

The Rem(a)inder of the Praxis of Philosophy: Methodologies in Developmental Context

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While writing the post-script of this volume of *Journal for Practical Philosophy* titled *Action Research Methodologies in Developmental Contexts*, one needs to keep in mind that conventional history of Action Research neatly overlaps with the history of Development Discourse. Both have social transformation as their object of analysis whereby theories of development prescribe the logic of action for planned interventions and Action Research, especially in its Lewinian form, hopes to provide action for this social transformation. However re-construction of action research in the light of practical philosophy also transforms the imagination of development. And each of the seven papers in this volume highlight this reconstruction and transformation across themes of gender, health, education, rural, livelihood, representation of community and village. However, before laying out the outline of this paper, it is important to state that I have myself just started undertaking action research. Yet, over the course of the last eight years, I have read, listened to, engaged with, taught, and supervised action research projects in the discipline of development practice. And this paper is a reflection on this journey.

The paper begins by looking at the relationship between philosophy, methodology, and knowledge and its evolution from pre-modern to modern times. It is to show how theory centred-cognitivist view foreclosed practical philosophy. This conception of knowledge led to particular conceptions of the methodology of action research and theories of development. Having done so, the paper looks at practical philosophy, its ideas about the relationship between understanding, interpretation, and meaning as well as a particularist notion of phronetic and ascetic truth. In this light, it rethinks action research and development through the papers of this volume to argue for practical philosophy and multiplicity of methodologies that centres subjectivities of developmental contexts.

Genealogy of Philosophy-Methodology-Knowledge

In the practice of research – a systematic work undertaken to increase the stock of knowledge – there exists a pre-given relationship between philosophy, methodology and scientific truth. Philosophy tells us about “the nature of reality as well as the distinctive character of the particular kind of reality i.e. social phenomenon.” It comprises of ontology, i.e. conception of what exists, and epistemology, i.e. conception of forms of and condition for valid knowledge. Such knowledge of philosophy is not the function of scientific research.¹ It is the source that provides the knowledge to prescribe “procedural rules for scientific practice” or methodology². Methodology refers to theoretical rationale and principles that justify research methods appropriate for a ‘field of study’ and is not derived from research but exists a-priori in the knowledge of philosophy³. These methodological prescriptions can be derived from ontological doctrines concerned with the distinction between essential properties of things. It is not established by scientific investigation but calls for corresponding distinction in the methodology. It can also be prescribed by epistemological theories, conceived in terms of distinction and correspondence between realm of ideas (knowledge, proposition, concepts and belief) and realm of objects (‘real objects’, phenomena, experience, and sense data)⁴. Thus, methodology is the procedure for valid knowledge and the ground for empirical validity. And the realization of said methodology leads to scientific knowledge⁵.

In pre-modern times, philosophy referred to all kinds of intellectual inquiry where key conceptual distinction was not between theory and practice or knowledge and action, but between different kinds of human activities and types of knowledge that guide them. *Theoria* was an activity engaged for the sake of knowledge involving contemplative form of enquiry that used a-priori reasoning to generate eternal truth with little relevance for the conduct of everyday practical activities. Theoretical task articulated mode of reasoning, form of knowledge and kind of philosophy appropriate to different kinds of human action⁶. *Sophia*, traditional guide for ontology, as a form of knowledge was directed toward the eternal, permanent and

¹ Barry Hindess, *Philosophy and Methodology in the Social Sciences* (England: Harvester Press, 1977), 6.

² Ibid., 4.

³ Wilfred Carr, “Philosophy, Methodology and Action Research,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, (2006), 40(4), 422.

⁴ Hindess, "Philosophy and Methodology in the Social Sciences," 6.

⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁶ Carr, “Philosophy, Methodology and Action Research,” 425.

necessary. Its universality was based in knowing the first cause of all things that determines the essential for all without needing to attend to each⁷. It transcends its own embedded contingency by looking towards the eternal and its philosophical autarky renders it monological in nature⁸. *Episteme*, as distinct from *doxa* or common belief and opinion, was a principled system of understanding. For Foucault, it “defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice”⁹. Its operations are so basic that they're experientially "invisible" to its subjects.

