
The Political Value of Disputable Knowledge. Theorising the Rhetorical Model in Parliamentary-Style Practices

*El valor político del conocimiento disputable.
Teorizando el modelo retórico en prácticas de estilo parlamentario*

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Abstract

In this article, the value of knowledge in politics is re-examined from the perspective of the rhetorical tradition. This alternative model contends that, unlike the assumptions made by such influential strands of scholarship as epistemic governance and knowledge brokerage, the disputability of knowledge derives from both the political actor(s) and their audience(s). Our aim is to deal with scholarly knowledge as it plays an inherent part in the parliamentary procedures and practices, when debating the items on the agenda from opposing points of view. Our research approach is to discuss the ideas of two major political theorists, Max Weber and Quentin Skinner, who both consider knowledge in politics in terms of interventions in debate. The main finding is that both authors regard 'knowledge' either as new arguments contributing to an existing debate or as rhetorical moves to pursue new directions for debate. We examine this debate model of knowledge in relation to the practices of academic and parliamentary debates, the role of experts and officials in the parliamentary control practices, the rhetorical use of scientific knowledge by parliamentarians in the German Bundestag, and the role of parliamentarians as lay-scholars in the European Parliament. Finally, the debate model is applied to government officials' claims to monopolise the interpretation of the existing situation, thereby restricting the extent of legitimate political discussion: the point of parliamentary debate and the responsibility of politicians concerns the situational judgment as well as the evaluation of the alternatives.

Keywords: political theory, political knowledge, debate, scholarship and politics, parliamentary practice, Max Weber, Quentin Skinner

Resumen

En este artículo, se reexamina el valor del conocimiento en la política desde la perspectiva de la tradición retórica. Este modelo alternativo sostiene que, a diferencia de las suposiciones realizadas por corrientes académicas influyentes como la gobernanza epistémica y la intermediación del conocimiento, la disputabilidad del conocimiento deriva tanto del actor o actores políticos como de su(s) audiencia(s). Nuestro objetivo es abordar el conocimiento académico como una parte inherente en los procedimientos y prácticas parlamentarias, especialmente en los debates sobre los temas en agenda desde puntos de vista opuestos. Nuestra metodología de investigación consiste en analizar las ideas de dos destacados teóricos políticos, Max Weber y Quentin Skinner, quienes consideran el conocimiento en política en términos de intervenciones en el debate. La principal conclusión es que ambos autores ven el 'conocimiento' ya sea como nuevos argumentos que contribuyen a un debate existente o como movimientos retóricos destinados a impulsar nuevas direcciones en la discusión. Examinamos este modelo de debate del conocimiento en relación con las prácticas de los debates académicos y parlamentarios, el papel de los expertos y funcionarios en las prácticas de control parlamentario, el uso retórico del conocimiento científico por parte de los parlamentarios en el Bundestag alemán, y el rol de los parlamentarios como académicos no especializados en el Parlamento Europeo. Finalmente, se aplica este modelo de debate a las afirmaciones de los funcionarios gubernamentales que buscan monopolizar la interpretación de la situación existente, restringiendo así el alcance de una discusión política legítima: el objetivo del debate parlamentario y la responsabilidad de los políticos radica en el juicio situacional y en la evaluación de las alternativas.

Palabras clave: teoría política, conocimiento político, debate, academia y política, práctica parlamentaria, Max Weber, Quentin Skinner.

1. INTRODUCTION: RE-ASSESSING THE VALUE OF KNOWLEDGE IN POLITICS

In everyday discourse, knowledge is commonly understood as 'possession', something that a person may or may not possess. For example, it was striking during the COVID-19 pandemic how medical and health experts were frequently interviewed as the 'holders' of key knowledge and the latest 'facts', which they were expected to reveal to a waiting world. In certain fields of academia, this process is known as 'knowledge brokerage', meaning the communication between scientists and the general public (Martini *et al.*, 2022). In this respect, it is assumed that knowledge can be mobilised (Mormina, 2022) and 'moved' around (Meyer, 2010: 119) as a transferable good. What the pandemic also clearly showed, however, was that 'knowledge' is disputable, since the 'facts' about the coronavirus and its impact on humans remained elusive and changeable.

In Spain, the pandemic increased political polarisation but, at the same time, it saw the consolidation of the citizens' initiative 'Science in Parliament' (*Ciencia en el Parlamento*) dating back to 2018. In March 2021, the Science and Technology Office of the Congress of Deputies, or Office C (*Oficina C*), was founded with the aim of 'promoting collaboration' between the Congress, the scientific community and the general public in 'addressing the legislative challenges the country faced (Melchor *et al.*, 2024:10). This parliamentary science advice office was formed taking into account previous experiences in other countries as well as the explicit need to steer away from a 'reactive' model of scientific and technological advice for the executive and legislative branches and adopting a more 'proactive' system of providing scientific information to parliamentary actors (Santillán-García *et al.*, 2021: 294).

In an attempt to re-assess the value of knowledge for politics, this article will examine a different model of knowledge, based on the rhetorical tradition as expounded by various authors in the field of political theory, including Max Weber and Quentin Skinner. The use of this kind of knowledge involves 'intervening in pre-existing debates' (Skinner, 2018: 11). In such debates, the *speech act* is the operative mode with which one can offer a new argument or suggest a move in a new direction. Whether or not this expectation will be *realised* in the specific context does not depend on the actor(s) alone, but also on the response of the audience(s) concerned. This model illustrates that knowledge is not to be understood as the property or possession of the acting person (i.e. epistemic governance), nor as the actual content of the proposed argument or move alone. Instead, it is our contention that the condition of political knowledge is vested in *the recognition of procedures and practices for debating* a question from opposing points of view.

Two modes of debate — academic and parliamentary — will be considered from the standpoint of this alternative model of knowledge. Our main argument is that these two genres of debate, when viewed from the perspective of the rhetorical model of knowledge, are largely similar. Parliamentary debate is, however, more complex and more regulated than its academic counterpart and in this sense it is the former that provides a model for the latter, not vice versa (see also Wiesner *et al.*, 2017).

