament, after which the government could function without contest, i.e., separating politics from policy, as I discussed in Chapter Three. To a certain degree, a parliamentary majority does guarantee enough authority to govern. But even though the question of legitimacy might not be explicitly raised it is always implicitly in question for every person charged with public authority. As with other questions, there is a difference between political discourse when legitimation is only implicitly in question and when governments face an explicit challenge, such as an election or vote of no confidence in parliament. Political systems vary according to the institutional forms that support questioning and the vibrancy of the public sphere.

Policymaking can employ scientific results and even utilise scientific techniques. However, this does not make it scientific. Science treats problems by reducing all answering to empirical justification. Public policymaking treats collective problems via the state which is
authorised to define the problems and seek their resolution. These resolutions do not have their own validity but require the assent of the public, at least to the power of the state as it is exercised. Heclo points out that the policy process is political because one group of people acts on behalf of others (in Skocpol 1985: 11). In other words, policymaking deals with social problems through political mechanisms. Even were we to impose a strict scientific methodology upon political institutions, the political dimension would remain in the necessity to legitimate decisions collectively, no matter how one might validate them empirically. Policymaking is a different questioning process than that of science because it deals with collective problems. Furthermore, in politics, considering the best course of action involves a high degree of problematicity, so we require deliberative rhetoric to debate political questions. What is important in this process are the collective relations between people. Policy problems do pertain to the concrete problems of experience but these problems mean different things to different questioners, all of whom have a right to their opinion (even though we put limits on how they can express dissent). The politics of policy is contained in the rhetorical linkage between the two questions, mediated through formal institutions and non-formal political action. Institutional structures are important but they are insufficient for an epistemological framework. To understand the politics of policy requires a problematological framework that expresses the problematicity of political life.
Policy can appear to be non-political because policy discourse does not always pose explicit questions about the legitimacy of public officials, as in election campaigns. Decision makers offer rational arguments for their views towards a problem rather than for their own legitimation concerns. Governments construct rational explanations for decisions as though legitimacy is not their main goal. After all, to raise this question (outside of an election campaign) would legitimise it as a question and suggest the alternative; that the government was not legitimate. Instead, attention is confined to the problem itself. How policy is devised with legitimation in mind then becomes the subject of further interpretation and argumentation for the public, commentators and scholars. To this end, the doctrine of public service and Executive (Cabinet) confidentiality are important legitimating devices that permit the ‘rational’ transformation of politically motivated decisions by keeping political debates secret. Traditional problem solving conceptions of policymaking suppose that the answer to the question of legitimacy is apodictic under ideal conditions. Here, fixed institutional forms and scientific methods would construct perfectly rational decisions that are also indubitably legitimate. In reality, the rational model is a rhetorical construction supported by institutional mechanisms and ideological discourse. The legitimacy of the state is implicated in even the mundane administrative routines of government departments.
Whatever its mechanisms, the question we must incorporate within the problematological reconstruction of the ‘problem orientation’ is the question of legitimacy. Far from being a compromise upon pure, problem solving rationality, legitimation mechanisms spur policy makers to consider the public’s concerns. Why should governments care about one problem over another? Why should they pay heed to public concerns once in power? Because the question of legitimacy must be answered. This question is the engine of the policy process, focusing the state on relevant problems by keeping it in check through questioning. Experience alone is not enough to define and order public problems because these are also matters for debate. Even a state composed entirely of scientists could not resolve these questions scientifically. Therefore we link the power of policy makers to accountability mechanisms which limit their actions, direct them towards public concerns and require them to justify themselves. This linkage is not mechanical but continually poses a question for us. Of course, this means that there is no unique method for conducting policymaking. Furthermore, neither the state nor the public nor policy scientists are immune from ignoring important, long-term problems in favour of the immediate concerns of the day, a trend which Lasswell envisioned the policy sciences running against (1951a: 8; see Chapter Two). Scientists can pursue financial reward, notoriety or power as much as the most manipulative political actor. Only the vigorous political questioning of the legitimacy of the state and the knowledge it employs can keep its
attention focused on the most important problems in a productive manner. Hence the degree to which legitimacy is problematised through institutional arrangements and public sphere political action also affects the short- or long-term focus of the state.

2. Legitimacy and discourse

The relationship between state and society constitutes one dimension of political legitimation. It pertains largely to the structure of institutions, electoral systems and social cleavages; the domains of traditional political science and political sociology. However, politics cannot be reduced to the study of political institutions because it is grounded in public problems and discourse around those problems. A second dimension of legitimation emerges directly from discourse itself. This is a theme of recent inquiry in policy studies and the social sciences; the examination of discourses or narratives. This is linked to institutional legitimation because discourse that propounds a particular ideology also serves as an argument to support a Government or elect an Opposition. However, it also extends beyond this to the legitimation of ideas in general.

Understanding the discursive construction of meaning requires rhetoric. However, as I noted in Chapter Four, rhetoric has suffered because Plato condemned it as sophistry. Meyer (1996) notes that a correlate of Plato’s debasement of rhetoric in favour of apodictic
discourse is that rhetoric has remained a vague concept, amenable to any number of competing, but not mutually exclusive, definitions. It has been thought of variously as; to persuade and convince towards agreement; to please, seduce or manipulate; to convey the plausible, probable or opinion; to suggest the implicit via the explicit; to convey figurative meaning to create stories; to make use of figurative, literary language; and to reveal a speaker’s or writer’s intentions (1996: 229-30). Many of these definitions cross over. Of particular import for considering narratives and legitimation is the confusion between the literary and argumentative moments of rhetoric.

Meyer argues that all these various definitions do share a common, underlying structure. In rhetoric, one speaker positions herself towards another in regard to a question about which there is always the possibility for opposition, no matter what the argument (1996: 333). Consequently, Meyer provides a general definition of rhetoric as the negotiation of the distance between subjects in regard to a question or problem (1996: 334). All the qualities of rhetoric noted above can be articulated through this common underlying structure of the relationship between subjects articulated through language or other forms of communication (1996: 333-4). Redefining rhetoric in terms of problematicity rescues it from its historical condemnation because it speaks ‘to the problematicity affecting the human condition, in its passions as much as in its reason and its discourse’ (1996: 337). I do
not extend on this article of Meyer’s at great length in the following passage, however I will outline the elements of it that pertain to legitimation.

Given the current circumstances of widespread historical problematisation, we cannot presume problems to be widely agreed upon. Politics is characterised by deliberation under significant contingency rather than rational problem solving. When a question is at stake between people, questions are not pre-defined by experience nor some other reductor of questioning. Indeed, we might even wish to dispute that there is a question to face at all (for example, when policy makers reject problems as problems). So, we can question the existence of a fact itself along with how we define that fact. Furthermore, because rhetoric speaks to the distance between people, there is also the question of how one interlocutor perceives the right of the other to raise a question.

Meyer’s conception of discourse is very different to the problem solving view, which presumes one or all of these questions resolved. He identifies three questions at work in any particular question (1996: 344). Firstly, is the question of the question itself; is it legitimate? Secondly, is the question of the fact; whether we agree that the thing in question exists. Thirdly, is the nature of the fact; its qualification or predicate. Now, Meyer notes that classical rhetoric isolates each of these moments into separate discursive genres. The various definitions of rhetoric
privileged only one of these aspects according to how the theorists concerned thought of argumentation (1996: 351). The first type of argumentation, the Aristotelian tradition (including its contemporary versions in Toulmin and Perelman), focuses on the question of factualisation; it asks if a proposition is ‘true’, if an event has occurred (1996: 351). The second type focuses on qualification and deals with the rhetoric of meaning, figures, and interpretation (1996: 351). The third conception of argumentation (see, for example, Habermas) deals with the utterance itself, the meta-level moral and ethical norms which justify a discourse (1996: 352). Here the content is less important than the relationship between the communicators which lies behind it. It concerns the legitimacy of the argumentative norms the speaker invokes, the legitimacy of her right to speak (1996: 351-2).

The main point Meyer makes is that we should not isolate these interrogative moments. In policymaking, for example, people employ language as rational persuasion intended to reach agreement. In doing so, the speaker might attempt to seduce the audience by appealing to their interests and by using language that pleases them. This language might well be figurative, making use of metaphors and other devices. She might also refrain from stating everything explicitly, appealing instead to implicit norms shared by the audience. The policy literature discusses all these elements of discourse (see Chapter Four), so it would
be a partial and impoverished definition of rhetoric that highlighted only one of them.

