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What is Good Professional Practice?

Where the limits of our possible knowledge are very narrow, where the temptation to judge is great, where the illusion that besets us is very deceptive and the harm that results from the error is considerable, there the <u>negative</u> instruction, which serves solely to guard us from errors, has even more importance than many a piece of positive information by which our knowledge is increased. The compulsion by which the constant tendency to disobey certain rules is restrained and finally extirpated, we entitle <u>discipline</u>. (Kant, 1787, B737)

On a cursory view of the present work it may seem that its results are merely negative.... But such teaching at once acquires a <u>positive</u> value when we recognize that the principles with which speculative reason ventures out beyond its proper limits do not in effect extend the employment of reason but inevitably narrow it. These principles really only threaten to extend the use of theoretical reason beyond all limits of experience and thereby to supplant, rather than support, <u>reason in its practical employment</u>. (Kant, 1787, Bxxivf, my simplified transl., my italics)

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Part 2: The quest for practical reason Part 1 (Ulrich, 2011a) argued that there are some good reasons to question the conventional concept of competent professionalism; reasons that we basically found to be of a sociological, ethical, and methodological nature. We focused particularly on two strong assumptions underpinning the current notion of professionalism. The first stipulates that professionalism distinguishes itself from the practice of other qualified occupations (such as those of politicians or entrepreneurs) by a "disinterested" or even altruistic *ethos of service;* the second, that professionalism owes its societal recognition to a "technical" kind of competence grounded in the so-called *means-end scheme,* which suggests that all the normative presuppositions of professional intervention may be associated with the choice of ends so that professionals can recommend proper means in a value-free or at least value-neutral manner (i.e., based on theoretical-instrumental reason only).

Both assumptions were found to be untenable. In different ways, they both ignore the unavoidable normative core of all practice. A concept of professional competence built on such assumptions cannot support professionals in dealing systematically and critically with that normative core. Counter to what is usually assumed, we found that the supposed virtues of "disinterested professionalism" and of a "technical" focus on the selection

of means are more likely to impair than to strengthen the competence of professionals. Hence, we concluded, these conventional assumptions should be dropped in favor of a *two-dimensional concept of rational practice,* in which theoretical and practical reason would be understood to go hand in hand, in the sense that they mutually presuppose and support one another. It is imperative, therefore, that professionals learn to appreciate and practice the idea of practical reason – the topic of the present, second part.

What is practical reason? Dealing philosophically with any issue means to inquire into its ultimate foundations of rationality; into the criteria and considerations that may help us understand what it means to handle some class of questions "with reason." This also applies to questions related to "good" practice. There is a philosophical discipline specializing in the logic of such "practical" judgments, called *practical philosophy.* In its most basic definition, practical philosophy is the philosophical effort aimed at explaining how *reason* can guide the quest for good practice, that is, how it may *give us good answers to practical questions.* To understand the concept of practical reason and how it can promote good practice, we thus need to be clear about three basic issues involved**:**

- What do we mean by "practical" questions?
- What do we mean by "good" answers to such questions? And finally,
- What does it mean to deal with such questions "reasonably" or, with a slightly stronger focus on procedural requirements, "rationally"?

Each of the three questions takes on a more specific meaning in practical philosophy than it has in common parlance; let us make the differences clear.

What do we mean by practical questions? In everyday language and sometimes also in philosophical disciplines other than practical philosophy (e.g., in epistemology, science theory, and hermeneutics), a question is quite generally considered "practical" when the issue is what we reasonably are *to do,* that is, what proposals for action can be supported by rational deliberation and argumentation. A question is "theoretical," by contrast, when the issue is what we reasonably are *to believe,* that is, what claims to knowledge can be supported by rational deliberation and argumentation. This general usage often also designates as "practical" those questions which concern the choice of means for reaching defined ends, that is, questions of

know-how or "instrumental" (e.g., technical, procedural, economic, and administrative) questions. As we have seen in Part 1, this type of questions falls philosophically under the jurisdiction of theoretical reason; for the answers we can give depend on the transformation of theoretical propositions and conforming empirical statements (judgments of fact) into *what-if* statements or instrumental propositions. They describe what we can or cannot do in the light of what we know about the circumstances and conditions under which we need to act. They do not, however, tell us whether we actually ought to undertake such action and with what ends in view.

From the vantage point of practical philosophy, such instrumental questions are basically a matter of science and technology; they primarily require empirical, technical and theoretical expertise. Practical questions in the sense of practical philosophy are, by contrast, *genuinely normative* questions, that is, questions that cannot be answered in the terms of theoretical or instrumental reason. The core issue is not what is feasible and expedient but rather, what is valuable and desirable. We ask not for the *facts* that should inform what we do (e.g., concerning available resources and efficacious ways to reach an end) but for the *norms of action* that should guide us, that is, for basic principles and evaluation criteria; hence the talk of "normative" presuppositions or questions. In the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle (1976) suggested as such a basic principle the "doctrine of the mean," which we might translate as a principle of balanced judgment, along with an influential list of criteria of virtuous conduct that should be employed in the spirit of this principle, among them moderation, generosity, sincerity, and fairness (cf. Ulrich, 2009a, p. 12). In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason,* Kant (1786b and 1788) formulated an even more fundamental principle in the form of his *categorical imperative,* with which he introduced to practical philosophy the groundbreaking (though difficult) idea of moral universalization – an idea that for the first time explained the deep connection between rationality and ethics and which for this reason has become an indispensable cornerstone of all rational ethics (cf. Ulrich, 2009b, pp. 4-16 and 24).

To be sure, most real-world practice raises both theoretical-instrumental and practical-normative questions. Either may pose major difficulties. A major

difficulty in dealing with instrumental issues consists in the interconnectedness of our modern world, which often makes it difficult to anticipate and understand all the circumstances and interdependencies that may influence the outcome of action – the core issue of *complexity.* A major difficulty in dealing with normative issues consists in the increasing pluralism of values, world views, and corresponding forms of life, which makes it difficult to agree on any specific standards of action – the core issue of *diversity.* In fighting poverty, for example, it has proven difficult to define policies and instruments that not merely alleviate the consequences of poverty but also eliminate its manifold and interconnected causes and thus could be expected to be instrumentally effective and efficient in the longer run. Just as difficult are the normative issues involved, such as finding a societal consensus on who should be considered poor in the first place and who should not, that is, ultimately, what kind of "just" society we want to live in. We cannot fight poverty efficiently, and in fact we cannot even understand and measure poverty, without such normative assumptions, along with a thorough-going understanding of the roots of poverty in a world of affluence.