The application of knowledge in politics is more complicated than the simplistic assumption that political decisions are little more than opinions or conclusions based on scientific advice. Within the framework of the rhetorical perspective, we will illustrate that the decisive aspects of knowledge in politics relate to recognising the procedures and practices of debate for the public contestation of different arguments. At the same time, we acknowledge that scientific research can provide parameters for acting politically, by marking out what is — or is not — realistically possible. In some cases, it can even make clear what a person or group *wants to be done*, but it can never dictate what *ought to be done*. Max Weber formulated it succinctly: 'An empirical science cannot tell anyone what he *should* do, but only what he *can* do and — in some circumstances — what he *wants*' (Weber, 2004: 363).¹

1. 'Eine empirische Wissenschaft vermag niemanden zu ehren, was er *soll*, sondern nur, was er *kann* und — unter Umständen — was er *will*.' (Weber, 1973: 151)

The structure of the paper is as follows: first, we set out the problematic aspects of knowledge as political practice, by examining the two currently common views of knowledge, namely, the relativistic and the scientific views and contrasting them to the rhetorical view of knowledge. This will be followed by a section elaborating on this alternative, rhetorical model of knowledge. It is discussed from the Weberian perspective, which sees ‘objectivity’ as a procedure of debate, further elaborated by a comparison between parliamentary and academic debate. Next, we will examine the implications of the rhetorical approach to knowledge for officials and will illustrate ways in which parliamentary control can be exercised on this knowledge. Following this, we analyse the different ways of using and controlling expertise in parliament; first in committees and then in the plenum, with specific reference to the role of parliamentarians as lay-scholars. By this, we mean experienced parliamentarians, who throughout their political career have dealt with a variety of questions and issues, often as members of different parliamentary committees, which has allowed them — even without having a background in the academic world — to develop a specialised competence to participate in scholarly debate in matters of politics. In the conclusion, we will discuss an example of the claim often made by officials to monopolise the interpretation of the existing situation, thereby restricting the extent of legitimate political discussion, emphasising our view on the value of parliamentary debate and arguing that politicians should not accept any such reduction of their political responsibility.

2. KNOWLEDGE AS POLITICAL PRACTICE: NEITHER RELATIVISM NOR SCIENTISM

Today, we can identify two prevalent (and yet contrasting) views with regard to the value of knowledge for political debate and decision-making. These are the *relativistic* and *scientific* views.

The *relativistic view* holds that there is no such thing as knowledge but only opinions. According to this view, the opinions of creationists, climate crisis denialists or anti-vaccination activists (to name but a few) should be treated with the same respect as those of scholars or investigative journalists. The inference is that political decisions are also merely matters of opinion, as ‘requested’ by electors in various polls and surveys.

Relativism, famously rebutted by Richard Rorty (1982: 166), is ‘the view that every belief on a certain topic, or perhaps *any* topic, is as good as every other. No one holds this view’. He further maintains: ‘When ... an alternative is proposed, we debate it, not in terms of categories or principles but in terms of various advantages or disadvantages it has’ (Rorty, 1982: 168). With this assessment, Rorty clearly belongs to the rhetorical tradition, emphasising the role of debate in producing political knowledge. For a relativist, in contrast, no real debate is possible. Elections and parliamentary debates are mere measurements of various opinions, as in the cases of opinion polls and surveys. Such a view, as famously expressed by US presidential aide Kellyanne Conway in 2017, claims to present ‘alternative facts’.

The main argument against relativism, similarly expressed by Rorty, is that — unlike answering questions in an opinion poll — scholarly arguments and parliamentary motions must be subjected to procedures of control, such as peer review in scholarly journals or the detailed treatment of issues by members and external experts in parliamentary committees. Both of these procedures evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of opposing views and arguments, finally leading to a balanced appraisal on the basis of a closer examination of the issues at stake.

The *scientistic view* refers to commonly expressed claims that decision-making in politics must be ‘science-based’. This is not to dispute the existence and value of science and scholarship as such. Our aim in introducing this view is merely to put forward that this old *topos*, along with its interpretations, range and political implications, continues to be a common assumption in public debates. It holds on to the ‘superior’ authority of science as the guiding principle for parliamentary politics. It also plays a prominent part in government programmes and similar documents. The implied argument is that improved (or better governed) knowledge could terminate political controversies.

There is a long tradition dating back to Plato’s ‘philosopher kings’, continuing through claims of ‘scientification of politics’ by Saint-Simon and Engels with their idea of replacing governing by persons ‘by the administration of things’ (Engels, 1948: 343) and the case of ‘technocracy movement’, influential beyond academic debates in the post World War II US and Canada (see Burris, 1993), to replace political decisions with scientific expertise. In practice, the scientistic view assumes a rule of experts who are not elected by and responsible to the citizens (see e.g. Merkel, 2023: 209-242). The ‘scientification’ aims at reducing politics to an application of the results of science without recognising the controversial and frequently contested character of knowledge. Even if all participants happen to share a similar interpretation of knowledge, there exists a ‘gap’ from knowledge to judgement and from judgement to decision. It is the politicians’ responsibility to identify both gaps and debate how to deal with them.

Our contention is that the scientistic model relies largely on a misleading view of the contribution that scholarship makes to politics. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated clearly that scientific knowledge often cannot provide a sufficient ‘basis’ or justification for political decisions. In many parliamentary democracies, expert advice has been challenged in recent years, specifically because there was not enough information or scientific evidence available to make proper judgements about the coronavirus. Instead, politicians had to use weak evidence to support the decisions that they were expected to make. The challenges to political decision-making are attributed to ‘scientific uncertainty’ that produces ‘conflicting values’ and results in ‘conflicting interpretations of evidence, public criticism and the contestation of the decision-making process’ (Mormina, 2022: 672).

The aim of this article is to introduce a third, *rhetorical* view, that has a long history but has not yet been studied from the point of view of *disputable* knowledge as an inherent part of parliamentary practice. Linguists have increasingly studied parliaments with discourse analytical approach (e.g. Wodak and van Dijk, 2000) or

Habermasian inspiration (Burkhardt, 2003). Political scientists have also been using a Habermasian-type concept of ‘deliberation’ (Steiner et al., 2004). With the exception of pragma-rhetorical approaches (see Ilie, 2010), such views, however, tend to assume that debate should ideally lead to a consensus. They judge the ‘quality’ of parliamentary debates by ‘discourse quality index’ (e.g. Steiner et al., 2004: 45-73), a top-down criteria set for parliamentarians, which ignores the value of politicians’ hands-on knowledge to assess it. Some politicians have also suggested that ‘scientific policy advice’ could help to simplify political decision-making. However, the main principle of parliamentary procedure lies in the recognition that all decisions are disputable as such and that the weighing of conflicting values and interpretations of different situations is an indispensable part of the political vocation (see Palonen, 2021: 134-136, 250-254).