Meyer discusses how the classical systematic definitions of rhetoric cannot be separated because all these features of language intertwine; from invention through to action; *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*; and the deliberative, forensic and epidictic genres (1996). This combination of perspectives arises because ‘language users, (interlocutors) present themselves to others according to a variable distance which they attempt to negotiate, a distance given by a question’ (1996: 340). Dialogical discourse upon a question places the speaker in question as well. The question of her right to pose the question arises along with the question itself. Because rhetoric deals with problems, her interlocutor can call her discourse into question by challenging the conceptualisation of the fact, the qualification of the fact, the norms implied by her discourse or the character of the speaker herself. Justifying one’s legitimacy, Meyer points out, ‘involves arguments (*logos*) as well as recognizing the place of the other (*pathos*) whom we are trying to please (in order to be accepted) or manipulate (*ethos*)’ (1996: 340).

While noting that each should not be completely separated from the other, Meyer draws a continuum of rhetorical genres based on the degree of problematicity involved. What is relevant here is to consider the case most relevant for policymaking, deliberation, where there is a great deal of problematicity. Meyer notes that *pathos* is more at work in
the deliberative rhetorical genre because of the uncertainty of politics (1996: 349). Rhetoric establishes identity and is persuasive in that the audience feels closer to the decision maker and is more likely to give her the benefit of the doubt. Alternatively, it may alienate others and establish a greater social distance. Mobilising supporters to political action, particularly, requires *pathos*. To repeat the example I cited in Chapter Seven, the Bush administration forestalled impassioned anti-war mobilisation by banning photographs of the coffins of American soldiers (Milbank 2003). In contrast, passionate feelings about nature motivate Australian environmentalists who chain themselves to trees to protect forests from logging (see, for example, Cohen 1996). As a mode of problematisation, mobilisation is driven by passionate discourse. In highly problematic situations, the character of the speaker, her *ethos*, is also determinative; her institutionally-sanctioned authority legitimates her discourse. For example, specialists in a given field project authority (Meyer 1996: 342), as do officials holding positions in institutions. As I noted in Chapter Seven, the argument from authority carries significant weight.

Because the question of legitimacy is contained within each communicative utterance, it extends to each individual actor involved in the policy process. Each individual who is called on by others must justify herself in response. Public officials must fulfil the requirements of their position to establish their legitimacy in respect of bureaucratic
rules, from the customer service officer who responds to a client’s telephone call, to the Minister answering questions in parliament. Members of the public themselves are put in question by state policies and they must respond. Each individual or organisation approaches a problem from their own contexts and requirements for legitimation. Various institutional and cultural mechanisms link the legitimacy of their position to the larger question of the legitimacy of the state and discursive ideologies. Policymaking is not just linguistic or practical problem solving but a political construction involving many intersecting locations and discursive practices (Gottweis 2003: 257). All these aspects of knowledge and power link together to rhetorically construct the social distance between the governors and the governed, the norms contained within the practice of governance, and the distance between citizens subject to these mechanisms.

The policy narratives of political discourse rhetorically construct social similarities and differences. Often, this involves an ideological closure that both establishes and justifies a normative stance towards a problem. A political ideology ‘is a body of ideas developed for a specific purpose: the legitimation or undermining of a socio-political order’ (Meyer, 1983: 87). Ideologies are a system of ideas that serve as a principle, but one that must remain beyond questioning because ideologies cannot justify themselves according to their own criteria, i.e. reflexively (1983: 96). Ideologies are effective because they conceal their
ideological nature by closing off questioning, ensuring that their credibility remains beyond challenge (1983: 96). An ideology establishes closure by providing an answer to any question that challenges it, even explaining contrary facts within its own system of ideas (1983: 96). That is, an ideology is a political legitimation system that disguises its own nature by being repressed within other ideas which validate it (1983: 96-8). So, it can explain both the occurrence and non-occurrence of an event (A and not-A) consistently within the one set of ideas. For example, neoliberal reforms to the economy, such as submitting public sector agencies to market rules and removing trade barriers, serve as an explanation for economic success in countries that pursued the reforms (e.g. Australia), as well as an explanation for their failure in other countries (e.g. Argentina), because they were not implemented enough. Neoliberal ideology renders arguments against reform as entirely ‘out-of-the-question’. Dillon describes policymaking as a paradigmatic activity that deploys symbolic representations of reality to propagate a given intellectual or social order (1976). Critical policy analysis, therefore, has a part to play in posing questions that unmask the ideological effects of prevailing ideas. Questioning ideologies makes their closed nature explicit since ideologies only serve their legitimating function when they remain unchallenged (Meyer 1983: 97).

Questioning is the enemy of ideologues because it makes explicit the ideological nature of their discourse, revealing its legitimating effects
and political consequences. Meyer cites the examples of Socrates and Galileo who both questioned the ideologies of their day and revealed them to be problematic (1983: 97). More recently critical theory, in particular the Frankfurt School, sought to (ideologically) expose the ideology and effects of capitalism to undermine its legitimacy and pave the way for new principles of social organisation. Questioning reveals the implicit in the explicit and shows it to be only partial because there is always an alternative interpretation. Questioning introduces a reflexivity that ideological principles cannot sustain. Important political consequences follow from Meyer’s principle of questioning – we can always show that, at heart, any claim to knowledge is problematic. A task of critical policy scholarship should be to question power by explicating the ideologies that legitimate policy discourse.

3. Legitimacy and the policy process: the practice of power

Policymaking is rarely simple or straightforward. Incorporating the question of legitimacy into the problem orientation enables us to account for a range of political strategies that lie outside the problem solving model. Problematology reveals a more nuanced picture of political discourse by illuminating the joint rhetorical treatment of policy problems and legitimation problems. This is essential if we are to develop policy studies as a critical mode of thought that questions
power. I now outline some ways in which governments deal with these twin questions of legitimacy and policy.

Governments have recourse to a range of strategies that deal with the legitimation questions presented to them in the course of policy deliberation. The greatest risk to the legitimacy of governments is for them to do nothing at all about a problem. Once a policy problem is on the political landscape demands for action will increase and the legitimacy of the government will be called into question if it fails to respond. If the government does nothing it risks being seen as having no solution and therefore appearing either incompetent or to be ignoring public concerns. It is important that a government does something about a problem in order to forestall, if not settle, the question of its legitimacy; in the first instance, a solution is more needed than the solution. Problems demand at least a problematological response if an apocritical solution is not readily available. Hence incremental policy change (see Lindblom 1965) solves the question of legitimacy through minor policy adjustments without risking a controversial solution that may prompt widespread disagreement and bring the legitimacy of the government into question. Decision makers might even demonstrate their competence by looking for a problem to which they already have a solution, announcing the existence of a problem and then solving it in short order using a solution held in reserve. This lends legitimacy to the decision maker as a competent problem solver but reduces politics to trivia and leaves more important issues unaddressed.
Problem framing also sets the terms for possible legitimation challenges. Framing a problem in a way that limits the scope of possible solutions prevents radical solutions from being raised, making it easier for the government to construct the terms of debate around alternatives acceptable to it. Appealing to prevailing ideologies and established problem frames limits the range of possible answers and the likelihood of legitimation challenge (unless it originates outside social norms). This framing strategy could also be effected by appealing to institutional structures. For example, limiting a transport problem to the Department of Roads absolves the government from considering expensive new railways, even if the latter option might be a better solution.

Governments can treat persistent policy problems by reframing them; changing their meaning and simultaneously altering the extent of state responsibility for them. For example, persistent unemployment has posed an intractable policy problem. Governments have tried many different policies with no lasting success. However, from being understood in the 1960s as a structural feature of the economy, by the 1990s the problem had been rhetorically reframed through ‘welfare-to-work’ and ‘mutual obligation’ policy reforms that constructed unemployment as partly the fault of the unemployed (in the English-speaking democracies in particular) (see Wilson and Turnbull 2001).

Reframing the problem served the legitimacy of the state by shifting responsibility for unemployment to the unemployed themselves, an
ideological shift also played out in electoral contests for office between left and right parties (for example, in the United Kingdom, see Butler 2000, and Deacon 2000; in Australia see Wilson and Turnbull 2001). The qualification of the fact and the legitimacy of the norm that lies behind it are intertwined. Explaining the fact of unemployment implies the norm which justifies the explanation and allocates responsibility for the problem. The neoliberal redefinition of unemployment shifted the norm underlying the welfare state from a safety net device to one that enforces quid pro quo obligations upon unemployed citizens. Social security expenditure continues to be high but the legitimation question for the state has been partly addressed.