A two-dimensional concept of rational practice needs to respond to both core issues. It recognizes that practical questions of *what to do* always raise theoretical-instrumental issues of *what we can and cannot do*, just as instrumental questions of *how to do it* raise practical-normative issues of *what we would like and ought to do.* To put it differently, rational action invariably confronts us with both kinds of questions, of handling complexity *and* of handling diversity. More than that**:** the answers we give to either type of question in turn can and need to be discussed in the light of both theoretical and practical reason, that is, with respect to both instrumental and normative adequacy. In the terms we have used before, the choice of means and the selection of ends cannot ultimately be separated, although it is often possible and helpful to deal with them one at a time. Taking again the example of fighting poverty, we cannot judge the efficacy of a proposal such as, say, replacing the proliferation of bureaucratic social welfare programs and institutions by a guaranteed minimal income for all, without examining the consequences such a new policy might have in both economic (cost-effectiveness) and ethical (consequences for work ethic and quality of life) terms. This double interdependence of theoretical and practical judgments

provides no reason, however, for ignoring or blurring the different methodological requirements involved in "good" judgment. When it comes to justifying or criticizing the judgments involved in professional intervention, it should always be clear whether we discuss them with a view to ensuring theoretical (instrumental) or practical (normative) rationality, as the criteria for "good" practice will accordingly differ.

What do we mean by good answers to practical questions? We have become used in everyday contexts of action to speak of the need for *doing things right* and *doing the right things.* We thereby tend to think in terms of the means-end scheme, that is, we tacitly give the first "right" a merely instrumental meaning referring to means and ways, and the second, a merely normative meaning referring to ends and criteria of improvement. Interestingly though, once we stop to take the means-end scheme for granted and begin to recognize that both means and ends have a normative content in need of questioning, this way of talking about good practice gains a new significance**:** it reminds us to consider practical questions from a normative as well as an instrumental perspective. Since, as we have seen earlier, not only the choice of ends but also the choice of means has value implications, the latter can indeed be *normatively* right or wrong – better or worse – so that asking whether we do things "right" does indeed make sense in both an instrumental and a normative sense. Similarly, trying to do the "right" things in the usual sense of a proper choice of ends has instrumental as well as normative implications, in that it may mean better or worse chances to actually achieve improvement of a situation; it can thus indeed be *instrumentally* right or wrong – better or worse – regarding aspects of feasibility, economics, risks and uncertainties involved, and so on, that is, in the light of what science and expertise can tell us about it. Aligning normative and instrumental issues with "doing the right things" and "doing things right," respectively, is thus a rather inadequate idea, frequently held as it is. Both claims to "doing the right things" and claims to "doing things right" can and need to be questioned regarding instrumental as well as normative presuppositions and consequences. Again, there is no way round the fact that the two dimensions of theoretical and practical reason are always simultaneously involved.

There is, then, a deeper philosophical significance (deeper than we usually

realize, that is) in the everyday formula of "doing things right" *and* "doing the right things"**:** good practice demands that as a matter of principle, we consider each and every professional assumptions or proposal, even if it appears to concern the choice of means only (or conversely, that of ends only), in the light of theoretical-instrumental *and* practical-normative reason. A similar observation applies to the everyday habit of referring to technical-instrumental questions as "practical" questions. It is quite correct, although in a sense different from what is usually assumed. The question of what is "good" *instrumentally* is inextricably linked to the question of what is "good" *normatively,* and vice-versa. It is, then, always a relevant question to ask what criteria of "good" practice should be employed – and to answer it from a perspective of *both* theoretical-instrumental and practical-normative reason.

In sum, the everyday use of the qualification "good" for both instrumental and normative merit is far from inadequate. *Good practice comes in plural forms.* It entails questions of what is feasible and useful (serves the purpose) as well as questions of what is desirable (makes us happy) and fair (can be defended morally). Even so, in philosophical reflection about rational practice we need to avoid ambiguities of language as they are contained in expressions such as "doing the right things" and "doing things right." Likewise, practical philosophy must not rely on tacit assumptions of the kind usually associated with the means-end scheme. As is the case with the word "practical," we thus need to specify the meaning of "good" in practical philosophy as distinguished from its everyday usage. To avoid any ambiguities and tacit assumptions, I suggest we adhere to the following use of language**:**

- *In everyday communication* about good practice, it should be clear that the qualifications "good" and "right" may qualify instrumental as well as normative aspects. Hence, where confusion threatens, we better say explicitly what we mean. Are we referring to feasibility and expediency (focus**:** theoretical-instrumental questions) or to intrinsic value, desirability, and moral defensibility (focus**:** practical-normative questions)? Furthermore, if in a specific case we find it difficult to decide whether the focus is (or should be) on an instrumental or a normative type of questions, it helps to ask**:** Is the core issue in need of clarification one of complexity (focus**:** theoretical-instrumental questions) or of diversity (focus**:** practical-normative questions)?

- *In practical-philosophical discourse* about good practice, by contrast, it will be clear unless otherwise stated that the focus is on normative aspects. Accordingly, the qualifications "good" and "right" will in such discourse (including the present essay) be reserved for practical-normative claims as they may be raised in combination with both practical proposals (action proposals, stipulation of ends, evaluations, standards of improvement, and so on) and instrumental proposals (stipulation of means, efficiency judgments, and so on). That is, "good" and "right" will refer to the normative implications of all judgments made in a context of practical intervention, including theoretical-instrumental considerations. Perhaps a better way to express this intent is by saying that in practical-philosophical discourse, we examine all kinds of judgment with special regard for the practical-normative dimension of reason. In short, at issue is the *normative core* of practice as it is contained in both theoretical-instrumental and practical-normative judgments. What needs to be made explicit in practical-philosophical discourse is thus not this focus on the normative dimension but rather, the differing specific meanings we may (but need not) attach to "good" and "right" in qualifying normative content. On the other hand, inasmuch as the focus is on the theoretical-instrumental dimension, we will usually avoid the qualifications "good" or "right" in favor of terms such as "useful," "purposive" (or "purposive-rational"), "efficacious," "expedient," "functional," and so on, except when we mean to refer to the specifically normative implications of means.

Good versus right: In contemporary philosophical discourse, the terms "good" and "right" are increasingly (though not always) distinguished as follows. "Good" is taken to refer to personal judgments of what is valuable and desirable; "right," to interpersonally shared standards of proper action. Thus understood, the distinction of good and right is akin to that of *ethics and morality.* "Good" is understood as an *ethical* qualification that responds to the question: "What makes me happy?" and "right" is understood as a *moral* qualification that responds to the question: "What *ought* we – everyone – to do?" My personal way of life may be good for me (i.e., a source of happiness) but is not necessarily right for everyone, given that we live in an epoch of ethical pluralism. Moral principles and human rights, by contrast, are meant to be right (i.e., a source of obligation or orientation) for all mature agents and as such are still indispensable and in fact, more needed

than ever, to resolve ethical conflicts as they arise through the clash of different forms of life. It is precisely because we accept ethical pluralism that we need some overarching moral standards to resolve ethical conflicts peacefully, "with reason" (i.e., on the basis of argument) rather than with force (i.e., on the basis of power, manipulation or coercion).

Consequently, we may further distinguish "good" and "right" as follows**:** "good" is a subjective *value judgment,* "right" is an intersubjective *argument.* About what makes you happy, I cannot argue with you – it's just part of your subjectivity, your way of life, and it would be pointless for me to claim it is no good. I might argue with you, however, about the extent to which your way of life is right, that is, morally defensible, say, as a model for others or at least in the sense that it does no harm whatsoever to others. You might then respond with your own arguments as to why your way of life is right; for example, because it shows consideration for and solidarity with others, or because it imposes no unduly restrictions to the freedom of others to chose their own way of life, is motivated by a quest for environmentally conscious behavior, and so on.

