

Chapter 20

Competing Methodologies: Possibilities from a Point of View

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to construct a basis to move toward addressing lacunae in governance approaches in a way that is not merely ad hoc but rather is grounded in theory and that can affect practice in a positive way. Essential to this is the establishing of a problem clearly defined in order that it can be a problem understood. Here, the ground is cleared for proposals for ways to approach the specific problems we detect. In doing this, the ambition of treating them is rendered possible.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding how possibilities appear to individuals is a key part of how governance can work. In understanding possibility from a point of view, those in governance can open the door to formulating policy that speaks to the practical orientations of real citizens. This means looking at a practical, rather than a theoretical reality, and examining that reality in the light of practical implications and results, as well as practical

expectations. These are important elements of context, that very context that EGAIS has insisted upon the necessity to construct. Here, we look at various methods used in pursuing the goal of understanding possibility from a point of view.

PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTEXT

Expertise, be it philosophical or scientific, as the unquestioned source of normativity in governance, means that practical significance is played down and the construction of context is absent. What's

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required is an approach that can offer first a criterion of evaluation and second a more interesting way to address the conditions not only for an ethical reflexivity, but also for determining the conditions of construction of ethical issues, of ethical norms, and the conditions for their adoption and implementation without undue presuppositions.

The reasons that we have to accept or refuse a proposition, a course of action, or a change in our way of doing things will not themselves necessarily be susceptible to change on some pre-defined basis. For example, one might refuse simple, life-saving medical treatment despite being convinced of the efficacy of the measures suggested as they are presented, but on the thicker, value-laden grounds that dignity in natural death is more appropriate. The 'obvious' good of life-saving treatment may not appear so obvious, depending upon how that treatment, its consequences and its basis appears in the consciousness of the actor who would be saved. Understanding reactions such as these requires broad empathy more than formal logic – at play is the practical logic of the individual. This is also represented in the thought of Joseph Raz (Mulhall & Swift, 1996, p. 342), a liberalist thinker who nonetheless appreciates much of a more communitarian position:

... autonomous persons are those who can shape their life and determine its course. They are not merely rational agents who can choose between options after evaluating relevant information, but agents who can in addition adopt personal projects, develop relationships, and accept commitments to causes, through which their personal integrity and sense of dignity and self-respect are made concrete. Persons who are part creators of their own moral world have a commitment to projects, relationships and causes which affect the kind of life that is for them worth living.

These hint at a broader, value-laden conception of rationality that is required in order to comprehend the practical logic of human action.

This is essential to the project of framing ethical governance owing to the need to account for human action in all its plurality and in its own terms (i.e. inclusive of value). Toward this end, Jean-Marc Ferry distinguishes four distinct types of rationality relevant to the human condition. His position is summarised in Smith (1994) as follows:

Historical and discursive progress from narration toward reconstruction is associated with increasing reflexivity about identity and the grounds upon which it is established. Narration, in Ferry's view, consists of ossified traditional myths which define identities in a more or less prescriptive, taken-for-granted way. Interpretation, on the other hand, involves the assimilation of identity to universal categories like law and justice and is exemplified in early Christian and ancient Greek thought. Argumentation opens up claims of identity to rational dialogue as embodied, for example, in the Enlightenment. Reconstruction, the final step toward reflexivity, involves hermeneutic attempts to understand the historical grounds behind the "good reasons" offered by others in argumentation. This is in part a logical and ethical consequence of the shift from it to you (acknowledging subjectivity) which emerges with argumentation itself.

Somewhere, reason runs out and the framing that constitutes my way of seeing the world steps in – the deep sense of my self and all that my convictions connote. My being, in a thick sense that includes my upbringing, cultural religious convictions, feelings of indebtedness to a past, honouring legacies etc. While this is clearly important in comprehending who/what a person is, it is only comprehensible if we step back from the primarily argumentative mode of discourse and regard framing not as an aggregative report of experiences had between various times, but rather as the authentic self-portrayal of a human being in terms of a life lived – i.e. we need to use

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