This reframing also takes the form of a broader ideological shift about the state’s policy role and responsibilities in general, i.e., at the meta-level of state-society relations. Neoliberal reformers (again particularly in the English-speaking countries) have framed policy debates by debasing interventionist governments as promoting a ‘nanny state’ (Reeves 2005). This rhetorical device functions by ridiculing interventionism as overly protective while also implying that it reduces citizens’ motivation to take responsibility for their own well-being, thus limiting economic innovation and degrading community life. When this rhetoric is used to criticise particular policy measures it represents a larger ideological position that rejects the idea that the state should be responsible for such a large range of social problems. The goal is to shift
the broad question of responsibility away from the state towards individuals operating in the market or the community sector. For example, privatising and deregulating public services assists legitimation by limiting the government’s responsibility to ensuring a viable market rather than providing effective services itself.

A government can deal with legitimation problems by delaying the resolution of a policy problem to disguise that it does not intend to take substantive action. It is difficult to challenge the legitimacy of the government if it is doing something about a problem, unless it admits that it has no intention to do so. Government often refers problems to committees, or commissions research to show it is treating the question, when in fact it does so only to delay making a decision. Upon receipt of the research findings, it might then further delay proceedings by questioning the validity of the findings and then commission more research into other facets of the problem. The idea is to delay the resolution of a difficult problem and weaken the resolve of other actors who seek a prompt resolution. It makes the process outlast the political resources of those mobilising against it so their challenge falters. To this end, the state can obfuscate and delay at any stage of the process, from policy development through implementation and evaluation. The question of legitimacy is then resolved by inertia.

The policy process does not proceed automatically from identifying problems through to practical action. Governments always have a choice
about how to proceed in light of changing circumstances. Other than deliberate delaying tactics, unforeseen events may intervene and divert attention to a new problem, while other problems fall off the agenda, even if they have already progressed to the implementation stage. Rather than conceiving of the policy process as a series of propositions that follow necessarily, one after the another, each stage represents a new question for policy makers. The policy process is, then, a series of linked questions governed by the problematological logic outlined above. At each stage the question of legitimacy intervenes as well, which politicises the administrative process.

Governments can deal with legitimation questions by shifting responsibility for policy problems to other jurisdictions; to other arms of the state or to other levels of government. For example, blaming bureaucrats is a time-honoured strategy used by Ministers under fire. Bureaucrats also attempt to shift responsibility onto other bureaucrats within the hierarchy. Moving the institutional locus of responsibility for problems ‘shifts the goalposts’ at which complainants must aim. Here, governments use their own institutional structure to insure against a crisis of the whole. When legitimation challenges are effective, Ministers and senior public officials can be dismissed and replaced, like amputating a diseased limb that regrows in healthy form.

Another option is to shift responsibility to different levels of government – a common feature of federal systems, such as Australia
and the United States – or even to international bodies such as the World Bank. While globalisation describes an economic trend, it is also an argument that justifies all kinds of policy decisions: nations must reform policies because globalisation demands it (see, for example, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2003). On the other hand, were the public to perceive this as the government shifting the blame to avoid taking responsibility for problems it could lead to a legitimation question being explicitly posed.

Just as rhetorical technique dictates that a speaker must address her audience’s concerns or risk its disinterest (Meyer 1995: 222-3), states must address the problems of the public. However, this does not preclude states from trying to persuade the public about what their concerns ought to be. States have considerable power to frame policies and set the agenda, for example, through access to the media and supportive networks of powerful organised interests, such as business and labour. Depending on one’s perspective, such problem setting constitutes strong leadership or manipulation. Whatever the case, states can deal with the question of relevance to the audience by bringing particular concerns to the forefront of debate.

Another possibility is to explicitly reject a problem as a problem. Governments can, and often do, reject problems as a way of solving them. This is easy to do with new ideas that have little popular support, for example those that challenge conventional beliefs and morals. The
concerns of the women’s movement and the environment movement were dismissed for many years. Whereas governments must respond to problems that are of significant public concern, acknowledging a problem legitimises it as a problem (see Meyer 1996: 344). In politics, if a government acknowledges a problem it implies it has a responsibility to develop a policy in response. Therefore governments first prevent problems from being raised by simply not talking about them.

When dealing with difficult problems, governments can eliminate them by challenging the legitimacy of those who raise questions against them through personal attacks (ad hominem argument) (see, for example, Walton 2000). Ad hominem arguments are extremely common in politics, if not especially desirable. Ken Starr’s pursuit of former US President Bill Clinton sought to undermine the legitimacy of his leadership by questioning his character, no matter what the pertinence of this to his policy decisions. At other times a leader’s character is positively decisive for them. For difficult problems, character (ethos) absorbs the burden of answering that cannot be found otherwise; we accept a policy because of the person who decided it (Meyer 1996: 342). Despite the importance of legal-rational legitimacy in modernity, the charismatic form of legitimacy has always been important in politics (Weber 1948). The rise of the mass media has given renewed persuasive power to charismatic leadership.
Another way to circumvent political mobilisation is to discourage it at a general level in the political culture. The question of legitimacy can be treated through depoliticisation, discouraging interest in politics and supporting passivity over activism (Habermas 1976). For instance, we see signs of cynicism in politics in low voter turnout at elections. Understanding depoliticisation is not easy, because it is a question not just of strategy but of political culture more broadly. Does depoliticisation result from an intentional strategy (e.g. ‘bread and circuses’ distractions or anti-democratic institutional reform); or from the inherent features of capitalist consumer society (Frankfurt School Marxism); or from professional policy discourses that obstruct participation by lay actors; or is it that many people are simply indifferent, in Bourdieu’s sense (1998:77), to the game of professional politics? The question of participation and passivity in policymaking requires further research. When broad depoliticisation is not present, government can discourage legitimation challenges through a ‘divide and rule’ strategy. This reduces the potency of mobilisation by fostering disunity among the challengers. When there is a multitude of different actors and views about a problem, governments can play challengers off against each other so that no group of actors can muster enough support to make an effective legitimation challenge.

In plural societies, it is difficult for political leaders to appeal to a heterogeneous audience. To deal with this, government officials might
espouse conflicting positions in different contexts and with different stakeholders (Fischer 2003a: 108, citing Hajer). They might also encourage and support ‘epistemic communities’ (Haas 1992) around an issue, which draw expert stakeholders into a relationship around a shared interpretation of a problem. This makes the audience less heterogeneous by creating a shared context, interpretative frame and an inclusive dialogical process. When the audience is large and undifferentiated, as is the case when communicating through the mass media, political rhetoric can become vague and speakers reluctant to give concrete answers for fear of displeasing the majority. Meyer notes that the difficulty of appealing to a large audience results in politics spurning the endeavour to convince in the very field where we believe it most likely to be found (Meyer 1994: 95). In election campaigns, for example, increased media scrutiny seems to have produced less policy debate.\textsuperscript{123}

4. Legitimacy, democracy, and policy studies

The question of legitimacy is a key one for policy theory. It structures the political characteristics of policymaking by linking the problem orientation with the problem of government. Although Michel Meyer does not speak directly of political legitimacy in this way, by utilising problematology we can gain new insight into the political qualities of policymaking, its ideologies and political strategies. Questioning creates
both the public and the state around the problematically constructed political difference. In treating a policy problem, we also create the difference between state and society, which stand in dialectical relationship defined by a continuous questioning process. Legitimation also arises from the ideologies and norms expressed directly through discourse itself. From dialogical communication to the meta-level distinction between state and society, political discourse rhetorically affirms relationships of identity and difference. Policymaking crosses disciplinary boundaries and incorporates both scientific and practical reason but in the end we settle policy problems by political means. What is important is to comprehend the multi-faceted interaction between policy problems and the question of legitimacy. Some policy processes obtain legitimacy through hierarchical rules and coercion, while others are more democratic. These latter types may not guarantee better decisions but they give lay citizens the opportunity to participate in decision making and real power to decide upon legitimation questions. Deliberative democracy and traditional representative democracy are alternative answers to the problem of government. They sit on a continuum, marked by degrees of problematicity on the question of legitimacy which defines the relationship between state and society. Authoritarian states lie at the extreme end of the spectrum, where the question of legitimacy is resolved by police force and state propaganda. Policymaking is important not just for its outcomes but also because debate and action
upon substantive policy questions contribute to collective social identity. Politics and society interact through policymaking which structures social values and collective identity at a macro-level in the process of dealing with practical problems at the micro-level.