Apart from allowing clear and accurate communication, this way of distinguishing between "good" and "right" also has some major methodological relevance**:** only with respect to judgments of rightness can we conceive of interpersonal standards, that is, standards or principles of action that all mature and responsible agents can acknowledge to be right. This is why, as mentioned above, we can argue about judgments of rightness but not about other value judgments such as conceptions of happiness or what it means for you and me to lead a good life. The *arguability* of claims to rightness opens up an avenue towards a rational solution of ethical conflicts, that is, of conflicting conceptions of the good. That leads us to the last of our three basic questions**:**

What does it mean to deal reasonably (or rationally) with practical questions? In general language, we do not often appeal to "practical reason." When we do, we usually mean to emphasize that there is a need for approaching things in a thoughtful and well-reasoned way. We might say, then, that *practical reason* in an everyday sense refers quite generally to the human will and ability to let actions be guided by reason rather than by mere impulse or inclination. In practical philosophy, the same plea for practical

reason acquires a more specific meaning; it then aims at a careful, well-reasoned handling of what we have earlier called the normative core (or normative content, dimension) of practice. It is captured by the questions**:** What are, in a specific situation, the normative presuppositions and implications of alternative ways to act? and consequently**:** On what basis can we claim that a practical proposal is more or less defensible on normative grounds than is another?

The basic idea, captured by the first question, is value transparency or (to the extent it is wanting) *value clarification,* as the *sine qua non* for all the parties concerned to be able to judge for themselves and try to agree. But while value transparency is a necessary condition, it is not a sufficient condition for practical reason. The sufficient condition, captured by the second question above, is *value justification and critique:* a claim to "practical reason" implies the proponent's readiness to question a proposal, or to allow it being questioned, with respect to its normative presuppositions and implications. The crucial question is, accordingly, whether the proposal lends itself to *argumentative vindication beyond mere appeal to self-interest,* that is, beyond mere reference to the views and interests of those directly involved.

In the history of practical philosophy, this core idea of vindication beyond mere reference to self-interest has found a variety of different expressions. Some of them we have encountered in our separate, ongoing series of reflections about reflective practice (see Ulrich, 2009a, b, and c)**:**

- In ancient times, the *golden rule* certainly embodied the idea of disciplining one's claims and actions by considering them in a spirit of "reciprocity" from the perspective of others. The device of shifting one's perspective in this way is indeed methodologically fundamental to any self-reflective effort of orienting one's thinking and acting beyond mere self-interest (cf. Ulrich, 2009a, pp. 16 and 28).

- From an Aristotelian perspective, we characterized the same essential idea as "excellence" (or "virtue") and its methodological expression as *good deliberation* (Ulrich, 2009a, pp. 8, 10, 13, 16, and 18-20).

- From a Kantian perspective, we described the basic impetus as one of "good will" and its methodological expression as *enlarged thought* or "dropping the ego" (Ulrich, 2009b, pp. 10f, 35, and 39; 2009c, p. 37f).

- With Kant (1786b, 1788), along with Adam Smith (1795) and John

Rawls (1971), the idea of treating others with equal consideration and respect for *their* views and values also translated into the idea of taking the stance of a sympathetic but *impartial spectator,* and in Rawls' work moreover into the methodological device of arguing from an imagined *original position* characterized by a "veil of ignorance" regarding one's own possibly privileged (or deprived) position in society.

- Finally, from the perspective of the contemporary revival of practical philosophy, particularly in the work of Apel (1972) and Habermas (1979; 1990; 1993a) about practical discourse and discourse ethics, the basic idea becomes "communicative rationality" and its major methodological thrust is *argumentation under fair conditions* (Ulrich, 2009c, p. 36; cf. Tables 4 and 5 there for an overview of Habermas' model of practical discourse, pp. 32-34).

We have previously analyzed these different expressions of the core idea of practical reason – the need for rational agents to think and act beyond mere self-interest – in the "Reflections on Reflective Practice" series and there is no need to repeat these earlier discussions. The point I would like to highlight here is a more general one: *abstracting from one's own limited standpoint* is the epitome of all good reasoning. It is the core idea of the *very concept of rationality.* The quest for practical reason, as a basis of rational action, is no different in this regard from the pursuit of theoretical reason as a basis of knowledge and instrumental know-how. In either case, well-understood rationality is about disciplining thought and action so that they are not arbitrary, merely living up to "subjective principles" and in this sense "private," as Kant (1787, B840f) puts it.

In theoretical reason, the basic ideal of abstracting from one's own particular angle of view translates into the quest for *objectivity;* in practical reason, into the quest for *morality.* In Kant's language, practical reason is morally *pure* (perfect, ideal) when it is "free from all private purposes" (B841); it is morally *defensible* (arguable), we might add, if it is not *merely* pursuing private ends. Reason is, quite simply, more than just calculating one's own advantage. We can, then, capture Kant's understanding of ordinary practical reason, and thus ordinary morality, in the following definition: *morality is practical reason that is free from merely private purposes.* Ordinary practical reason is not perfect; a perfect will would not need guidance by moral

principles, much less by a categorical imperative. What matters for ordinary practical reason is that it be not just oriented towards purely subjective interests, whether they take the form of reasoned maxims (subjective principles, Kant 1786, B15n; 1787, B840) or mere inclinations (Kant, 1786, B38f).

Ordinary practical reasoning will thus do. It takes *practical philosophy,* however, to clarify the source and nature of perfect morality (or of a perfectly good will, as Kant likes to put it) so as to provide guidance to the common reason of mankind (1786, B20-24). Just as in the theoretical domain it is the theory and methods of science (along with logic and argumentation theory) which provide the necessary standards and procedures for sound and arguable research, in the practical domain it is practical philosophy with its core disciplines of moral theory and the formulation of rules (or imperatives) of moral reasoning or, in contemporary practical philosophy, models of *moral discourse,* which has to provide the necessary standards and procedures for good and arguable moral practice.

This also explains why moral theory and discourse rather than ethics in general, and/or political philosophy, philosophical pragmatism or other fields of reflection close to practical philosophy, provide the methodological key. To be sure, it is always relevant to examine the normative content of actions or related claims with a view to their ethical, political, and pragmatic underpinnings and implications. We certainly can and should always *reflect* and (with Aristotle) *deliberate* on such normative implications, for example, by systematically shifting our perspective, whether in our imagination or through dialogue with others, so as to better appreciate the limited nature of any standpoint from which we may choose to identify and evaluate normative assumptions. But the methodological point at issue here is that we can *argue* about normative claims, that is, criticize or justify their adequacy, *only by taking* a *moral point of view* (Baier, 1958), that is, by examining their compatibility with some *shared* standard of *interpersonal* fairness that would do justice to all those effectively or potentially concerned and therefore *can* be accepted by them on their own free will. I say it "can," not "must," for neither rationality nor morality can grow out of coercion or manipulation. But although a proper standard will not necessarily always be accepted under real-world conditions of imperfect morality, it must *philosophically* still be

acceptable and hence, arguable, on moral grounds. This is why from a practical-philosophical perspective, the quest for practical reason is fundamentally linked to (the theory of) *moral argumentation and discourse.* Moral discourse plays the same critical role in practical questions that scientific discourse plays in theoretical questions**:** both are about making sure that the "reasons" we advance for any claims and conclusions *hold publicly,* in front of all the people concerned.