In sum, for its focus on debate, the rhetorical view of knowledge promotes the recognition of disputability and deliberation. The scientific view is inadequate to deal with the controversial judgements on the value and significance of knowledge in parliamentary politics. Relying on scientific arguments alone cannot legitimise political decisions. And, without clear parliamentary dissent to voice valid concerns relating to those decisions, relativistic forces, for their part, including the proponents of ‘alternative facts’, can easily gain ground.

3. THE ‘OBJECTIVITY’ OF KNOWLEDGE RE-CONSIDERED: THE RHETORICAL MODEL

It is commonplace to understand knowledge as ‘objective’. Even in academia, the criteria for ‘objective’ and ‘objectivity’ are seldomly problematised. Max Weber, however, did precisely that in a thorough and unconventional manner in his article on ‘objectivity’ in 1904. Following Nietzsche, Weber emphasised that ‘all knowledge of cultural reality is always knowledge from a *specific point of view*’ (Weber, 1973: 181, 170; Weber, 2004: 381, 374). ‘Reality’ itself is inexhaustible in conceptual terms and possible definitions and perspectives are numerous. Knowledge is concerned with different interpretations of realities, not presumed ‘facts’ or a total view *à la* Hegel.

The question Weber puts forward with regard to ‘objectivity’ is this: how can we judge interpretations of reality? His approach is pragmatic, discussing the interpretations of reality that scholars have used in actual research practice, such as, for example, the conflict (*Methodenstreit*) between the historical and Austrian schools in economics. How are these interpretations related to past scholarship and the current state of affairs?

Max Weber quotes an exasperated Viennese student who felt he was confronted with ‘two sciences of economics’. For Weber, however, this is a regular occurrence for scholars: ‘[T]his is clear to anyone who observes the struggle about methods, “basic concepts” and presuppositions: the constant change of viewpoints and the continual redefinition of “concepts”’ (1973: 160-161; Weber, 2004: 367-368). In other words,

he does not regard the conflict relating to concepts, methods, approaches and perspectives between different schools of thought as exceptional, but rather as an inherent part of scholarly activity. The only form of 'progress', the only way to avoid stagnation, lies in the acceptance of revisions in the conceptual apparatus (Weber, 1973: 206-207; Weber, 2004: 398-399). Controversies are therefore part and parcel of scholarly life (Weber, 1973: 153; Weber, 2004: 363).

'Objectivity' refers to a procedure for debating the pros and cons of theories, concepts, perspectives, approaches, and so on. In instances where he identified a consensus among scholars within a discipline, Weber saw the danger of research stagnation (Weber, 1973: 184; Weber, 2004: 383). Accordingly, 'objectivity' in his view is not the quality of a person but a scholarly practice: if someone treats knowledge of a particular topic as their personal property, this would stop further debate, which in Weber's terms is equivalent to abandoning the search for truth (1973: 160; Weber, 2004: 367). In contrast, adopting partial and partisan standpoints can potentially have a great heuristic value for debate in comparison with 'middle ground' positions (Weber, 1973: 154; Weber, 2004: 364).

Weber's polemic approach was directed against the absence of a fair procedure for dealing with omnipresent academic disputes. For him, scholarly controversies are as regular, legitimate and valuable as those found in parliamentary politics. His preferred model of 'fair play' for dealing with controversies was the Westminster parliamentary procedure (Palonen, 2010). Similarly, when Quentin Skinner recommends reading philosophical treatises as speech acts in debates (2008b), he likewise directs attention to the context of the speech; in other words, to identifying the question to which the speech is trying to provide an answer (Skinner, 1969; see also Collingwood, 1978).

Weber's rethinking of objectivity focused on the relationship between parliament and academia, making clear that parliamentary and academic modes of debate have many similarities. In the domain of political theory, Skinner (2008b) also recommended to his students that they should read Hobbes' *Leviathan* as they would 'read a speech in parliament'. Weber, for his part, emphasises that in the human sciences the only way to prevent stagnation lies in a constant struggle to judge the strengths and weaknesses of theories (1973: esp. 156-157, 206-207; Weber, 2004: 364, 399-400). In this way, Weber urges us to create new knowledge through a parliamentary style deliberation of *pro et contra*.

At the same time, of course, differences between the scholarly and the parliamentary modes of debate must be considered. Academic debate has, in principle, no time limit, whereas the early Westminster procedure already acknowledged that debates in parliament must be limited in duration. The motions made must include a resolution to vote and all speeches must refer to the motion and the resolution, for the purpose of achieving what should be done (Palonen, 2014). In more recent procedural literature, the debate itself is considered to be 'the main process', with the vote as the final step in the debate (Griffith and Ryle, 2003: 86). Academic debate generally follows an imperfect version of parliamentary debate without a final vote, but, as Skinner (2018)

points out, a scholar can still intervene in a debate in a manner that can help to serve the decision-making of politicians.

The supply of opposing views by scholars is important for novel takes on concepts and theories prevalent in political debates (see also Mill, 1991). It dispenses with the assumption of linear progress of scholarship, allowing to consider dominant trends as passing fashions and judgements on progress as revisable, while giving occasion to present dissenting voices and unconventional approaches in public discussions. Therein lies the value of disputable knowledge. Similar to parliamentary-style of politics, normatively speaking, academic scholarship should not leave any knowledge claims without examination and confrontation with alternative perspectives. Knowledge serves as a power share (*Machtanteil*) (see Weber, 1994a), but as such it is equally disputable and never justifies an unconditional *ex cathedra* authority of scholars, experts and specialists.

In summary, the rhetorical model of knowledge highlights the value of knowledge as a practice to create arguments from a plurality of standpoints. A parliamentary scholar can advise his or her readers to use procedural tools such as amendments, adjournments or questions of order as examples of rhetorical practices for re-evaluation, as well as the devaluation or neutralising of concepts (see Skinner, 1999 on *paradiastole*).

4. THE PARLIAMENTARY CONTROL OF KNOWLEDGE

Weber's essay on 'objectivity' published in 1904 considers the nature of academic knowledge (*Erkenntnis*), but the perspectivist and controversial tone of his discourse and the demand for fair debate also embrace everyday knowledge (*Wissen*). In his polemic against the lack of parliamentary government in the German Empire, and in particular with his *Parlament* pamphlet published in 1918, Weber contributed to a broader interpretation of parliamentarism. He demanded the election of ministers from among the members of parliament and also argued in favour of the possibility to dismiss a government through a vote of no confidence, whilst further emphasising the duty of the government to respond to criticism from parliament in plenum and committees. More importantly, the pamphlet also dealt with the question of parliamentary control of the administration (Weber, 1984b: 226; Weber, 1994b: 165-166).

