Praxis

On Acting and Knowing

Praxis investigates both the existing practices of international politics and relations during and after the Cold War, and the issue of whether problems of praxis (individual and collective choices) can be subjected to a "theoretical treatment." The book comes in two parts: the first deals with the constitution of international relations and the role of theoretical norms in guiding decisions, in areas such as sanctions, the punishment of international crimes, governance, and "constitutional" concern. The second part is devoted to "theory building." While a "theorization" of praxis has often been attempted, Kratochwil argues that such endeavors do not attend to certain important elements characteristic of practical choices. *Praxis* presents a shift from the accepted International Relations standard of theorizing, by arguing for the analysis of policy decisions made in non-ideal conditions within a broader framework of practical choices, emphasizing both historicity and contingency.

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[T]he word "good" is used in as many senses as the word "is" . . . Using technical language we may predicate "good" in the categories of a) substance, b) quality, c) quantity, d) relation, e) time, f) space. Clearly then "good" is something that can be said in one and the same sense of everything called "good" . . .

Next, what do they mean by the "thing as it really is"? For in their own terminology "man as he really is" is just another way of saying "man" . . . If we are allowed to argue on these lines we shall find no difference either between the really good and the good, in so far as both are good. Nor will the really good be any more good by being eternal. You might as well say that a white thing, which lasts a long time, is whiter than one which lasts only one day . . .

The thought that a knowledge of the absolute good might be desirable as a means of attaining those goods which a man may acquire and realize in practice . . . The argument has a certain plausibility but it manifestly does not accord with the procedure followed by the sciences. For all these aim at some *particular* good and seek to fill up the gaps in their knowledge of how to attain it. They do not think it any business of theirs to learn the nature of the *absolute* good . . . Or how shall a doctor or a general who has had a vision of the Very Form [of the good] become thereby a better doctor or general?

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*,
Bk. I, iv (1096a 19–1097a 15)

In all incidents of life we ought still to preserve our skepticism . . . Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon skeptical principles and from inclination we feel employing ourselves in that manner . . .

While warm imagination is allowed to enter into philosophy, and the hypotheses embraced merely for being specious and agreeable, but were these hypotheses once removed, we might hope to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (for that perhaps it is too much to be hoped for) might at least be satisfactory to the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination . . .

Generally speaking, the errors in religion are dangerous, those in philosophy only ridiculous.

David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*,
Bk. I, part 4, sec. 7

A rule stands there like a sign post. Does the sign post leave no doubt about the way I have to go?

If I have exhausted all justifications I have reached bedrock and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: This is simply what I do.

Ludwig Wittgenstein,
Philosophical Investigations, paras. 85 and 217

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