Besides, reason obviously demands that we also question all normative (ethical and political as well as moral) assumptions and claims with regard to their feasibility, economic, social, and ecological rationality, and any other input that expertise may provide in a specific situation of professional intervention. But with this kind of questioning we leave the domain of practical reason strictly speaking (i.e., the jurisdiction of practical philosophy) and return to the domain of theoretical reason (i.e., the jurisdiction of science), which is why in practical philosophy we do not subsume such basically instrumental questions under practical questions.

So what? Methodologically speaking, a crucial question remains**:** What can be the basis for genuinely practical and hence, at bottom, moral argumentation? What principle(s) can guide it? What is the origin and reach of whatever authority such a principle may be expected to give to reason in practical questions? We have already hinted at the core principle that Kant contributed to practical philosophy, the idea of *moral universalization.* But it is a difficult idea, for it charges rational agents with a burden of proof – a standard of rationality – that is hard to meet in practice. We will need to strike some balance between the two diverging requirements of authority and practicability. The more it matters that we first understand the idea of moral universalization thoroughly, so that we can then try to pragmatize it without undermining its relevance. I would like to dedicate the second half of the present essay to this fundamental issue. Only seemingly does it lead us far away from the central concern of this series of essays with good professional *practice;* quite the contrary, it leads us directly to the heart of the matter, although the philosophical considerations in question will of course, in due time, need to be pragmatized properly. Well-understood simplification results from thorough understanding, it does not replace it.

Whence originates reason's authority in practical questions? Some basic thoughts about the deep connections between reason, morality, and the public realm We have recognized that a basic condition (and limitation) of reason's authority in practical questions consists in a need for shifting the focus from ethical questions of what is "good" (questions of personal preference) to moral questions of what is "right" (questions of interpersonal justification). But then, do we not have to expect that people in turn will have different preferences as to what constitutes a "good" standard of interpersonal justification and thus provides a rational basis for claims to rightness? What exactly can it consequently mean to decide among clashing claims to rightness "with reason"? Why and in what way is it "rational" to take a moral point of view in the first place? How do we really know a proposal can "rightly" claim to be moral? And why in the world should we bother at all, rather than just give preference to our own preferences? With a view to fully appreciating what it is that the practical dimension of reason adds to the quest for rational thought and action and why it is indispensable, we need to delve a bit deeper into the subject of reason's authority in general, and of practical reasoning about what is right in particular.

Reason and power To put us on the right track, it helps to first ask ourselves what happens if such authority is absent. With regard to purely private action, the consequences of which do not concern anyone except those directly involved, the answer is simple: nothing. In all other cases, where the consequences of actions concern people who are not involved, the absence of the disciplining and coordinating function of reason leaves us with basically two possibilities: either there is an open *clash* of interests and actions – a lack of coordination that leads to disorder and conflict – or else, some other, *non-argumentative* force takes the place of reason as a coordinating authority. The result is the same: if a plurality of agents pursue their different interests without being willing and able to coordinate their non-private actions peacefully, "with reason" rather than with force (whether in the form of brute or hidden force or a mere *threat* of sanctions), some will manage to impose their will upon the others simply because they have the economic, technical, or political means to do so. This ability of imposing one's will regardless of whether one manages to convince those concerned argumentatively is what the German sociologist Max Weber (1921), in a

famous and influential essay, defined as *power:*

> We understand by "power" the chance of a man or of a number of men to
> realize their own will in a communal [read: social, non-private] action even
> against the resistance of others who are participating in the action. (Weber,
> 1921, p. 531; 1968, p. 926; 1991, p. 180)

The question is then no longer what is the right thing to do for each and every agent but only, who is the stronger. And the answer is given not on the basis of argumentation but of power, status, legal or bureaucratic authority, manipulation, coercion, or war. Power in all its non-argumentative forms undermines the ability of people to act as mature and moral agents, for such action requires freedom of will, of expression of thought, of argumentation and action. It also diminishes the quality of outcomes, as those holding power can impose their notions of the right things to do without needing to argue, that is, advancing and substantiating "good reasons," and consequently without needing to inform themselves and to learn. As history teaches us, this privilege of power holders, of not needing to learn and to argue, sooner or later tends to diminish their ability to fully appreciate both the complexity and the diversity of the contexts of action concerned – the two earlier-mentioned core issues of rational action. Instead, it favors an impoverished understanding and consideration of relevant contexts, or speaking with Kant, a merely private use of reason.

Against a merely private use of reason Let us look a bit closer at Kant's (1784b, 485-487; 1787, B841; 1793, B157-159; 1798, § 43; and 1800, B83f) before-mentioned notion of a merely *private use of reason.* It may help us better understand what the idea of practical reason – reason's authority in practical questions – is all about. First of all, it is worth mentioning that Kant's use of the word "private," as I understand him, captures the full original sense of the Latin *privatus* (past participle of the verb *privare*), which means both "deprived" (or "bereaved," because incomplete, partial, biased by private ends) and "privileged" (exceptional, not available to others, not public). Kant's methodological antidote is the *sensus communis,* by which he means

> an effort to compare one's own judgment to the collective reason of humanity,
> as it were, and thus to avoid the trap [orig.: illusion] of allowing one's private
> conditions of thought, which one might easily mistake for objective, to inform
> [orig.: affect in a harmful way] one's judgment. (Kant 1793, B157f, my
> simplified transl.; for earlier discussion see Ulrich, 2009b, esp. p. 10).

This idea of "community sense" rather than "common sense," perhaps best translated as *sense of civic responsibility,* informs what Kant designates the *public use of reason,* an effort of reasoning aimed at proposals and arguments that can be shared with all other people concerned. The public, non-private use of reason is the critical device that "disciplines" the way people think and act with regard to what in a given context is to count as rational, as true and right. In particular, it is a device to test and improve the *normative* validity of any assumptions or claims, given that issues of normative validity cannot be subject to the test of science. Like no other device, exposure to public observation and scrutiny makes sure reason is not merely serving some private agenda. Far from merely being a negative kind of control, the public use of reason actually allows errors or defects of reasoning to be uncovered and improved, as well as arbitrary or overly partial perspectives to be completed. It thus ensures to reason its credibility and authority in practical as in theoretical matters, which in turn expresses itself in an ability of the reasoners involved to supply, if challenged to do so, *cogent* (i.e., compelling, because well-reasoned and well-tested) arguments that withstand public scrutiny. Hence, these arguments can then confidently be shared with everyone concerned. *The authority of reason resides in the fitness of its 'reasons' for an unrestricted audience; and thus, in its being able to reach the world at large* (cf. Kant, 1784b, A487).