Hajer argues we should reconsider the connection between policy studies and political theory (2003b: 190). The problematological problem orientation suggests a path for extending the scope of policy studies scholarship. In the ‘institutional void’ he describes, policy studies is in an ideal position to link deliberation to political decision making, with which political theory is centrally concerned (2003b: 190). In theorising the question of legitimacy within the reconstructed problem orientation, policy theory feeds directly into political theory. While policy deals with the day to day events of government it is not without greater significance. It is in the complexities of deliberation over the smallest particles of the policy process that we find the characteristics of political discourse, just as much as we find it in analysing the ideologies of the leaders of nations. Problematology allows us to link policy and political theory through the different levels of questioning, showing the way to a complex analysis of governance.

The problematological view of policy understands the policy process as both the treatment of public problems and as a *legitimation process*. No single decision making method can guarantee legitimacy, which must be continually justified in the face of questioning. But this
problematicity is not a negative feature. It is, rather, essential to democratic governance. Dewey's problem of government is a question we repeatedly pose: by what means shall the interests of the governors be identified with those of the governed? There are many sides to this problem. How can we do this without too tightly circumscribing government's powers so as to prevent it acting effectively and in a timely fashion? The link between policy and legitimation problems is rhetorical and thus permits great flexibility, including the possibility of manipulation. However, it is a rhetoric grounded in the principle of questioning and must follow its rules. Therefore its operations can be uncovered in theory and studied empirically.

A key question for scholarly inquiry is in what sense is the question of legitimacy thematised and expressed in a positive way through democratic processes, and do these mechanisms ensure extensive and democratic inquiry without abrogating the necessity to make a decision? While we are rightly concerned about legitimacy being forcibly obtained through excess state power, conversely, political leaders can become so focused on their own legitimacy that they become spineless and ignore or suppress difficult problems, resorting instead to populism and seductive appeals to the basest social norms. Good legitimation processes, such as deliberative democracy, extend questioning to a greater number of citizens. This enhances the depth of analysis of policy problems by forcing both government and citizens to
engage with a range of views. People actively engaged in deliberation may even be more likely to consent to decisions they might not otherwise support because their opinions have been recognised. Fischer, for example, discusses how increased participation by citizens helps legitimate policy development and implementation (2003a: 205-6).124

Greater questioning is problematic for the stability of governments in some respects but it also has a positive effect by requiring them to justify decisions. And, of course, if they actually produced better solutions there might be less need for obfuscation and aversion as a rhetorical strategy. One can only hope! We need not conclude that extending the power to question necessarily obstructs strong and stable government. To support good policymaking and democracy we must understand the relationship between state and society and how it is structured through the policy process. Propaganda and authoritarianism flourish if we allow the demands of legitimation to separate from, or overtake, inquiry into substantive problems. Political actors can pursue a career for self-interest that equally attends to the public interest, but the consequences of ruthless individuals attaining excess power can be disastrous, as any cursory examination of history shows. The problematologically-reconstructed problem orientation provides an important understanding of political rationality. By understanding and then strengthening links between the two questioning processes we can encourage active, productive policymaking
and create an active community of inquirers at the same time. In a democracy founded on the value of questioning, the question of legitimacy is a crucial mechanism to foster and support deliberative processes and link them to good policymaking. Our concern must be to establish institutional and cultural questioning processes that support reflection and discourage the impoverished alternatives of conservatism and populism that Bourdieu notes maintain the status quo (see Chapter Seven). Perhaps the best we can do is to culturally and institutionally entrench strident questioning practices.

Despite this affirmation of problematicity, it is important to note that the problematological conception of policy does not produce endless questions without solutions. Asserting the value of questioning also establishes our responsibility to answer. The logic of questioning is based on the question-answer link. It dictates that we must answer when we are questioned because our legitimacy is also put in question. Therefore we must justify ourselves. Sometimes we can solve policy problems apocritically and these solutions meet with widespread agreement. However, most often we can only respond problematologically in the face of dissent. This might not eliminate policy problems but it does enable us to progress debate, thereby drawing together a disparate community through the questioning process. In a vigorous democracy this secondary effect is more problematological but it is an effective resolution nonetheless. Although
problematology expresses problematicity, it does not preclude us from adopting norms to guide political discourse in practice. In questioning, we draw on social norms and commonplaces that function as presuppositions for particular inquiries. However, while norms are important they are secondary to the question of knowledge, which is a metaphysical question. Norms are still problematological because they can always be questioned. Problematology is non-normative because it is based on an irrefutable foundation that makes no presuppositions as to what constitutes answering. Therefore it suffices for a comprehensive theory of knowledge, and also of policy and politics. However, and importantly for democratic theory, rights arise from this foundation in the form of a right to question and the freedom to put this into practice (Meyer 1989: 135).

A great potential of the problematological approach lies in its implications for democratic inquiry. Many scholars in the field have criticised the technocratic conception of policymaking. The technocratic approach fragments public problems into isolated, scientific questions, detached from questions of value. Policymaking becomes an elite exercise conducted within, and for, a community of experts. It excludes ordinary citizens from discussion if they do not have the requisite scientific knowledge. However, by seeing that policy problems are linked to legitimation questions, even if a policy solution is addressed to the specialised audience of a policy community, the question of legitimacy is
pertinent for every citizen. In democracies we have a right as individuals to put into question the legitimacy of those holding authority, or at least we should have. Even the most specialised policy discourses involve a related argument for legitimacy which we, as citizens, can judge. Political rights are denied when access to questioning is denied. The problematological view shows the task for the discipline of policy studies to be a critical inquiry that supports democratic rights – to question power.
Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued that problematology can be used to expand the scope of policy theory beyond the problem solving conception that underpinned the policy sciences. It enables us to express the problematicity that characterises policymaking as political rather than scientific. Further, in questioning policy, we find that the meaning of policy lies in questioning itself. As a result, the problematological theory of policy is reflexively consistent with the philosophical practice of questioning. Therefore the answer to the question of policy in the thesis is to confirm the problematicity of policy and to give it proper expression in theory by reconfiguring the problem orientation on problematological grounds.

This thesis has demonstrated a means to access and analyse aspects of policy which were previously excluded from consideration. The scientific view circumscribed and ignored the political aspect of policy. ‘Solving’ problems does not prevent them being put back into question. Democracy is ‘intelligent’ (Lindblom) in continually questioning political decisions, which are usually problematic. A central argument of the thesis is that we can sustain the problem orientation only by reconceptualising what we mean by a solution. If we mean a resolution that eliminates questions altogether then we fail to appreciate an important function of political discourse – to express collective problems
so that we might deliberate over them. Furthermore, as we saw in the last chapter, policy is political rather than scientific because it serves a legitimating function. Policy relates to the question of legitimacy, which is the ultimate arbiter for political solutions. Politics displaces the problematicity of policy solutions into a related question of legitimacy which is equally as important to policymaking as the policy problems themselves.

In Part I of the thesis, I revisited the philosophical underpinnings of policy theory by considering the problem orientation in a new way. The purpose was to understand its shortcomings in order to reconstruct it. By using Meyer’s insights about questioning I showed that the internal limitations of policy theory originate in Dewey’s and Lasswell’s view of problems. In working from metaphysics, I adopted a fundamentally different approach from the practical problem solving logic of these thinkers. I showed the alternative path Dewey might have taken by revealing how questioning operates in his thought. I did not reject problem solving, I broadened and extended the concept of questioning to show that problem solving is only one element of inquiry. The literature I reviewed in Part I bears out the limitations of the problem solving view of policymaking and additionally points to problem setting, politics, symbolic meaning and argumentation as being equally important. My critical examination of the ‘argumentative turn’ identified its limitations in working from theories that do not challenge the
division of logic and rhetoric, an epistemological construction linked to the longstanding philosophical rejection of questioning. By considering the postpositivist critique of the policy sciences as a 'problematising' theoretical movement I explained how this literature expresses the problematicity of policy and policy theory. In turn, this made it possible to pose the question of policy anew, this time in terms of questioning itself.