In Westminster, the parliamentary control of officials, especially through committees, had been regarded as a major aspect of parliamentary practice since the nineteenth century (see Bagehot, 2001). In the Wilhelmine *Reichstag*, ministers were regarded as officials. This meant that when an MP became a minister (in a federal state, since no *Reich* government existed at that time), he had to give up his parliamentary seat, whereas in Britain since the eighteenth century ministers remained as MPs (see Selinger, 2019). Weber referred to the German system the 'rule of officialdom' (*Beamtenherrschaft*) (1984b: 212-234; Weber, 1994b: 145-177). The key claim of officials in response to the concerns of parliamentarians — not only in the German Empire, but also more generally — was (and is) that they 'know better' than the parliamentarians, who they tend to treat as 'dilettantes' in policy matters.

Max Weber is often regarded as being a theorist of bureaucracy. This assumption neglects his crucial distinction between bureaucracy and bureaucratisation; the former being indispensable in a modern state, whereas the expansion of the bureaucratic style of thinking far beyond its legitimate limits was already a worrying world-wide tendency in Weber's time. Weber thought that while bureaucratisation could not be stopped, it was at least possible to develop counterweights to hold it in check. In his *Parlament* pamphlet, Weber asked how it might be possible to salvage any last remaining remnants of individual freedom against this overwhelming bureaucratisation trend. His answer was that a minimum of democracy could best be maintained by asking what bureaucracy cannot do (Weber, 1984b: 222; Weber, 1994b: 149).

Weber saw parliaments as being a proper counterweight to bureaucracy (1984b: 226; 1994b: 165) and he was interested in finding ways that would allow parliaments to assume power (1984b: 244; 1994b: 190). He does not dispute the superior knowledge of officials over MPs in routine policy issues, but for this very reason he regards parliamentary control of the officials' knowledge as the 'political key' to the parliamentary system. This position would not be tenable without Weber's re-thinking of the concept of objectivity as a procedure for enabling fair debate as the tacit background for decision-making (Palonen, 2010).

The government official and the (leading) politician are ideal types that have different responsibilities. The official follows instructions; the politician, struggling to deal with the opposing views of his adversaries, takes independent responsibility for his standpoint (Weber, 1984b: 222-224; Weber, 1994b: 159-161). In Weber's opinion, officials tend to be 'poor' politicians, doomed to fail when they try to act politically, because of their inability to engage effectively in controversies and to take a political stand in relation to them (1984b: 235; 1994b: 177-178). After recent events, however, we must add that political control of officials does not refer here to any arbitrary power of presidents or ministers over them. As parliamentarians scrutinise proposals of the officials, they must consider their arguments from the point of view of both the legality and the expediency of the measures.

Weber distinguishes three types of knowledge regarding officials in their interaction with parliamentarians: *Fachwissen* (specialised knowledge), *Dienstwissen* (official information) and *Geheimwissen* (secret knowledge or official secrecy). Each of them was used at times for legitimising the rule of officialdom but all three can be controlled by parliamentarians through a range of different procedures that make it possible for the parliamentarians to question the officials' knowledge and its use for the legitimising of their power (Weber, 1984b: 236-238; Weber, 1994b: 178-180).

According to Weber, the best way to control the officials' specialised factual knowledge lies in the cross-examination of officials from different bureaus and ministries, each of whom have their own interests. Officials tend to be blinded by the specific perspective of their position and their specialism (turning them into *Fachidioten*, as the German expression puts it), instead of attempting to judge issues politically through the consideration of opposing points of view. To counteract this failing, parliamentary committees use hearings attended by external experts (*Sachverständige*),

a procedure that allows the validity or the significance of the officials' knowledge to be disputed, thereby widening the knowledge horizon of the MPs in relation to the matters under discussion and making it possible for them to form an independent judgement of the relevant pros and cons (Weber, 1984b: 236; Weber, 2004: 178).

Another possibility for officials to gain the upper hand over politicians lies in the information that the former receive in their offices. Officials can rely on the information contained in documents, archives or other sources as a basis for justifying the government's policy. In Weber's time, the members of the Reichstag had no access to these sources and were therefore unable to dispute the information. Weber proposed that the members of parliamentary committees should have on-the-spot access to these sources (*Augenscheineinnahme*), as well as the opportunity to cross-examine officials about such sources (Weber, 1984b: 236; Weber, 2004: 178-179).

The most difficult type of knowledge for the parliamentarians to control relates to official secrets (*Dienstgeheimnis*), classically represented by the *arcana imperii* or secrets of the realm. In Weber's opinion, the modus of control for these secrets was provided by the so-called parliamentary right to inquiry (*Enqueterecht*). He thought that it would frequently be sufficient simply to 'threaten' officials with the setting up of a special parliamentary commission of inquiry. This would usually have the effect of persuading the government's chief administrators to divulge their secret knowledge. The Weimar constitution and the *Grundgesetz* of the Federal Republic both followed Weber's proposals in this respect, including the possibility to establish such commissions of inquiry in the Bundestag, with opposition members of the assembly as their chairs (Weber, 1984b: 236-237; Weber, 2004: 179-180).

Weber's classification of the types of knowledge used for securing the rule of officialdom and the counterbalancing procedural instruments of parliaments should be taken as examples, based on his knowledge of the Westminster parliament, and not as an exhaustive list of topics and controlling tools. Since Weber's time, both the British and the German parliaments have developed their own profiles of parliamentary control (for Britain, see Evans, 2017; for Germany, see Siefken, 2018).

Nevertheless, Weber's examples are still useful to illustrate the complex relationship between politics and knowledge. Parliamentarians acquire their knowledge through their practice of judging the strengths and weaknesses of motions and the arguments on which they are based, supplemented by their ability to 'weigh the power of words in party conflict' (Weber, 1984a: 187; Weber, 1994b: 127). In fact, Weber even goes so far as to argue that the officials would actually benefit from acknowledging the superiority of parliamentarians as the political actors *par excellence*, since this would allow them to learn how to appreciate both sides of the question under debate (1984b: 237; 1994b: 182). Under the aegis of parliamentary government, officials (in a manner similar to the external experts invited to attend parliamentary committees) would be subject to fewer restrictions to acquire knowledge or information and therefore more at liberty to open up new perspectives or to conduct new thought experiments. This would effectively put them on a more equal footing with the parliamentarians in the committee.