The public constitution and use of reason What holds true in the realm of theoretical questions holds even more true in the realm of practical questions**:** reason by its very nature is public – open to criticism on the part of everyone concerned – or it is fundamentally impoverished. *Reason is publicly constituted.* It cannot do without the active involvement and possible *veto of free citizens:*

> Reason must in all its undertakings subject itself to criticism; should it limit freedom of criticism by any prohibition, it must harm itself, drawing upon itself a damaging suspicion. Nothing is so important for its usefulness, nothing so sacred, that it may be exempted from this searching examination, which knows no respect for persons. Reason depends on this freedom for its very existence. For reason has no dictatorial authority; its verdict is always simply the agreement of free citizens, of whom each one must be permitted to express, without let or hindrance, his objections or even his veto. (Kant, 1787, B766f; cf. my earlier discussions in Ulrich, 2009b, p. 15, and 1983, p. 310)

Reason is either free and public or it is deprived of its authority, *privatus.* In both theoretical and practical questions, reason must at all times be above all

merely private agendas. Every competent researcher, every true scholar knows that; every moral agent practices it. Substantively speaking, then, reason's authority originates in a stance of *impartiality;* methodologically, in the possibility of unfettered *criticism* (cf. Kant, 1787, B775, B780 and B784). Unlike all other forces that may motivate and control human thought and action, reason not only allows but actively encourages and supports unrestrained criticism, for it understands such criticism as the very discipline to which it owes its authority – its constitutive *self-discipline.*

There consequently exists a fundamental *common denominator* of the sources of reason's authority in both theoretical and practical questions. It consists in the unique potential of reason to settle differences of views and opinion (what is true?) as well as of values and interests (what is right?) without recourse to power. It has this potential because – or better, so long as – it does not put itself into the service of any agenda that would be buttressed by power rather than by free exchange of ideas and arguments. *No private agenda!* is reason's basic motto. Its only agenda is that of reason's integrity itself, which demands its independence and impartiality, its completeness and growth, its consistency and ability to address an unrestricted audience. These are big aims, but for every individual reasoner their conquest begins small, by abstracting from one's own small world, by renouncing the merely private use of reason, by submitting one's claims and actions to public scrutiny. Impartiality – overcoming partiality – is key. It is a never-ending quest, but as we have said, Kant does not ask ordinary practical reason to be perfect, only to renounce a merely private agenda. He expects us to submit (whether in thought or actual discourse) our "good reasons" to a principally unrestricted audience, as a way to find out whether we are then still able to argue them consistently without getting entangled in inconsistencies; without ever needing to claim an exception for ourselves or for any particular party. This is the idea that is known as the fundamental principle of moral reasoning (the categorical imperative), but it is in fact the fundamental principle of all reasoning.

Reason and impartiality: reason's cooperative potential Isn't it a remarkable conclusion that reason's authority in all its employments is inextricably linked to its self-disciplining effort of being impartial? As soon as reason neglects such discipline and allows itself to become "private" in the

sense in which Kant understands it – of being partial rather than impartial, deprived rather than enlarged – it loses its authority and thereby its ability to settle human differences peacefully. It forgoes, in other words, its *cooperative potential,* opts for a declaration of war instead. That is, reason and morality have a deep-seated, common origin in the idea of peaceful cooperation (which does not preclude fair competition, to be sure). We begin to sense why Kant considers the practical dimension of reason to be more fundamental than its theoretical dimension, and accordingly speaks of the primacy of practical reason over theoretical reason**:** it is because impartiality is a key to dealing with questions of interpersonal coordination not only *morally* (i.e., in a shareable, because mutually fair and just way) but also *reasonably* (i.e., in a way that can be vindicated argumentatively with "good reasons") and thereby also *peacefully.*

In both its theoretical and practical employments, *reason,* at bottom, is the idea that mature individuals limit their claims to what other mature individuals can share with them and all others argumentatively – the core idea of *morality.* Such self-limitation is vital for peaceful conviviality in practical questions, but it is also essential in dealing reasonably with theoretical questions. In either case, cooperation involves the idea that private bias and interest may be disciplined systematically through a process of mutual coordination that all competent observers can share and accept on the basis of their own insight and recognition – the common denominator of *science* as well as of *morality.*

Intermediate conclusion: Let us pause for a moment and see where we stand. We can perhaps provisionally answer our questions of the source and nature of reason's authority in practical matters, and of the methodological basis (standards and procedures) for exerting such authority, in this way**:** Reason's authority is essentially rooted in its function as a *discipline of impartial thought and action.* The hallmark of impartial thought and action is that they can be shared with an unrestricted audience, as there is no need for hiding any private agenda. Consequently there is no risk of getting entangled in inconsistent argumentation and thus, of needing to claim an exception for oneself or for any specific party (compare Kant, 1786b, B424, and the discussion of the "no exception!" test in Ulrich, 2009b, pp. 31-35). Conforming to this root of reason's authority, reason's methodological basis

for exerting such authority in practical questions consists in a systematic effort of value clarification and critique with a view to ensuring the fitness of normative assumptions and claims for unrestricted shareability. This is what the two core disciplines of practical philosophy, moral theory and moral discourse, are basically about.

To be sure, perfect morality is not attainable under real-world conditions. Ordinary practical reason is not usually free of *any* private agenda. What matters in practice is that we (or others involved in a situation of shared concern) do not, in the names of reason and morality, pursue a *merely* private agenda. How do we know? The way to find out is by submitting whatever agenda there is – the normative assumptions and claims involved in all practice – to public scrutiny. Why should we? Once normative assumptions and claims have successfully been tested for moral defensibility, they can be shared confidently with an unrestricted audience, as they need not fear to be convicted of standing for a merely private agenda. They have, in this regard, a strong competitive advantage, which over time and with sufficient opportunities for non-private discussion increases their chances to prevail. A representative current example is provided by the worldwide gradual retreat of the so-called banking secret, a non-shareable business model supported by so-called "tax heavens." As they claim an exception for themselves from principles they expect all others to respect in dealing with them, they find themselves unable to argue the case for the banking secret consistently; their argumentative position is accordingly weak, that of their opponents strong (see our previous short discussion of this example in Ulrich, 2009b, p. 35f, note 3).

Reason and impartiality are siblings: they gain and lose authority together. In dealing with theoretical questions, the quest for impartiality amounts to the ideal of objectivity or intersubjective reproducibility of observations (or judgments of fact); in dealing with practical question, the same quest amounts to the ideal of morality or interpersonal fairness of valuations (value judgments). *No hidden agendas!* is thus the motto that motivates the quest for practical as well as theoretical reason, and its methodological counterpart reads**:** *No claims or assumptions that cannot be defended publicly!* Which is exactly what impartiality means**:** keeping undisclosed private agendas out of what counts as true and right.

Reason's political dimension But not only impartiality is deeply entrenched in reason's mission. Linked to its deeply non-private nature, it also has an intrinsically political dimension that it needs to cultivate. It is true, Kant formulates his fundamental principle of practical reason, the "categorical imperative," in the monological (self-reflective) terms of a lonely reasoner rather than in the dialogical (argumentative) terms of a *res publica* or, as we also say today, of a living civil society. But the underlying conception of reason is nevertheless a deeply communicative and indeed, republican conception. We have already hinted at it**:** *reason's unique mission is that of a guardian of public arguability* or, as Silber (1974, p. 217) has aptly phrased it, of *universal communicability.* Not only reason and morality are siblings, but also communicability and universality. In practical as in theoretical questions, reason has authority inasmuch as the specific reasons that drive our thinking and acting (whether as researchers, professionals, decision-makers, or citizens) are good enough to be laid open to everyone concerned. Reason in its proper, not merely private use provides *good grounds:* it supports our thought and action with conjectures that need not be concealed but are universally communicable, in the sense that we can publicly defend them (or else, we can allow them to be criticized so as to improve their communicability) regardless of the particular circumstances and interests involved and without limiting the audience in advance.