In Part II of the thesis I moved from problem solving to problematology. I responded to the critique developed in Part I by reconstructing the problem orientation of policy theory using Michel Meyer's philosophy of questioning. I explained how Meyer commences from first principles to deduce a new vision of reason. Problematology is based on the secure foundation of questioning. This contrasts with Dewey, who rejected metaphysics in favour of practical problem solving. In this respect, problematology differs from positivist and poststructuralist approaches as well. These philosophies also reject metaphysics, albeit in very different ways. Meyer's orientation is traditional in seeking a first principle but otherwise it is radically different from traditional metaphysics. By grounding thought in questioning Meyer rejects ontology, the propositional view of reason and the goal of establishing an exclusive logic of necessity; he has reconceptualised metaphysics in an original way that gives voice to the problematic. Reflecting upon the philosophical foundations of reason is
not just idle abstraction, as Dewey suggested. Problematology has significant utility when we apply these foundational concepts to policy theory. I showed how problematology appropriately and effectively thematises the problematicity of policy presented in Part I. The ‘problematological difference’ is a ground-breaking concept which reveals the intricate structure of answering beyond problem solving. It articulates problem setting as a form of answering and reveals the difference between answers that express problems and answers that close off discourse upon some solution.

Part II is a problematological answer to the question posed by Part I; it expresses the problematicity of policy and in doing so establishes a new theoretical result. I elaborated upon this result by explaining policymaking as a dynamic questioning process at two levels; problem setting and problem solving. Policy does answer social questions, although often it does so problematologically. Problematology reflects the problematicity of political solutions and describes an interpretative relationship between questions and questioners. It articulates a place for the passions in terms of questioning which expresses the difference between unreflective practices and reflective inquiry. I further demonstrated the explanatory power of the problematological approach by redefining the problem orientation as two linked problems; policy problems and legitimation problems. This follows from conceiving of the relationship between state and society as a dialectic of question and
answer. By considering the question of legitimacy alongside policy problems I extended the argumentative turn, rhetorically linking policy inquiry with the legitimacy of the formal political system and outlining the logic of legitimating ideologies in policy discourse.

In this thesis I showed that problematology is a unifying philosophy of knowledge. As we saw, rather than permitting the *logos* to be divided into logic and rhetoric, science and politics, policy and politics, or science and literature, Meyer articulates a general philosophy of questioning grounded in a principle. He responds to the fragmentation of thought by looking for what unifies it underneath its various historical and disciplinary expressions. I have argued that problematology provides a unifying interpretative framework for the field of policy theory. It works from questions rather than propositions and shows how these questions link together through dialectic, hermeneutics, and rhetoric. This brings the problem orientation together with key concepts of interpretative policy theory. Indeed, problematology articulates how these elements work together in a way that has not previously been understood in the philosophy of social science. Michel Meyer does not speak of policy, but by drawing upon Meyer’s philosophy I have shown the strengths and limitations of past attempts at policy theory and reconstructed the problem orientation. Policy as problem solving is just one possibility of questioning, so we can remove its theoretical hegemony by locating it alongside, and equal to, other
aspects of knowledge. By working from the foundation of questioning, problematology unifies its object whereas science fragments it. Problematology incorporates the various dimensions of language that make up political discourse and articulates what is particular to policymaking compared to other modes of questioning. This includes the figurative symbolism of policy discourse as well as its pragmatic aspects. Problematology does not artificially eliminate the problematicity of policy by imposing an *a priori* restriction on reason in order to render it as an idealised logic of necessity. Such a view is unsustainable, both philosophically and empirically. Problematology reflects the problematicity that characterises our historical situation while still permitting us to progress knowledge by finding answers. Problematological policy theory will contribute to political critique by 'questioning power'.

Problematology is far from an easy concept to grasp, which is probably one of the reasons it is not yet well known. But once we are sensitised to questioning we can find it everywhere and use it to good effect. Michel Meyer has had a rare insight into the fundamental structure of reason. I argue that policy theorists following an interpretative approach can find in problematology a unifying philosophical framework that synthesises the advances they have already made while offering an opportunity to further develop theory of the middle range. Much of this potential lies in problematology’s
capacity to elucidate the political dimensions of the problem orientation. Reconceptualising policy on problematological grounds positively reconstructs policy theory by drawing upon the existing resources of our own field. Problematology integrates the strengths of the problem orientation and extends them to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive vision of policymaking. I have limited the scope of this thesis to establishing a philosophical framework for policy theory. The next task for research is to systematically examine other aspects of policymaking in problematological terms, for example, by reconsidering the stages of the policy process as a series of linked questions and by articulating the legitimating devices of policy discourse in order to distinguish positive from manipulative rhetoric.

In general, there are two possibilities for political questioning: 1) passivity, which does not challenge entrenched power nor lead to better policy because it concedes to authority either willingly, or through depoliticisation, or grudgingly through plain apathy; or 2) active and pointed questioning that advances knowledge and democracy at the same time – the democratic community Dewey thought so important. This is always a choice, guaranteed by the freedom to explicitly reflect questioning or to refuse it. If we are to democratise policy research and processes we must advocate questioning as a central value and support and encourage reflexive questioning in government, the universities and among the public.
For Meyer, reflecting upon questioning necessitated returning to the very foundations of metaphysics as well as the historical origins of Western philosophy in Socrates. For us, Socrates is equally important because his questioning had a political function as much as a philosophical one. He questioned the Athenian elites of his day and revealed that their knowledge was not certain but problematic. In problematology we find the intimate connection between philosophy and politics reinvigorated. The tenor of questioning resounds with contemporary concerns in both the theory and practice of politics. Problematology restores the political relevance of philosophy by re-grounding thought in questioning. However, problematology is different from Socrates’ aporetic method because it also deals with answering. The changing political climate and destabilisation of institutions reveals a problematicity that threatens the old order but is welcomed by interpretative policy theorists as a better way of dealing with public problems. For that challenge to legitimacy to be understood in positive terms, where questioning is of intrinsic worth, we must articulate politics upon this foundation of knowledge which affirms the value of problematicity. Problematology strikes a balance in policymaking between supporting questioning and upholding our responsibility to seek solutions that underlies a productive democracy.
Notes

1 Michel Meyer is Professor of Philosophy and Rhetoric at the Free University of Brussels (ULB) and the University of Mons, Director of the European Centre for the Study of Argumentation, Editor of the Revue Internationale de Philosophie and Editor of a book series on philosophical interrogation at Presses Universitaires de France. He was born in Brussels in 1950 and completed his qualifications in philosophy at the ULB in the 1970s. His supervisor and mentor was the noted Professor of Rhetoric, Chaim Perelman, whom Meyer succeeded as Professor after Perelman’s death in 1984. He has published more than twenty books on philosophy as well as numerous edited collections and journal articles. His work has been translated into English, Spanish, Portuguese, Korean, Italian, Japanese and German (for a list of publications, see <http://homepages.ulb.ac.be/~mimeyer/>; last viewed 10 February 2005). His work systematically develops his highly original philosophy of questioning, problematology. In developing problematology, he covers a wide range of other topics, including rhetoric, art, the passions, aesthetics, religion and theatre, although he has not yet applied his work to the human sciences or politics. Meyer is a well-known philosopher in the French-speaking world but is not well-known in English, despite important works having been translated into English. However, the volume and scope of his work, the rigour of his arguments, and the originality of his ideas should eventually correct this. Robert Barsky, in the ‘Translator’s Introduction’ to Meyer (2000), provides a good introduction to Meyer, his work and his heritage in Perelman’s study of rhetoric.

2 An earlier version of this chapter was published in the proceedings of the Australasian Political Studies Association Conference 2004; see Turnbull (2004b).

3 This is true for thought more generally, even in philosophy (Meyer 1995).

4 For a general discussion and critique of positivism in social and political theory see Fay (1975) and Bernstein (1976).

5 Carnap and Feigl’s arrival in the United States in the 1930s saw a shift to logical positivism which displaced the pragmatist voice in American philosophy (Wilson 1995: 122-3).

6 Meyer points out the extent of this common root of resolution as the dissolution of problems. It can be found in the Vienna Circle philosophers, Wittgenstein, Carnap, and Schlick, but also in French non-positivists such as Bergson and Valéry (1995: 48-54). Meyer cites Schlick, who is most explicit on the idea that ‘To dissolve is to resolve’, in an article ‘Unanswerable Questions’; “Every explanation or indication of the meaning of a question consists, in some way or other, of prescriptions for finding its answer. This principle has proved to be of fundamental importance for the method of science...Thus a question which is unanswerable in principle can have no meaning, it can be no question at all: it is nothing but a nonsensical series of words with a question mark after them” (Schlick, in Meyer 1995: 45).