5. KNOWLEDGE AND DEBATE IN PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

An appeal to knowledge-related terms is a recurrent aspect of parliamentary debate. If we look at the classical procedural commentaries of the British parliament, terms such as ‘evidence’, ‘testimony’, ‘inquiry’, ‘examination’, ‘investigation’ and so on are a regular part of the procedural language; more specifically of forensic rhetoric (see for example May, 1883; Redlich, 1905: esp. 450–462). In the law courts, such expressions are also a common part of the argumentation and, as such, are subject to controversy and disagreement.

Scholarly arguments are especially relevant in committee debates. In Westminster, select committees focus on the giving and examination of evidence, investigating topics that are related to items on the political agenda. Erskine May’s updated online treatise on Westminster procedure explains their power and usefulness as follows: ‘Select committees have become over recent years the principal mechanism by which the House discharges its responsibilities for the detailed scrutiny of government policy, spending and actions’ (UK Parliament, 2019: paragraph 38.1). Parliamentary committees also extend invitations to persons outside their own membership, including parliamentary officials, the government officials charged with preparing and defending the motions under discussion, officials from other departments, other civil servants, the representatives of interest groups and activist networks, and so on. The evidence given in the committee is submitted to debate, with the members of the committee judging its weight and significance for the motion and its resolution, each from their own perspective.

Committees frequently hear representatives from interest groups, who are expected to give their overtly partisan standpoints on specific motions on the political agenda. This generates healthy controversy, which involves investigating and passing judgement on the situation as a whole and on the suppositions on which the justification of the motion is based, as well as any possible unexpected consequences to which the approval of the motion might lead. Such partisan views help to widen the spectrum of considerations for the committee members, while at the same time effectively lobbying them for their support of the interest group’s own standpoint. The members must understand this double impact of inviting partisan experts to attend their committees.

Scholars are also regularly used as external experts. As far as this article is concerned, we are particularly interested in the use of this type of expertise in parliamentary debates. These experts’ scholarly knowledge of the subject matter rarely, if ever, exactly matches the issue on the agenda. It tends to be either more general than the content of the motion or, conversely, so specific that meaningful reflection on the motion’s presuppositions and/or its wider consequences is lacking. Experts cannot simply transfer their knowledge to the matter under discussion. This must be assessed for its relevance to the said matter, to be judged politically by the committee members.

Using an example from classical forensic rhetoric, we can further illustrate the nature of the disputes faced by parliamentarians and legal experts in committees. In his *Forensic Shakespeare* (2014), Skinner emphasises that, based on the pre-Ciceronian rhetoric of *Ad Herennium*, three types of controversies need to be distinguished: first,

there is legal controversy, arising “out of a text or something stemming from a text”; second, there is conjectural controversy “about some matter of fact” or, as Skinner adds, ‘about some mystery surrounding a matter of fact that needs to be resolved’; and third, there is juridical controversy, which relates to “whether something was justly or unjustly done” (Skinner, 2014: 23).² By analysing Shakespeare’s forensic plays, Skinner further demonstrates how the different parties involved in court cases might also disagree about which kind of controversy is at stake.

In similar vein, we can easily illustrate how comparable disputes occur in parliamentary controversies. For example, constitutional lawyers, statisticians and political scientists might all be invited by a committee as experts to discuss the principles and effects of electoral systems: whether, for instance, a proposed electoral reform will be compatible with the text of the constitution, or how it might alter the distribution of seats, or whether such changes would be fair or not. It is perfectly possible that these experts will disagree about which of these aspects should be considered as the most important one for the motion under debate. And even if the experts agree that the existing electoral system is not ‘fair’, there remains the question of just how ‘fair’ the proposed motion to change the system truly is, not only in terms of the legal framework, but also in terms of the degree of correspondence between the interpretations of reality and ‘fair play’ and the basic principle itself (for more on fair play and fairness in a Westminster procedural reform debate in 1882, see Palonen, 2014).

Within the current discourse on such matters, the fashionable term ‘science-based policy’ or even ‘science-based politics’ is increasingly prevalent. It can be, however, argued that the interpretations of the past can no longer be used to determine the future, not even in ‘conservative’ politics. In judging this future, we can concur with Reinhart Koselleck (1979) that the ‘horizon of expectation’ appears distinct from the ‘space of experience’. The judgement of the present situation is always selective and contrasting views on it offer acting politicians different choices about what is possible and what might be the realistic consequences of these choices. Although the quality of judgements past, present and future varies, it is up to the politicians themselves to debate and vote on the available alternatives.

6. APPEALS TO SCIENCE IN PLENARY DEBATES IN THE GERMAN BUNDESTAG

Our scholarly doubts concerning the justification of political decisions in the name of ‘science’ do not necessarily correspond with the actual use of the *topos* in parliamentary plenary debates. Whereas in the committees scholars can present their arguments in detail, in the plenary debates the options for appealing to or criticising the ‘authority of science’ are more general. For an understanding of the rhetoric of

2. Here, the double quotation marks refer to *Ad Herennium* in English translation.

‘science’ in politics, such appeals and critiques are nonetheless interesting, and it is also relevant to consider how the *topos* has changed over time.

To examine this kind of rhetoric, we analyse the expression ‘scientific basis’ (*wissenschaftliche Grundlagen*) in the German Bundestag plenary debates,³ available online from the beginning of 1949 to the end of the nineteenth parliamentary term in 2021, and this in the form of a brief longitudinal study. The point is merely to present ‘representative anecdotes’ (in the sense of Burke, 1945) relating to the application of this expression. It should also be borne in mind that *Wissenschaft* in German refers to all kinds of scholarship, including the humanities. We regard appeals made to a ‘scientific basis’ in parliamentary plenum as rhetorical moves.

An overview of the general situation was obtained by a search for the term ‘scientific basis’ in the Bundestag online archives, which also indicated the frequency of term’s use during different parliamentary cycles. This use grew slightly after the coalition of Social Democrats (SPD) and Free Democrats (FDP) took office in 1969. Since then, however, the level of use has remained stable, with the exception of a peak during the Christian Democrat (CDU) and Social Democrat (CSU) coalition governments of 2017-2021. For a more detailed analysis, we have chosen the two parliamentary terms of Konrad Adenauer’s CDU coalitions with the FDP (1949-1957), one term of the SPD-FDP government of Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt (1972-1976), one term of Helmut Kohl’s CDU-FDP coalition (1991-1994) following German reunification, one term of Gerhard Schröder’s SPD-Green government (1998-2002) and one term of Angela Merkel’s CDU-SPD coalition (2013-2017).