Shortly before concluding this essay, I find a similar line of thought in Onora O'Neill's (1989) account of Kant's practical philosophy in *Constructions of Reason,* a book that was not available at the time I developed my understanding of Kant in *Critical Heuristics* (Ulrich, 1983) but which in at least two respects comes as close to it as any other source of which I am aware. The aspects I mean are the "political" core of Kant's critique of reason, and the relevance of his "constructivist" practical philosophy for contemporary notions of sound inquiry, rational action, and legitimate politics. O'Neill's work has also made me turn to the related work of Hans Saner (1973) in his book on *Kant's Political Thought,* of which I had been aware but which I had failed to read. No further need to explain why this *Bimonthly* comes late!

Reason as peacemaker and as political propaedeutic To begin with Saner, he offers what must be the most detailed and careful exegesis available to

date of the development of Kant's political thought, from the precritical writings to the three *Critiques* and on to his anthropological, historical, juridical and political writings. To be sure, Kant does not write about politics in the way we would understand it today; systematic political analyses are rare in his work (Saner, 1973, p. 1f, lists them) and they have received scant attention (a major exception is Jaspers, 1962, pp. 328-362). However, as both Saner and O'Neill show, one can find throughout Kant's writings a large variety of political along with judicial figures of speech, to which O'Neill (1989, p. 12) refers as "metaphors" and Saner (1973, p. 3) as basic "thought structures" or "thought forms"; patterns of analysis and argument, we might say, that Kant consistently employs to describe the nature and scope of his project of a systematic (self-) critique of reason in both its theoretical and its practical employments and which he later also uses in his "applied" writings. Indeed, as I know from my own extensive reading of Kant, he frequently refers to the "public" nature of reason, to its having no "dictatorial authority" but remaining open to the "verdict" or "veto" of "free citizens," its implying not only "intellectual freedom" and "freedom of the pen" but also a "sensus communis," even a "cosmopolitan point of view" and ultimately, a "way to peace" (my examples, referring to places in the three *Critiques* and some other writings that have been particularly important to my use of Kant in *Critical Heuristics,* see Ulrich, 1983, esp. Ch. 5).

To Saner, the major political thought structure underpinning Kant's work is the idea of a systematic way from *diversity* to *unity*. Kant makes reason the guardian of this way. As Saner (1973, pp. 5-68) demonstrates in considerable detail, this line of thought slowly emerges in Kant's early natural-scientific and metaphysical writings (the precritical writings) and subsequently in the *Critiques* as a figure of speech, a mere analogy at first that helps him formulate the problems of order in nature and of the self-constitution of reason's own order. It keeps recurring as a basic scheme of progress from "diversity" (antagonism in nature and society) via a "road to unity" (physical community and reciprocity in nature; a law-governed social order in society) to final "unity" (e.g., of the noumenal and phenomenal world of nature; of a cosmopolitan constitution of government, international law, and civil society that would secure peace, freedom, and justice for all; and ultimately, of the convergence of the universal history of nature and the history of human culture and enlightenment). By the time Kant embarks on his later writings

on practical, legal, and political philosophy, the scheme has become more than a means to the end, it now is part of the end itself, of reason's self-set task of securing what I am tempted to call *cognitive and political peace* at once. Both in his theoretical philosophy (metaphysics and science) and in his practical philosophy (ethics, law, and politics), Kant makes reason the big *peacemaker* that paves the difficult way to unity of thought and action.

Unity is always in danger of being pursued in the wrong ways, by shortcuts that rely on non-argumentative means; but for Kant, such unity is worthless. The only kind of unity he wants is unity in freedom; a unity that is compatible with free will, free argument, and mutual fairness – essential conditions of true peace – as well as with reason's peace with itself (cf. pp. 215-313). This is the "way to peace" that Saner (pp. 3 and 312) identifies as a major political theme in Kant's thinking. It is ultimately also the essential *leitmotif* of Kant's plea for reason in general. The free and public use of reason – in Kant's cosmopolitan ideal**:** a worldwide expansion of reason – *requires* peace and at the same time embodies the only possible *way to* (worldwide) peace (pp. 252-261). That makes it such a difficult, yet necessary way.

> Kant is the philosopher of that way. He is not a pacifist of metaphysics – after all, he rejects certain forms of peace – but in a profound sense, he more than any other thinker, may be the philosopher of peace. (Saner, 1973, p. 312)

Kant's philosophizing thus becomes for Saner "a propaedeutic for political thinking," although, to be sure, "not *merely* such a propaedeutic" (p. 312f). Indeed, I would like to add, isn't it at the same time also the most meaningful kind of general philosophical propaedeutic we might imagine; a primer to the proper use of reason that speaks to philosophers, professionals, and citizens alike? And which certainly has nothing to do with the narrow rationalism and formalism of which Kant is so often accused quite superficially? As Saner's remarkable book suggests to me – and the evidence it compiles is strong indeed – Kant's entire philosophizing, drawing on its political root metaphor but reaching far beyond, may ultimately be subsumed under the one central theme of *reason's quest for peace with itself.* "All his philosophizing," Saner writes, "is understood by him as being *en route* to the peace of reason." (p. 312, italics added)

Reason and justice Kant's revolutionary view of reason, according to his

well-known "Copernican" hypothesis (1787, Bxvi), is that reason must construct the world after a plan of its own. More than that, it also must construct itself**:** to provide itself with the legitimacy and authority that no external force can give it, it has no choice but to define its own principles and constitute its own critical tribunal. Furthermore, as O'Neill argues convincingly (and with this I turn to her exploration of Kant's practical philosophy), reason's rejection of external force burdens it, from the start of its self-constructive enterprise, with a third difficult task. It must establish not only its own *cognitive order* but also, simultaneously, some *political order* in the world of human inquirers and agents, for the two problems arise in one and the same context (1989, p. 16). Neither can be solved without the other.

To put it differently, in Kant's thinking *reason and justice* originate in the same, ultimately political source (p. 16). Neither is given naturally to mankind; both require for their development and preservation constructive acts of interpersonal cooperation and (self-) legislation. Both also respond to the existential need of human agents to coordinate their views and interests in ways that promote collaboration and peace rather than disorder and discordance. Just as the human *zoon politicon* (Aristotle) depends for survival and welfare on the constitution of some societal and political union with others, each plurality of human agents or inquirers depends for their free and peaceful coordination on that peculiar force which we call "reason." In Kant's view, therefore, reason *had* to emerge in the natural and cultural history of mankind as the only entirely non-coercive force that can coordinate human agents or inquirers in freedom. Or, in O'Neill's beautiful words, it is the one force that allows us to "share a possible world," that is, to establish and maintain both *cognitive order* and *political order:*