7 See Hawkesworth (1988) for a detailed critique of the separation of fact and value in policy theory.

8 Aristotle does, in fact, state that we do deliberate over the ends, which means they are not fixed, despite also insisting that they are indisputable (Meyer 2000: 54). I discuss this contradiction further in Chapter Seven when considering ‘practice’. For now, I simply note that Aristotle was confusing on this point. If his problem solving logic mentioned here is correct, then it is scientific. If it is not, then it is contradictory.
See Meyer (2000) for a discussion of practical reason within his larger work on philosophy and the passions.

9 See Meyer (1995: 201-9); see also Chapter Six, following.

10 Bernstein highlights this aspect of Dewey’s theory of inquiry, which he argues emphasises discovery rather than the a posteriori reconstruction of logical relationships, making it distinct from the problem solving conception of science (1966: 106-7).

11 Dewey’s logic does not express problematicity as such, but instead locates problematicity within experience, which is not static but evolves.

12 See also the following claim: ‘Statement of a problematic situation in terms of a problem has no meaning save as the problem instituted has, in the very terms of its statement, reference to a possible solution’ (1938: 108).

13 In Part II, I outline Meyer’s conception of the dual apocrical and problematological characteristics of answering, which explains how a question can also be an answer.

14 For a critique of the anti-democratic tendencies of scientific policy making by experts see Fischer (1987) and Hawkesworth (1988).

15 Critics of positivism point to the positivist separation of fact and value as the source of a ‘depoliticizing scientism’ (Hawkesworth 1988: 25).

16 For a range of perspectives on Lasswell’s work see the edited collection by Rogow (1969). In this volume, Eulau (1969) argues for the influence of A.N. Whitehead on Lasswell’s ideas; Smith (1969) points out Dewey and G.H. Mead’s influence on Lasswell along with that of Whitehead and Merriam; and Janowitz (1969) also points to the influence of Dewey, Mead and Thomas on Lasswell at the University of Chicago.

17 Interestingly, Sjöblom (1986) notes that the concept of ‘problem’ has received little attention in social science in general nor political science in particular. He conducts an exploratory analysis to see how the concept might be applied in political science and he argues for its productive potential for theory building.

18 From here on I will refer interchangeably to ‘policy science’ or ‘the policy sciences’ for stylistic purposes, while noting that Lasswell used the plural sense to indicate an important conceptual distinction, which I discuss later in this chapter.

19 See Dryzek (1993: 217-22) for the distinction between logical empiricism, positivism and related concepts in policy analysis.

20 Lasswell developed a stepwise, linear model of decision making consistent with this scientific view of decision making for public policy (1971: 56-7).

21 For a general discussion of values in policy analysis, see Fischer and Forester (1987); and for a critique of the positivist separation of fact and value in policy science see Fischer (1998) and Hawkesworth (1988).

22 Lasswell also noted that the popular conception of a division between science and its application produced status problems for the policy scientist. The scholar or scientist involved in the policy realm may be perceived as a careerist by scientific colleagues and as a half-hearted participant or as intellectually threatening to those operating primarily in the policy field (1971: 120-1). Such a person appears to be ‘a second-class man of knowledge and a second-class man of action’ (1971: 120) or, more colloquially, a ‘half man, half brain’ (1971: 121).
His solution was to suggest the formation of new institutions to bring academics and policymakers into fruitful association (1951a: 14).

While the policy sciences referred to the natural sciences as well as the social sciences, it is the latter that occupy much of the debate because these are directly relevant to the question of the science of governing.

Although, Lasswell qualified this by noting that these are not strictly scientific because he did not hold a determinist view of social change (1951a: 11).

Meyer argues that reducing knowledge to the justification of existing propositions is a feature of many different philosophies (1995: 104). Positivism and pragmatism share this logic in common, despite their differences around practice.

Parsons (1995: 13-16) provides a good discussion of the varying historical meanings of the ‘policy’ concept. He notes the primarily Anglo-Saxon use of the word, as distinct from ‘politics’ in other languages, and the post-Second World War association of policy as a ‘rational’ plank upon which the legitimacy of the liberal democratic state is built.

Wolin (1961) describes a general theme in political theory of the ‘sublimation’ of politics. For a broad discussion of the decline of traditional political theory in the face of political science, see Gunnell (1979).

I discuss the main alternative stream of policy theory, interpretative policy theory, in Chapter Four.

Meyer identifies two major (failed) twentieth century philosophical responses to the crisis of the Cartesian subject, neopositivism and the negative metaphysics (nihilism) of Heidegger and others who followed him (1995: 57). In the first case philosophy took science as its model, while in the latter philosophy renounced itself as impossible. Importantly, Meyer notes the generality of the attack on philosophy in that it was not only Anglo-Saxon but French and Germanic as well (1995: 58).

This is most ironic because this is typically what science is at pains to avoid.

This is linked to ideological policy change; for examples of the effect of neoclassical economics on policy in the United Kingdom, see Hutton (1996) and in Australia, see Pusey (1991).

Both the left and right of US politics envisioned a policy making system managed by an expert policy elite (Fischer 1993: 26).

Critics of Lasswell argue he held a much less democratic outlook than Dewey. Statham, for example, states that Lasswell supported the manipulation and control of the public by an elite, compared to Dewey’s emphasis on inquiry guided by democratic agreement (1995: 33-4). Kaufman-Osborn (1985) argues that the policy sciences in the Laswellian tradition is not consistent with Dewey’s more democratic orientation.

See also Schön (1996) on professional practice and problem setting.

See Chapter Five on problematological answers.

See my discussion of problematological answers in Part II. The concept of a policy ‘frame’ is related to the hermeneutic concept of a ‘horizon’ of knowledge (Gadamer 1979). The notion that a question is a first level of intelligibility that frames the world without entirely determining it (i.e., solving the question of what it is) explains the properties of Gadamer’s horizon as open, yet finite at the same time; ‘Horizons are limited, finite, changing, and fluid’ (Bernstein 1991: 143).
Experience might be an accepted criteria to set priorities in some cases, e.g. a 30 per cent rate of unemployment would attract all the political will and resources of the state, but it is not always so in others, e.g. a 30 per cent rate of unemployment of Australia’s Indigenous people.

This also includes ‘agenda setting’, whether before or after problem definition.

Skocpol (1985: 15) notes that state action can never truly be ‘disinterested’ – no matter how appropriate its response to a given problem – because its actions routinely reinforce the authority of the state organisations that generate policy.

They also note the dangers of scientists permitting themselves to be directed by state interests, which they describe as ‘committing moral suicide’ (1951: 306).

Over the last few decades, this reflexive questioning has taken place in all the social sciences.

Howlett and Ramesh (2003) make substantial modifications to the model.

The turn to questioning has also occurred in philosophy more generally (Collingwood 1939, 1962; Gadamer 1979; Hintikka 1999; Meyer 1988a, 1995). All of these thinkers share a concern for questioning but only Michel Meyer has formulated an entire philosophical system based on questioning. He articulates questioning as a fundamental principle of reason and describes reason and discourse entirely in terms of question and answer; see Part II.

Gadamer did not draw this link because his idea of questioning was different to Dewey’s. He did, however, draw on Collingwood in seeing meaning as a question and answer relationship (1979: 333; see also Collingwood 1939: 29-43, and 1962).

Stone gives the example of the women’s movement (1988: 124).

Narratives are rhetorical but not necessarily argumentative. On the other hand, narratives do create social norms and identities which can be argumentative when used in such a way as to demand compliance of individuals outside the norm. Literary rhetoric, the ‘rhetoric of figures’, and argumentative rhetoric, the ‘rhetoric of conflicts’, have traditionally been opposed and sometimes confused (see Meyer 1994, 1996). I discuss this further in Part II.

This also has practical uses. For example, Yanow argues against the idea that implementation problems can be solved by ‘fixing’ legislative and administrative language (1996: 26). Legislation is often written ambiguously in order to accommodate competing positions and get a bill passed (1996: 129).

For non-sexist language and a smooth style, I use male pronouns in Part I and female pronouns in Part II.