Numerous search results refer to policy reforms or preventive measures on matters such as health and medicine or the protection of environment. These references often appeal to the external expertise to be found in ministries or specialised institutes. As an example, Mechthild Heil (CDU) made reference to ‘numbers, dates and facts’ that could provide a scientific foundation for quality testing and mentions an exemplary reliable source to obtain this data (20 June 2014).

In some cases, new specialist offices are seen as a guarantee for scientific quality. For Rudi Walter (SPD), the newly founded Federal Environmental Office (*Umweltbundesamt*) would provide the necessary juridico-administrative basis for a new measure (18 June 1973). Similarly, Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher (FDP) promised that the Federal Health Office (*Bundesgesundheitsamt*) would provide the scientific basis for the legal regulation in a study with a deadline (8 November 1973). Carl-Christoph Schweitzer (SPD), Professor of International Politics, refers to his upcoming book with Polish colleagues on ‘scientific basis’ (21 March 1973). These examples indicate that the social-liberal coalition was especially reliant on the use of

3. See the search conducted for this analysis in the official website of the German Bundestag using the key words ‘Wissenschaftliche Grundlage’. Accessed 2 November 2023, https://dip.bundestag.de/erweiterte-suche?term=%22wissenschaftliche%20Grundlage%22&f.herausgeber_dokumentart=Bundestag-Plenarprotokoll&rows=25&sort=basisdatum_auf

‘a scientific basis’ for justifying its reforms, as a substitute for more intuitive judgements.

That being said, the coalition’s critics also asked for more reliable prognoses based on scientific evidence. Ludwig Franz (CSU) asked for the expected number of conscientious objectors (*Kriegsdienstverweigerer*) if the conscience examination would be abolished (26 September 1974; see also Herbert Gruhl (CDU) on the expected number of household devices, 9 April 1975). Hans-Joachim Otto (FDP) asked for the ‘scientific basis’ of the red-green government’s draft plan for the prohibition of alcohol advertising and its possible consequences for companies, citizens and the media (8 September 1999). In the subsequent debate, Otto and parliamentary state secretary Christa Nickels (Greens) both based their claims on conflicting ‘scientific results’. Otto’s arguments give an indication of how lobbyists can also legitimise their interests in the name of ‘science’. In this case, the different judgements relating to the current situation were contested.

In a number of other cases, the issue was the replacing of outdated scholarly views with more recent ones. Joachim Singer (SPD) mentions that the critique of ‘repressive drug policy’ is shared by reasonable (*vernünftige*) CDU members, and argues for a new experiment on ‘scientific basis’ (*auf wissenschaftlicher Grundlage*) (1 July 1993). Responding to Brita Haßelmann’s (Greens) question about voting rights for mentally disabled (*behinderte*) persons, parliamentary state secretary Günther Krings (CDU) refers to an interdisciplinary study as ‘scientific basis’ necessary to establish the appropriate conditions for such reform (19 March 2014).

The results of scientific studies were occasionally contested. Parliamentary state secretary Jürgen Schmude (SPD) disputed the results of a Polish study into the numbers of German refugees in Polish areas (6 November 1974). Monika Ganseforth (SPD) blames the lack of ‘scientific basis’ for climate-friendly traffic policy and sees the car lobby behind the recommendations of the government (21 September 1994). Michael Hufstedt (Greens) contests the numbers of the Minister of Economics with reference to studies of ‘our scholars’ (5 July 2002).

Governing CDU/CSU parliamentarians still tend to rely on ‘the numbers’ as a ‘unitary scientific basis’ for reducing disputes (Fritz Hellwig, 19 September 1955; see also Mechthild Heil (CDU) quoted above). This ‘science on our side’ *topos* is explicitly used when blaming the Greens of emotional politics, as can be seen, for example, in Arthur Auernhammer’s (CSU) response to Harald Ebner’s (Greens) accusation against agricultural chemical lobbyists (*Agrarchemielobbyisten*) (21 October 2016). Max Straubinger (CSU) claimed that the protection of consumers must have ‘a scientific basis’ instead of the ‘gifts of the month’ invented by the Greens (13 May 2016; see also Thomas Mahlberg (CDU), 21 January 2015). All these arguments date from the CDU-SPD coalition period.

In the first Bundestag term of Adenauer’s CDU-FDP coalition, Herbert Kriedemann (SPD) warned against the overinterpretations of ‘scientific socialism’ (25 February 1953). Something of this *topos* still persists. For Gudrun Schaich-Walch (SPD), science-based knowledge is a necessary but not a sufficient ground for making

decisions (28 April 1994), whereas Ulrich Heinrich (FDP) expressed his preference for 'scientific' grounds over the 'ideological' politics of the red-green Schröder government (15 November 2001).

Compared with the scientific ideal, the Bundestag arguments on science are modest. Both the government and the opposition claim the support of 'science' for their own side, while disputing the 'scientific basis' for the arguments of the other side. Appeals to 'science' can be accompanied either by a rejection of outdated practices that no longer take account of the current state of research or by references to future policies that need to take scholarship more fully into account (see, for example, Anni Brandt-Elsweiler (SPD) for the inclusion of more women-relevant themes in the health system, 8 November 2000). In practice, the rhetoric of 'the scientific basis' in the Bundestag most frequently refers to the present state of research. It is not generally acknowledged that scientific results themselves are disputable in principle, but Helmut Lippelt (Greens) noted already in 1990 that 'science' cannot be unpolitical any more.⁴ This implies that all science has a political aspect, which does not make it less 'scientific'.

7. A SPECIALISED KNOWLEDGE OF POLITICS IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AS LAY-SCHOLARS

While the previous section illustrated examples of how parliamentarians use 'the scientific basis' in political debates, in this section attention will be turned to parliamentarians who participate in scholarly debates about politics. We will approach the parliamentarians' use of procedural knowledge as their way of understanding knowledge as political practice. In this respect, we will argue that some professional parliamentarians can be defined as 'lay scholars' (or independent / non-professional scholars) when it comes to having a specialised knowledge of politics. This argument is inspired by recent scholarship in political theory relating to the European Union (EU), which considers the close relationship between political theorising and political practice (see in particular Kauppi and Palonen, 2022).

An interesting older example of how a non-academic politician has contributed to political scholarship is the British Labour politician Herbert Morrison (1888-1965). He was a 'self-made man', who sat in the House of Commons for decades and served as a deputy party leader and as a government minister in the Labour and war-time coalition governments, before finally being elevated to the House of Lords. In co-operation with Oxford University, Morrison published the book entitled *Government and Parliament. A survey from inside* (1954), when Labour was back in opposition. It describes the Westminster political system in the language of an insider, but without using the academic jargon of the time (Morrison, 1954). This makes it significantly different from later studies by parliamentary anthropologists (see Crewe, 2015).