> Reason's authority – if it has any – would be undermined by appeal to any "alien" authority, which would itself stand in need of vindication.… The problem of seeing which modes of thinking – if any – are authoritative presupposes not only the lack of a "dictator," but the presence of a *plurality* of noncoordinated (potential) actors or thinkers. Kant uses the imagery of "citizens" or "fellow workers" to contrast the situation with that facing the subjects of a dictator who imposes common standards.…[In fact] Kant's account of the authority of reason uses not only the images of plurality but specifically those of constitutionality and political order.
>   The reason why Kant is drawn to explicate the authority of reason in political metaphors is surely that he sees the *problems of cognitive and political order* as *arising in one and the same context.* In either case we have a plurality of agents or voices (perhaps potential agents or voices) and no transcendent or preestablished authority. Authority has in either case to be constructed. The problem is to discover whether there are any constraints on

> the mode of order (cognitive or political) that can be constituted. Such constraints (if they can be discovered) constitute respectively the principles of reason and of justice. *Reason and justice are two aspects to the solution of the problems that arise when an uncoordinated plurality of agents is to share a possible world.* Hence political imagery can illuminate the nature of cognitive order and disorientation, just as the vocabulary of reason can be used to characterize social and political order and disorientation. (O'Neill, 1989, p. 15f, italics added; cf. similarly pp. 20-23)

Reason and justice are inseparable because at bottom, mankind's never-ending *quest for knowledge and understanding* – How can we master the world we live in? – shares its roots with the equally unending *quest for conviviality:* How can we live together well and peacefully? The common condition for solving both tasks consists in the political task of securing the personal *freedom* of all to use their reason and to express their free will publicly; the common promise, in releasing the *cooperative potential* of mankind in dealing with matters of collective (non-private) concern peacefully, based on principles of reason rather than just the law of the stronger.

The public constitution and use of reason (continued) We can now deepen our previous reflection about the public nature of reason a bit further. Both as citizens and as professionals, we always again face this existential choice**:** we can opt for argumentative reason as a way to "share a world," a world of mutual understanding and fairness; or we can allow some parties to impose their particular interests by non-argumentative means and thereby to deal with human affairs of collective concern *as if* they concerned private matters only. There is no way round a *free* decision of all human agents regarding this choice, for neither reason nor justice and peace can grow on the basis of unfreedom. Nothing can guarantee that the choice may not always again be in favor of a merely private use of reason. Just like the idea of reason as such, its public use is a never-ending challenge, a constructive task of lasting collective concern. Whenever reason is deprived of its free and public use, the causes of both reason and justice are in question. But at least, we have understood with Kant that there is no way for anyone to defend such a choice with arguments that could be addressed to a non-private audience, or with Kant's forceful words, to the *world at large* (Kant, 1784b, A487; cf. O'Neill, 1989, p. 48).)

The quest for practical reason can build on this insight. Methodologically speaking, it opens up an *emancipatory avenue* that I have pursued in my

work on critical heuristics and which I consider increasingly important for formulating adequate notions of good professional practice and of professional competence, as well as for putting them into practice within a living civil society today. At this place I can only refer to work available elsewhere (see esp. Ulrich, 1983, Ch. 5, and 2000). Moreover, history teaches us that the public use of reason cannot be suppressed over unrestricted periods of time, in today's global village less than ever before. Some arena of discourse will always open up that cannot be fully controlled by private interests, and in fact not even by totalitarian regimes. "Dictatorships have weaknesses." (Sharp, 2010, p. 28) The private control of reason is no less a precarious idea than is its public control!

So, just as the idea of impartiality is key to an adequate understanding of reason, its public use is and forever remains key to promoting reasonable practice, justice, and peace. It is a fragile, vulnerable source of emancipation, to be sure, like all non-violent ways. It will not always work as fast as we might wish. And of course, whenever it breaks down, or in the terms of O'Neill**:** whenever the public use of reason is not allowed to assume the job of coordinating human agents, some other, private authority will; but the results will show it. Cognitive and political order will then visibly be based on means that are not disciplined by the public use of reason. It will be a non-argumentative, unfree, and uncooperative order of the few rather than that of a free and shared world. But at least, no argument in its support will lend itself to being upheld publicly for long.

By its very nature, reason's authority is not and cannot be a dictatorial one (Kant, 1787, B706). Whether in professional practice or in the struggle for liberation from dictatorial regimes of any kind, it is therefore clear that all the parties must remain free to agree or not with *reason's counter-agenda* to merely "private" (deprived) reasoning, its *partiality for public arguability* as it were. To discipline reason so as to safeguard its integrity and authority, in practical no less than in theoretical questions and, likewise, in professional work no less than in political struggle, means to make sure everyone concerned *can* accept to share a cooperative point of view, not that anyone *must* do so. No more, no less is what the public use of reason is all about.

One might object that there is a normative core in such a conception of reason; that it ultimately boils down to a value judgment. That may be true;

but this normative core is far from being just a private utopia, a personal form of life that one may or may not want to adopt lightly. Rather, as we have seen, it amounts to an indispensable, existential requirement in coordinating human affairs; a minimal normative core to which there is no rational, just, and peaceful alternative. This is indeed what Kant's somewhat obscure invention of "transcendental" philosophy, the methodological device he constructed for the critique of reason, is all about: to uncover the ultimate *conditions of the possibility* (not necessity) of reason's authority in regulating human affairs. It belongs to these conditions that everyone remain free to choose the path of reason; but the alternative is not sustainable.

The other good news is, there is no public use of reason *against* the public use of reason. It is a practical impossibility to uphold a façade of rationality for long when reason's free use is suppressed, for such argumentation soon runs into overt contradictions: it is bound to argue a case that it does not respect itself. It is, in the terms of practical philosophy, immoral – not shareable (generalizable) on moral grounds.

The principle of moral universalization If reason is to realize its cooperative potential, we may conclude from our considerations thus far, it must adhere to argumentative principles and standards of truth and rightness that can be shared. Or, as O'Neill (1989, p. 56) puts it, it must limit itself to "principles that do not fail even if used universally and reflexively." Otherwise both its integrity (the quest for cognitive order) and its cooperative potential (the quest for political order) are at peril. By its own insight reason is therefore impelled to reject all strategies of argumentation that risk turning its public use into merely private use or which may undermine the possibilities of cooperation in other ways.

The most fundamental principle of reason must thus be to rely on *principles of thought and action that can be shared.* But of course, the community of those who may want to share is never known with certainty in advance. Hence, to make sure our personal maxims or subjective principles of thought and action are sufficiently shareable, Kant requires them to be *generalizable,* shareable with anyone actually or potentially concerned. This is the case, as Kant puts it, if the maxims in question can be conceived to constitute "universal laws" (of cognitive and political order, that is) *without* either undermining the possibility of peaceful cooperation or leading into

argumentative contradictions, thereby damaging reason's own integrity and credibility. *Reason's fundamental principle of self-discipline,* as I am tempted to call it, accordingly reads**:**

> The possibility of sharing principles is to be left open.… The fundamental principle of all reasoning and acting … is to base action and thought only on maxims through which one can at the same time will that they be universal laws. (O'Neill, 1989, p. 22f)

One may, but need not, read the reference to "universal laws" as intending the categorical imperative. More in line with the present discussion is to read it as standing for shareable principles of thought and action in general. In both its theoretical and its practical employment, the core concern of reason is that *rational thought and action should rely on principles that can be defended publicly.* This is the "positive" application of the principle of universalization. The "negative" application is no less important**:** whenever some merely private use of reason threatens to dominate what counts as rational thought and action, Kant provides us – everyone concerned in a specific situation – with a *standard of critique that allows consistent and cogent public argumentation throughout.* It is always a relevant idea to examine claims to expertise and rightness – our own as well as those of others, whoever raises them – as to whether they can be argumentatively shared with all those potentially concerned. Without adhering to this minimal standard, reason risks losing its integrity, and thereby its authority as a coodinating force on which we can rely in constructing a world to share.