See also Bernstein’s reading of Dewey in terms of practice as distinct from scientific methodologism and the similarity of his ideas to Aristotelian phronesis (1986: 265-7).

The following sections of this chapter are drawn from a paper I presented at the 2nd European Consortium for Political Research Conference; see Turnbull (2003). I thank the participants in that session who provided valuable comments from which I improved this chapter.
Scholars often cover the same ground in discussing interpretative and argumentative epistemology. See, for example, Fischer and Forester (1993b). In Chapter Seven I discuss how they are linked by questioning.

Richards notes, ‘Stability in a word’s meaning is not something to be assumed, but always something to be explained’ (1965: 11).

Meyer goes on to discuss how Aristotle sought (and failed) to eliminate the opposition between problematicity and nonproblematicity by capturing both in ontology (1995: 110-11).

Van Eemeren et al. point out that the use of Toulmin’s work in other areas is often detached from his philosophically radical ambitions of replacing logic altogether (1996: 153).

The normative approach has influenced several authors in policy theory in different ways; see, for example, Bobrow and Dryzek (1987), Dunn (1996) and Fischer (1995a). We can develop an approach to policy making based on norms, however this still leaves the epistemological question open. We need a theory of knowledge grounded in a principle (see Chapter Five) if we are to unfold the inner workings of reason, including the manipulative possibilities of rhetorical discourse. Only then can we properly identify, understand and criticise propaganda.

Stone rejects the Platonic condemnation of rhetoric, arguing that the distinction between genuine and manipulative persuasion is ‘blurry’ (1988: 249-52).

The ‘children overboard’ affair refers to the Australian federal government’s use of photographs to demonstrate that asylum seekers had thrown their children into the sea in an effort to force a naval ship to rescue them and thereby enter Australia. This incident was crucial in helping the government win the 2001 election campaign. The story was later shown by parliamentary inquiry to be false. In fact, the pictures showed a sea rescue after the asylum seekers’ boat had already sunk. Marr and Wilkinson drew this stark conclusion on the power of policy to tap into Australians’ passions – their fear of invasion and resentment towards refugees – and the electoral success of the Prime Minister; ‘That his government had lied in pursuit of victory was inescapably clear but most Australians forgave him. They liked what he had done’ (2003: 383).

For a general overview of Meyer’s theory of problematology, see Golden and Jamison (1990); Margetson’s book review (1995); and Chapter Seven of Yarbrough (1999).

Parts of this chapter are published in the Proceedings of The Australian Sociological Association Conference 2004; see Turnbull (2004c).

I elaborate upon these characteristics in Chapters Six and Seven.

Reflexivity is embodied within the problematological difference and therefore it is immanent in any secondary questioning process (Meyer 1995: 218).

See, for example, Derrida (1976), Fish (2003), Lyotard (1984) and Rorty (1979).

See the introductory chapter to Of Problematology for an extensive justification of this; see also his recent book (in French only) Questionnement et historicité (2001b).

Only philosophy poses reflexive questions without making any presuppositions. Secondary questioning processes operate upon accepted presuppositions, since any question must presuppose what constitutes the field of possible answers in order to mark out the solution to be reached (Hintikka 1999). Presuppositions present a special problem, in that ‘our concepts and our language operate only by courtesy of the presuppositions that their meaningful use is contingent on’ (Hintikka 2000: 490).
Nonetheless, Meyer can deduce the principles of the logos without presupposition because Meyer answers upon the question of the foundation without presupposing what the question is, which is left implicit: ‘The question itself does not presuppose an answer, even if posing it implies the possibility of obtaining one’ (1995: 205).


68 The various modalities of questioning detach themselves from their philosophical foundation and form sui generis areas (1995: 304).

69 I elaborate upon this in the following two chapters.

70 See also Forester’s (1995) critique of Schram in the same volume.

71 In 1982, Jean-François Lyotard sought to answer the question of postmodernity in a well-known article, ‘Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?’ (1984). Interestingly, Lyotard actually referred to Michel Meyer in this article, although not by name. Among his examples of scholars of the time who called for order and unity against experimentation, Lyotard mentioned that he had read ‘a young philosopher of language’ (he did not name him) who called for a new theory of language with ‘a solid anchorage... in the referent’ (1984: 71-2; Trans. R. Durand). A different translator identified the same philosopher more specifically as ‘a young Belgian philosopher’ (Lyotard 1993: 2). Although his identity was somewhat obscured, considering that Lyotard thought him important enough to refer to, one might have thought it interesting to investigate this philosopher’s ideas, however few people have bothered to ask who he is or what he has to say about philosophy and language.

72 However, it is important to note that postmodernism and poststructuralism are not equivalent concepts (Smart 1993: 22-3).

73 Antifoundationalism is not the same as poststructuralism, although the latter does follow from the former. See Bevir (2004) for a general discussion of postfoundationalism, interpretative theory, and governance. Here I would note that Meyer’s foundational philosophy is very different to that attacked by antifoundationalists because it is founded on problematicity, not on an unjustifiable proposition that directs all secondary results by a logic of necessity.

74 Even in cases of extreme semantic rupture, for example in Kafka’s fiction, Meyer argues against the deconstructionist reading and concludes in favour of the problematological conception of meaning and interpretation (1988b: 354-5).

75 See Hajer’s warning about policy analysis becoming the ‘intellectual handmaiden’ of government agencies (2003b: 190).

76 Note that I have treated the question of policy theory differently from policy in practice (or ‘policy analysis’), where practitioners draw upon their own knowledge obtained through practice as well as reflecting upon the presuppositions of that practice (see Fischer 2003a; Forester 1993, 1999; Schön 1996). Philosophy is not essential for practice, but creating new theory may help practitioners ask questions about their own practice and improve their thinking (Forester 1995: 386).


78 I discuss this in more detail in the section on practice in the following chapter.

79 If there is a bus strike, and I cannot get to university, then my problem becomes a problem for others. It then becomes a policy problem because it is a collective difficulty that people are concerned about. If no-one complained, and no workers or employers cared that they could not go to work, then there would be no policy problem. But then,
the bus drivers would not probably have gone on strike, since the object is to create a public problem as a lever against which to realise their particular demands.

80 In a simple case, policy decision making could be instrumental, linear, and scientific. However, even then it would still reflect the more general logic of questioning since science also proceeds by two related questioning procedures, discovery and justification (see Meyer 1994: 125-47). But even then policy making would still be political, as I explain in Chapter Eight.

81 For Freire (1973), the distinction between the educational approaches of imparting knowledge to passive listeners and posing problems in which students participate is crucial. He believes that only the latter approach can enable oppressed people to transcend their situation, whereas the former approach obstructs critical thinking and supports social oppression. It does this by maintaining the poor as individualised welfare recipients, divorced from establishing a common identity that might enable them to transform social structures (1973: 60-1). Freire sees problem posing education as humanising (1973: 27-8) because it does not impose a hierarchical relationship between speaker and hearer. This form of education by dialogue supports a view of humanity as always becoming, not as already resolved (1973: 71-2).

82 See also Schön (1996) on problem setting in professional practice.

83 Meyer points out that empiricism reified experience as 'an “in-itself”' (1995: 279). As I explained in Chapter One, this was also Dewey’s philosophy, despite his attention to questioning.

84 Meyer describes the logic of scientific discovery as ‘metaphorisation’ (1994: 142-7).

85 To be more specific, Meyer states ‘It is one o’clock’ is an argument for taking lunch – the former answer implies the latter answer (1983: 70). I discuss the hermeneutic and other properties of the problematological theory of meaning in Chapter Seven.

86 This quality has enabled questioning to be displaced into ontology, the object of the answer which was unthought of as an answer. Meyer explains: ‘The autonomization of answers has had the effect of allowing answers to be thought of as propositions; truth was their essential characteristic. The idea of resolution became subordinated to what I will call the propositional model of reason’ (1995: 6). Hence, inquiry seems to be directed elsewhere, at an independent reality. Consequently, subject and object are separated along with epistemology and ontology. Problematology, in explaining the autonomy of answering, also explains why philosophy naturally failed to understand its own nature as problematological, until now.


88 Meyer distinguishes this from the static propositional view of language which commences from the point where the results are already known (1995: 216).

89 Many social theorists speak of the dialogical nature of social relations; see, for example, Gadamer (1979); see also Torgerson (2003) who uses Bakhtin to study power in policy discourse.