4. 'Wissenschaft ist politisch: sie kann nicht mehr unpolitisch sein' (1 June 1990).

Morrison, who did not have a background in academia, was an established politician who over time gained such a high degree of political experience and developed such a faculty for shrewd political judgement that he eventually became knowledgeable enough to discuss, for example, the academic fashions underpinning government motions or the technocratic jargon of the European Council and the European Commission in their efforts to depoliticise policy proposals. During their long political careers, parliamentarians of this kind have dealt with a variety of questions, not least in their role as members in different parliamentary committees. This enables them to develop specialised knowledge that allows to participate meaningfully in scholarly debates relating to politics, even though they have no real experience of the academic world.

Using these criteria, we have selected two examples among recent Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), whose contributions to political debate will be examined in more detail. In the field of EU studies, committee work is regarded as forming the cornerstone not only for the Parliament's legislation, but also for promoting the political careers of MEPs through greater specialisation (Alexander, 2022: 901). Improved standards of professionalism through the acquisition of specialised knowledge in a certain policy area, such as the financial sector, the energy sector or digital communications, is now expected of all MEPs. However, the persistent image of the European Parliament (EP) as a forum dominated largely by specialised, technical expertise has recently been challenged. In fact, it has been illustrated that the EP's knowledge is primarily political rather than technical, and therefore subject to contestation in the EP's committee work (Elomäki and Haapala, 2024).

With all this in mind, two MEPs have been chosen for closer examination: Guy Verhofstadt and Sophie in 't Veld, both representing the Renew Europe political group in the EP. The former Belgian prime minister Guy Verhofstadt, a member of the Flemish liberal party (*Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten* or VLD) was first elected to the Parliament in 2009 and he almost immediately became the leader of the ALDE political group (the name changed to Renew Europe in the run-up to the European elections of 2019). Since then, Verhofstadt has held several top positions in European politics, such as the EP's Brexit coordinator and the co-chair of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

A lawyer by training, Verhofstadt has contributed to scholarly debate by publishing various works on European politics. During his Belgian premiership and before entering the EP, his pamphlet *The United States of Europe: A manifesto for a new Europe* (2006) was published by the Federal Trust in London. In it, Verhofstadt (2006) presented a political analysis of the European constitutional crisis in 2005. He argued that the French and Dutch voters had not rejected the Constitution because it was too ambitious, but because it was not ambitious enough. Verhofstadt's interpretation of the resulting political crisis was that the political goals of the Constitution were not sufficiently clear. The main aim of his book was therefore to outline the goals that he thought were missing from the public debate of this crucial matter. In this way, he reinterpreted the crisis and reframed the political debate in accordance with his own analysis.

In the aftermath of the 2010 Eurozone crisis, Verhofstadt and the former co-chair of the European Green Party, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, co-wrote the pamphlet *For Europe! Manifesto for a postnational revolution in Europe*, which was eventually published in 2012. It was a blueprint for wide-ranging European reform and was translated into various European languages, including German and Spanish. The key message of the pamphlet was that Europe and its citizens should not settle for the status quo. At the same time, the book offered a re-interpretation of the Eurozone financial crisis: 'This was not a crisis of the euro, and not even a crisis of the European single currency as such. What is certain is that, right from the very beginning, a grave fundamental error was committed, an almost fatal absurdity in the way the structure of the single currency was built' (Cohn-Bendit and Verhofstadt, 2012: 33). By arguing that the Eurozone crisis was not really about the single currency, they presented a revisionist view of the political debate surrounding the crisis.

This re-interpretation of the Eurozone crisis does not take the standard political labels of the crisis at face value. According to Cohn-Bendit and Verhofstadt, the most serious political error had already been committed before the crisis happened:

On 1st January 2002, when the Euro was officially launched, its promoters knew full well that this would not be possible without laying the foundations of an integrated political and financial system; that is, a system at the European level. But since they could not agree on what that union should look like, they deluded themselves by saying that, thanks to the mere existence of the euro, an integrated economic and financial policy would automatically result (Cohn-Bendit and Verhofstadt, 2012: 33).

In other words, the Eurozone crisis was really about making (or not making) political decisions that had long been overdue. By avoiding tough political issues on the single currency, the inevitable and much needed increase of European integration was sidelined. What's more, Europe's political leaders camouflaged this reluctance to take their political responsibility in misleading economic and technocratic terms. The main conclusion of this interpretation was that the creation of the Euro and the subsequent crisis were a clear example of economic expertise being used by politicians as an excuse for failing to do what was politically necessary.

If we analyse Verhofstadt's two pamphlets, they both seem to re-direct the political debate about both European crises in a direction that leads away from the commonly accepted narrative. In the case of the European Constitution, Verhofstadt argued that it became a crisis because the proposals were not clear and ambitious enough. In the case of the Eurozone, Verhofstadt and Cohn-Bendit claimed that the crisis was the result of a lack of political will.

Verhofstadt's colleague in the Renew Europe group, Dutch MEP Sophie in 't Veld, is another example of a non-professional scholar who has extensive political experience and takes active part in public debate about European politics. In 't Veld represents D66, a centre-liberal political party in the Netherlands, named after the year of its foundation. She was first elected as an MEP in 2004, before which she was

a political assistant to MEP Johanna Boogerd-Quaak from the same party, who served two parliamentary terms in the EP from 1994 to 1999 and from 2003 to 2004.

In her book *The Scent of Wild Animals*, self-published in August 2021, Sophie in 't Veld argues for a reform of Europe's post-pandemic political institutions. The title of the book is taken from a quote by the founder of D66, Hans van Mierlo, speaking in the Dutch parliament in 1977: 'I really love the scent of wild animals in this building' (cited in English in the book). A former journalist, van Mierlo became the leader of his party, arguing for the radical democratisation of Dutch politics and its overemphasis on science-based policies.

In the book, MEP in 't Veld comments on the parliamentary control of public debates during the pandemic in similar terms:

Let there be no misunderstanding: listening to the experts and science is the sensible thing to do in a crisis, and I would not want to recommend otherwise. But the — false — impression was created that decisions were apolitical, that politics had been depoliticised and reduced to mere technocratic management on the basis of facts and figures. No need for public debate or parliamentary control. (in 't Veld, 2021: 13)

In her view, parliamentary control was sidelined during the COVID-19 crisis, with pandemic politics being reduced to little more than technocratic management. In this way, she describes the pandemic crisis management in a manner comparable with Verhofstadt and Cohn-Bendit, when they argued that the politics of the Euro-zone crisis was camouflaged as mere technocratic governance by economic experts.