In sum, reason is about disciplining thought and action so that their underlying principles can at all times be shared with everyone concerned. In this precise sense, reason expresses itself by our *thinking and acting on principle.* To be sure, we are talking about an ideal; real-world thinking and acting are hardly ever fully reasonable in this pure sense, more often they embody a combination of private (non-shareable) and public (shareable) reasoning. There is an eternal tension between the particular context that motivates human thought and action on the one hand, and the *universalizing perspective* that would render such thought and action shareable with others. It is at heart a tension between the two poles of private and public concerns, of contextual and general reasoning, with which we have to live in all circumstances of life, whether as professionals or as citizens. We cannot avoid it but can only learn to deal with it carefully and responsibly.

Particularly as professionals, we will want to deal systematically with it; for as we have observed in Part 1, the tension between dedication to professional service and maintenance of personal integrity touches upon a fundamental aspect of professionalism; a topic to which we will return in the continuation of this series but for which the present, fundamental considerations about the nature and implications of "practical reason" should prepare us philosophically.

Final consideration: the reasonable and the general In the ideal of practical reason, not unlike that of theoretical reason, *the rational and the general converge.* Whenever humans need to coordinate their different views and preferences, whether in the interest of understanding and mastering the complex world we live in or in the interest of living together well despite all the diversity of individual beliefs and values, it is a necessary condition for deciding among alternative views and wishes "with reason," rather than just on the basis of power, that there be a minimum of basic criteria and principles which all the individuals actually or potentially concerned can share. In other words, there must be some standards that are sufficiently general to *merit* being accepted by everyone. *The generalizable is what disciplines the rational.* This is why for Kant, the father of modern practical philosophy, the *principle of universalization* or generalization – the idea of making sure our practical maxims and theoretical hypotheses do not fail from the perspective of anyone concerned – was to become the touchstone of all good reasoning. The generalizable can orient a "good will" as well as "good thinking"; good action as well as good judgment.

Kant almost exclusively discusses the universalization principle in its capacity as the "supreme principle of practical reason," better known as the different forms of the *categorical imperative.* But if our conjectures are not entirely wrong, it must also hold for good reasoning in general. I find this idea expressed in many ways throughout Kant's writings, notably in the *Critique of Pure Reason,* where he characterizes the "principle peculiar to reason in general" (B364) by a systematic effort to understand the totality of conditions that explain the conditioned nature of all our judgments, all our claims to knowledge and understanding. But of course, the totality of conditions is itself unconditioned and as such is beyond all human knowledge, an unachievable yet unavoidable ideal of a systematic and

complete unity of all our reasoning**:**

> Reason … seeks to discover the universal condition of its judgment…. The principle peculiar to reason in general … is**:** to find for the conditioned knowledge obtained through the understanding the unconditioned [read: the totality of conditions] whereby its unity is brought to completion. (Kant, 1787, B364, cf. B379f and B436-447; for extensive discussion see Ulrich, 1983, pp. 217-230).

The principle is as fundamental as it is impractical, due to its holistic implications. One of the core ideas of my work on critical systems heuristics is the idea that for critical purposes, we can pragmatize Kant's principle as the *principle of boundary critique.* According to this alternative principle, it is quite sufficient for a critical employment of reason, both in its theoretical and its practical employments, to understand the specific, limited contexts for which specific judgments or claims are meaningful and valid, and to qualify them accordingly. In this way we can lay open to ourselves and to everyone concerned the conditioned nature of our thinking and acting. It is a merely critical strategy, but at least it allows us to communicate and argue rationally without needing to claim (or imply) we know and understand enough to fully justify all our judgments.

Another occasion where Kant comes close to stating the universalization principle as a general principle of reason, in a way that remains closer to the categorical imperative, is in a footnote of his essay "What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?"

> To make use of one's own reason means no more than to ask oneself, whenever one is supposed to rely on some assumption**:** What reason or principle does my relying on this assumption imply, could I make it a general principle of my reasoning? (Kant, 1786a, A329, my free transl.)

Good reasoning and argumentation for Kant involves a self-limiting and questioning sense of universal or, as he also says on some occasions (e.g., 1784a; 1784b), *cosmopolitan* accountability. We are accountable for our reasons to think and act the way we do, and reason itself provides no natural limit to such accountability, only external forces do. This "enlarged" sense of accountability is the ultimate source of a *critical use of reason* which, because its thrust is oriented towards unrestricted (or "universal") communicability and shareability, can prevent us from succumbing to the constant temptation of a merely private use of reason. In respect to practical as well as theoretical questions, it is therefore also the ultimate source of

reason's self-discipline and authority.

Summary Are you ready to adopt the spirit of reasonableness that is deeply entrenched in Kant's quest for practical reason? Are you prepared to share his insight into the fundamentally non-private nature of reason in its practical as well as its theoretical employment? If your answer is yes, here is your short summary of Part 2**:**

> When it comes to the normative implications of all practice, reason
> cannot help but to rely on principles that it can defend publicly.
> Reason's ultimate meaning and message to us, both as citizens and
> as professionals, is that we must *try to share a world.*

If however your answer should be no, please continue here.

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Picture data Digital photograph taken on 6 Jnue 2009 at 4:49 p.m. from a live TV transmission. ISO 400, exposure mode aperture priority with aperture f/7.1 and exposure bias 0, exposure time 1/13 seconds, metering
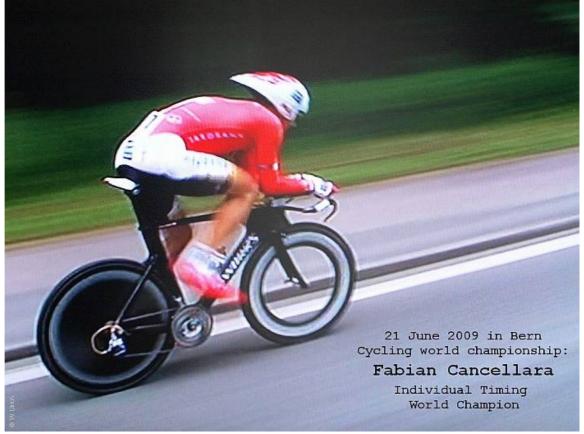
May 2011

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June 2011

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mode multi-segment, contrast soft, saturation high, sharpness soft. Focal length 42 mm, equivalent to 84 mm with a conventional 35 mm camera. Original resolution 3648 x 2736 pixels; current resolution 700 x 525 pixels, compressed to 105 KB.

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Good practice proves itself publicly

„Rational thought and action should rely on principles that we can defend publicly. …Kant provides us with a standard of critique that allows consistent and cogent public argumentation throughout."

(From this essay)

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