

# Chapter 31

## Paradigms of Governance: From Technocracy to Democracy

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### ABSTRACT

*The elaboration of some paradigms of governance lies upon the opposition between the democratic and the non-democratic, namely, as will be shown and defined, the technocratic (skilled-based power), the ethocratic (virtue-based power), and the epistocratic (wisdom-based power). The point in this opposition is that, contrary to the democratic paradigm, the non-democratic ones assume that the condition for social rules or decisions to be valid is their reflecting, discussing and making by an elite of experts, virtuous or wise individuals or groups. There is no doubt in these paradigms a basic distrust as to the ability of the people to take in charge the public affairs and then to elaborate the appropriate standards and norms accounting for the regulation of actions and conducts. The re-construction of these four paradigms (the democratic and the non-democratic) can be illuminating as regards the interpretation of the actual expert and law-driven trends in the ethical governance of technology. It appears, indeed, that the paradigms of technocracy as well as that of ethocracy still operate in the design of governance settings aimed at regulating research and innovation projects.*

### INTRODUCTION

The notion of governance is often used in politics to designate the dynamics of inclusion of the citizens and the society within the political processes of decision-framing and decision-making. The word ‘governance,’ however, which owns a common origin with the word ‘government’ (from the ancient Greek *kubernan*, the tiller) does not substitute the traditional nation-state government. It is rather an alternative regime applicable to a

wide range of activities, institutions and organizations, as suggested for instance by Stoker’s propositions on governance<sup>1</sup>:

- Governance concerns a range of organizations and actors, not all of which belong to the government sphere.
- It modifies the respective roles and responsibilities of public and private actors as established in traditional paradigms of policy making.

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- It involves interdependence between organizations and actors engaged into collective action in contexts in which none of them has the necessary resources and knowledge to tackle the issue alone.
- It involves autonomous networks of actors.
- A key principle is that actions can be pursued without necessarily having the power or the authority of the State.

The basic idea in the governance theory and practice is to concentrate more upon the way the rulers and the citizens share and exercise their political power than upon the sole institutions and organizations of the government<sup>2</sup>. It does not mean that the analyst should have no interest in the procedures that stand behind the processes themselves on the ground that one should pay more attention to the informality than to the formality of things. On the contrary, one of the main stakes in the so-called ‘reflexive governance’ is precisely to examine the relationship between the processes and the procedures of inclusion of the ‘outsiders’. Some procedures indeed are more likely to produce such or such governance process and to emphasize such or such aspects (‘technical,’ ‘ethical,’ ‘epistemic,’ etc.). It is then argued that we need a kind of mutual balance and adjustment of processes and procedures according to the means and the ends of the governance dynamics.

The overall trend in the evolution of governance is to substitute some democratic forms and experiments to some non (or less) democratic ones, the more well-known being the technocratic. It is often implicitly assumed that governance actually means *democratic* governance, while it is obviously not always the case if one considers its use in the management of firms, or the finance business, for instance. Thus, governance can also be viewed merely as a diversion for the citizens and the society aimed at keeping the power in the hands of its owners and at hiding their actual strategies and tactics in the course of their affairs. It is then valuable for the sake of self-judgment to present

in a synoptic historical-philosophical fashion the various *paradigms of governance*, namely, their origin, their concept, their rationality, as well as their limit. The notion of paradigm can mean many things since Plato, but here I refer mainly to Kuhn’s meaning, that is, the idea of a *frame of reference* including theories, practices and techniques<sup>3</sup>.

Hence a set of questions:

1. What origins, concepts, rationalities and limits can one identify in the anti-democratic paradigms (technocratic, ethocratic, epistocratic) as compared to the democratic one?
2. Is there something like an ethical expertise in the same sense as the technical or the epistemic expertise that are perhaps justifiably more legitimate?
3. To what extent do the democratic options of participation and deliberation form a coherent paradigm?
4. Can the technical, ethical or epistemic expertise of the ‘skilled,’ ‘the virtuous’ or the ‘wise’ be shared or even replaced by that of the society?

I will now present in more detail the four main paradigms that we identified in our research: the *technocratic-instrumental*, the *ethocratic-normative*, the *epistemic-cognitive*, and finally, the *democratic-inclusive*<sup>4</sup>. The presentation of these paradigms enables a better understanding of the kind of anti-democratic models and trends the supporters of the democratic options(s) had and still have to struggle with. It can also shed some light on what remains attractive in anti-democratic thought and on why there remains some kind of ‘aristocratic’ resistance and reluctance to putting the power of the experts or the rulers into the hands of the people. This is particularly the case in the ethical governance of emerging technologies, where the technocratic and the ethocratic paradigms remain quite influential, which means that the technical and the ethical *expertise* tend to remain at the center of the play (see Table 1).

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