Strikingly, in 't Veld uses a rhetorical *topos* similar to the one found in the Bundestag's plenary sessions, mentioned earlier in this article in relation to 'science-based' politics. She juxtaposes old, ill-equipped governance methods with the new political tools that are needed to tackle the EU's challenges: 'Climate change... will put the solidarity and unity of the European Union severely to the test. [...] But the current European governance system is not equipped for challenges of this magnitude. It was designed for the world of the 1950s' (in 't Veld, 2021: 4). In her view, the political institutions of today's EU belong to a bygone era and were created with past problems in mind.

One of the main arguments in her book is that the EP should have full powers over the EU budget. Although those powers are currently still limited, the Parliament 'should use the powers it has more strategically and assertively' (in 't Veld, 2021: 54). In particular, she proposes that the Parliament should use its committees more effectively to scrutinise and 'get leverage' over certain policy areas in its dealings with the Commission: 'In my experience, the Commission (and member states) are extremely reluctant to provide full insight into the way money is spent [...]' ('t Veld, 2021: 55). She argues, in the Weberian sense, that the exercising of parliamentary scrutiny over the executive is needed: 'The Commission denies responsibility and usually fails to give serious answers to parliamentary questions' ('t Veld, 2021: 56). She also points out that, as things stand, the Parliament does not have 'the power to summon witnesses

or hear them under oath'. Even though it has conducted successful parliamentary inquiries in the past, including the Panama Papers tax evasion scandal, it cannot compel witnesses to attend its hearings.

When the Parliamentary committee for public health (ENVI) called in the CEOs of pharmaceutical giants to question them about delivery issues with the COVID vaccines in early 2021, it took considerable arm-twisting to make them come to Parliament. Parliament has no formal means to summon witnesses (in 't Veld, 2021: 58).

She suggests that the Parliament should use other means to put pressure on witnesses. In the case of businesses and organisations, the lobby register could include a clause that would make it obligatory for the registered companies to comply with parliamentary inquiries. Should they refuse, their accreditation would be withdrawn. With regard to member states of the EU and their government agencies, refusal to submit to parliamentary scrutiny should have some kind of 'political consequences', she argues ('t Veld, 2021: 58).

8. THE KNOWLEDGE OF EXPERTS AND POLITICIANS: THE DEBATE MODEL

In this paper, we have aimed to re-assess the value and weight of knowledge in parliamentary-style politics where its disputable character is recognised in debate. For this reason, we have proposed and examined two modes of debate — the academic and the parliamentary — from the perspective of an alternative, rhetorical model of knowledge. Our main argument is that these two genres of debate, when viewed in terms of the rhetorical model of knowledge, are largely similar. We analysed both genres with case examples of parliamentary practices in plenaries and in committees, as instances to illustrate relevant procedural activity. This, we contend, should make it possible to outline some avenues for further scholarly investigation into the political value of knowledge.

The aim was to challenge the prevalent views about political knowledge. We argue that while politics cannot be based on the 'relativistic' view, which assumes that political decisions are mere opinions (or 'alternative facts'), neither can it be governed by the 'scientistic' view, which would imply a neglect of their duties by politicians, while hiding their (political) decisions behind the authority of scholars or other experts. In an attempt to facilitate a better collaboration between the scholarly community and the parliament, the Spanish Congress' office of scientific advice was founded during the pandemic. The issue of providing scientific advice is not merely a matter of providing greater understanding between academia and parliaments. Based on our findings, it is the recognition of the value of disputable knowledge inherent in parliamentary procedures and practices that should be reconsidered by both scholars and politicians.

The claims made for science-based politics, much supported during the pandemic, have also led to demands that the government and the opposition should share the same view on the political situation when science dictates it. But who could act as the external authority in such a situation?

To take an example, experts working for the Ministry of Finance in Finland publish a report before every parliamentary election on the current position and the expected future of the economy and its political implications. In the latest report, published in 2022, the abstract in English is entitled: ‘An innovative and sustainable Finland. Outlook review by officials at the Ministry of Finance’ (Ministry of Finance, 2022: 6). It would appear that the report acknowledges that decisions are made by politicians, but its aim is nevertheless to calibrate the ‘necessities’ to which politicians must adapt their decisions. The report was, of course, criticised by academic economists and other scholars, as well as by politicians. Even so, it still shaped agenda-setting during the electoral campaign and the negotiations of the programme for the new governmental coalition, almost as if the report were an *ex cathedra* authority, whose detractors have since been accused of failing to recognise the need for a ‘shared overall picture’ of the situation.

From the perspective of the debate model, such a view overlooks the fact that the conclusions of officials and experts are not beyond debate. Quite the reverse. In a parliamentary system, it is the duty of politicians to thoroughly evaluate seemingly authoritative reports from opposing points of view. The report in the Finnish example was neither debated in the parliament’s financial committee nor in its constitutional committee, which is responsible for demarcating the boundaries between administrative and parliamentary powers. To demand that there should be a ‘shared picture’ of the situation as the ‘basis’ for economic policy violates elementary parliamentary principles and ignores parliament’s ability to contribute to the controlling of academic and administrative knowledge.

This is where the two views of the relationship between politics and expertise clash with each other. For the ministry’s experts, ‘factual’ knowledge forms a foundation that should be respected by all, which leaves a value conflict to be decided politically. Our focus on debate as the key to knowledge also regards the interpretation of the situation as a political question. It is not a statement of facts, but a judgement of present and future possibilities compatible with those facts, with all their strengths and weaknesses, which therefore remain ‘controversial’ and disputable in principle. When it comes to judging situations and prospects, politicians with experience of parliamentary-style debating procedures, evaluating the pros and cons of the various available alternatives, should be regarded as more reliable than officials with their monocratic view of knowledge.

The language of finance ministries — and not just in Finland — tends to assume tacitly that there is a single ‘wise’ economic and financial policy, with its own principles and maxims as part of the *Staatsräson*. This is the heritage of the Schmollerian view of economics as *Weltanschauung*. A major impulse for Weber’s re-thinking of objectivity and his emphasis on the need for the parliamentary control of officials was

to insist that there are alternative ways of political thinking and judgement — also in matters of economics.

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