90 I elaborate upon this purpose in Chapter Eight.

91 Luhmann (1995) describes the operation of social systems as self-referential, or autopoietic, rather than in terms of unilateral control.

92 Meyer discusses the opposition between the literal and the figurative in Chapter Six of Of Problematology, and also in Meyer (1983). He argues that they are not opposed but are both rational aspects of the problematological conception of meaning.
The problematological conception of hermeneutics is a comprehensive theory of interpretation because it applies to all cases, not just instances where interpretation is difficult. For example, both Dryzek (1982: 322) and Gadamer (1979) limit hermeneutics to this latter instance.

Meyer’s problematological theory of interpretation is put with considerable more detail and complexity that I have briefly outlined here (see Meyer 1983; and 1995, Chapter Six).

Society is not fictional; see Meyer (1983: 124-30) on fiction and reality.

I do not go into detail about Meyer’s theory of rhetoric and argument in practice, which I will leave for future research. Meyer discusses rhetoric and argument in greater detail in Chapter Five of Of Problematology (1995) and in Meyer (1996), and the book from which this latter article is drawn (but not yet translated into English) Meyer (1993).

Problematology construes rhetoric as a fundamental property of reason, not just a technique of speech. Therefore a ‘listener’ is interchangeable with an ‘interlocutor’, a ‘reader’, or ‘interpreter’; and ‘speaker’ could equally be an ‘author’ or ‘actor’.

He points out that the problematological view explains Perelman’s concept of ‘adherence’ in a logical way, whereas in Perelman’s philosophy it appeared to be only a subjective phenomenon (1994: 50).

Note, there is a typographical error in this English translation that mistakenly reverses the order of this distinction in the text, i.e., that argumentation would be manipulative and rhetoric would be rational (1996: 354). This goes against Meyer’s analysis of Toulmin and Perelman elsewhere. Furthermore, the Italian translation of this work indicates the distinction as proposing that argumentation would be rational and rhetoric manipulative (1997: 45).

Bourdieu notes that this point of view is not neutral but rests on a number of social preconditions; ‘homo academicus is someone who can play seriously because his or her state (or State) assures her the means to do so, that is, free time, outside the urgency of a practical situation, the necessary competence assured by a specific apprenticeship based on scholē, and, finally but most importantly, the disposition…to invest and to invest oneself in the futile stakes, at least in the eyes of serious people, which are generated in scholastic worlds’ (1998: 128).

Furthermore, Bourdieu notes that the scholarly point of view, where we theorise about problems for their own sake, is itself a privileged form of practice which ‘presupposes historical and social conditions of possibility’, such as the financial and institutional capacity to permit scholars to remove themselves from the urgencies of life and pursue the detached, scholarly life (1998: 134-5).

Of course, Aristotle also discussed practice, writings which are the subject of much renewed interest today (see, for example, Flyvbjerg 2001). I do not discuss the Aristotelian division between theoría and practice, nor his distinction within practice between praxis and poiesis, and the related distinction between techne and phronesis. The distinction between praxis and poiesis has been employed a great deal in contemporary social theory to describe the ‘atrophy of praxis’ in modernity, the transformation of human activity into technically effective action over and above work that is meaningful in itself (Markus 1986: 30). The return to practice as meaningful
action in and of itself is often how the work of Dewey and other pragmatists is depicted (see, for example, Bernstein 1986: 260-72). However, there are fundamental flaws and contradictions in Aristotle’s distinction, which Markus (1986) points out clearly. His central criticisms are that Aristotle’s distinction is vague and that we cannot truly separate praxis and poiesis. Rather than going into detail, I would simply note that Meyer points out that it is the necessity of knowing the solutions to problems in advance – whether action is an immanent end in itself (praxis), or a known external end that we work towards instrumentally (poiesis) – that causes the conceptual difficulties (2000: 54).

105 See Markus (1986: 42) on the difficulty of establishing evaluative standards for action, depending on whether we evaluate it for excellence (praxis) or for efficiency (poiesis).

106 Of course, they can also rhetorically construct a rational process a posteriori to convince us that all their actions were intended, thus obscuring the real, more confused and indeterminate nature of the process.

107 Social scientists are also rediscovering the emotions; see for example Barbalet (2002) and Nussbaum (2001) who discusses emotions at great length, for example pointing out the role of emotions in value judgements and in public life.

108 See my discussion of practical reason in Chapter One.

109 In fact, in proposing that inquiry proceeds by already having the solution, Meyer says we end up with the paradox of Menon: ‘I need to know what I’m looking for in order to find it, and I don’t know about it so that it will be useful’ (2000: 209). Meyer states that propositional reason proposes passion as the difference: ‘On account of passion I don’t know what I’m looking for, in fact I don’t know to the point of being ignorant of not knowing, which I don’t even suspect’ (2000: 209). We know that passion blinds us, but also that we must search, and so ‘If passion blinds me and renders its own annihilation useful, it is also what I know that I must overcome. As such, reason is anti-passion par excellence’ (2000: 210). We know what to look for, passion, which is a problem to be resolved, eliminated, in order to obtain knowledge. Science is the true rationality, that which solves political problems by eliminating passion, which blinds us. Meyer thus shows that the condemnation of politics and passion runs much deeper than the historical condition of the Enlightenment which values science so highly, but goes all the way to the heart of reason conceived as propositional necessity.

110 In Australia, the political exploitation of social cleavages within the Australian Labor Party’s constituency has been termed ‘wedge politics’, which plays on resentments between social groups (on wedge politics and Indigenous Australians, see Macintyre and Clark; on welfare policy, see Wilson and Turnbull 2001; and on asylum seekers, see Ward 2002).

111 This highlights that legitimating policy is a dialogical problem and that rhetoric is not necessarily one-way manipulation (see Chapter Eight).

112 Aristotle includes ‘calm’ as a passion; ‘it responds to an action of the other, which we endure and which demands that a certain equilibrium be established or reestablished’ (Meyer 2000: 50; see Aristotle 1991: 130-4).

113 I note that the original title of Habermas’ Legitimation Crisis (1976) was Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus, which emphasises problems rather than crisis. This work is replete with discussion of problems, questions, and alternatives. Habermas did not argue an entirely determinist position that capitalism would
necessarily produce its own crisis as a consequence of its internal logic. Rather, he emphasised problems of legitimation which required strategies of resolution. Today, we could say that these have been answered by neoliberal policy reforms, however they have only been problematologically answered, i.e., they remain in question.

114 See also the general comments of Hajer and Wagenaar on ‘radical uncertainty’ in the network society (2003b: 9-10).

115 The question of power is a crucial one for political theory. However, this question is too substantial to address here. Having said that, no political theorist has effectively incorporated argumentation and rhetoric into a theory of power, even though the common saying ‘the power of persuasion’ suggests it is important. Foucault, for example, does not deal with rhetoric, nor does Lukes. Meyer’s problematology seems ideally placed to contribute a major new theory of power that incorporates rhetoric.

116 Even dictators must maintain their legitimacy through a variety of means including securing the loyalty of the armed forces. Here, the question of legitimacy is still problematological rather than resolved a priori; the problem of legitimation is directed through the ruler’s ability to impose force.

117 This is not a new historical phenomenon, of course. Legitimation crises occur during the transition from one social structure to another that threatens the status of major conservative institutions, or when new social groups seek access to the political process (Lipset 1960: 78-80).

118 This is only a general theoretical relationship. I do not suggest we reify the public or the state, which are less than unitary.

119 The same questioning relationship applies to any case of delegated authority. For example, in a non-government organisation where a Board allocates authority to management and establishes reporting requirements to monitor its operations. Hence the question of legitimacy also applies to a broader definition of policy that includes non-state organisations.

120 Again, this is only a general relationship. In practice, we do not reify the state in this way. Different levels of government, such as regional governments or state governments in federal systems, ensure different regions can differentiate themselves from the whole.

121 Here, I provide only an outline of Meyer’s complex logic of ideology (see Meyer 1983: 98-103).

122 See also Majone (1989) on changing views on poverty in the United States.

123 See, for example, the Introduction to a recent Australian seminar on social policy being ignored by policymakers for the purposes of ‘a safe and manageable election campaign – any possibility of discussions about the long and overdue social reforms in Australia is denied and instead replaced by bland rhetoric and blatant political bribery’ (Centre for Public Policy 2004).

124 He offers examples of sophisticated deliberative forms that do this (2003a: 209-19).
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