Poiesis, or productive activities, were guided by *techne* or a form of reasoning or making action whose ends were known prior to practical means taken to achieve it. It had instrumental reasoning connecting means to a-priori end, involving mastery of knowledge-method-skill that together constituted technical expertise. It can be linked to applied science of the present times as it provides principles, procedures and operational methods that constitute the most effective means of achieving pre-determined end¹⁰. *Praxis* also formed action directed towards end but of progressively realising good of morally worthwhile form of life. This good of praxis could not be theoretically signified but only be realised on the basis of interpretation and application in concrete situation. In praxis, acquiring knowledge of what is good and knowing how to apply it in particular situation were mutually constitutive within a single dialectical process of practical reasoning called *phronesis*¹¹.

However with the advent of modernity, a new notion of science and method emerged whereby the central role of methodology was to transcend and overcome the distorting effects of prejudice and tradition¹². John Dewey argued that since the 1600s, philosophical debates rested on a passive view of human mind and an inappropriate demand for geometrical certainty. Wittgenstein too argued that these philosophical investigations were directed towards a particular style of philosophizing i.e. a theory-centred style which posed philosophical problems and framed solutions in timeless and universal terms. Since the seventeenth century, this

⁷ Christopher Long, “The ontological reappropriation of phronesis,” *Continental Philosophy Review*, 35(1), (2002), 35-60.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. (United Kingdom, United States of America, Pantheon Books 1970), 168.

¹⁰ Carr, “Philosophy, Methodology and Action Research,” 425-26.

¹¹ Ibid., 426.

¹² Ibid., 431.

quest for certainty became the defining agenda of philosophy. This led to the sidelining of four spheres of thoughts: particular, oral, local and timely.¹³

With Pascal and the Cambridge Platonist, philosophers turned ethics into abstract universal theory ignoring the concrete, particular problems of moral practice. With Descartes, the questions about the soundness or validity of arguments were understood as referring to “chains of written proposition and formal relations among them”. The question of who addressed whom, in what forum using what examples were no longer philosophical concerns. Instead, proof was to be captured and judged in writing. For him, curiosity was a universal human trait but understanding does not come from accumulating particular experiences. The task of philosophers is to find general ideas, principles and reason behind local issues and experiences. Finally, he and his followers do not discuss issues involving a given moment of time like concrete issues of legal and medical practices through case studies¹⁴.

These shifts ignored the rational judgement of practical adequacy which was timely, in concrete and particular situation that was local. The new philosophers of the seventeenth century were theory centred, with a cognitive view of knowledge¹⁵. What this implied was a loss (of truth) in the history of western philosophy involving separation of philosophy from practice and thought from action, an overemphasis on *theoria*, *sophia* and *episteme*; and erasure of relationship between knowing-doing-being¹⁶. The foundationalist theory of knowledge instituted by the likes of Newton, Descartes and their followers was formulated in universal, timeless, mathematical terms alien to concerns of practice¹⁷. Other fields of social science, including Action Research that emerged in the 20th century, attempted to emulate the same principles. It derived its ontological account of distinctive nature of ‘*action*’ – the object of its study – and an epistemological justification for the kind of knowledge it seeks to generate from pre-existing philosophy.

Thus, much of the methodological debate about Action Research was rooted in the general debate about valid knowledge of human action. At the time, this was

¹³ Stephen Toulmin, “The Recovery of Practical Philosophy,” *The American Scholar*, 57(3), (1988), 337-352.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 338-41.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 341.

¹⁶ Anup Dhar and Anjan Chakrabarti, “Marxism as Asketic, Spirituality as Phronetic: Rethinking Praxis,” *Rethinking Marxism*, 28(3-4), (2016), 563-583.

¹⁷ Toulmin, “The Recovery of Practical Philosophy,” 343.

between the opposing methodological perspectives articulated by Durkheim's *The Rules of Sociological Method* and Weber's *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Durkheim aimed to establish sociology as positivist social science to study social facts by applying recognised objective scientific methods that avoid prejudice and subjective judgement at all cost¹⁸. Weber on the other hand argued that human mind imposes a pattern on the sensory organs to explain reality. For him, with social action as its basic unit, sociology should be concerned with understanding the meaning associated with action by the actor rather than mechanically studying action and its consequences using methods of natural science¹⁹. The conventional understanding of action research sought to justify itself as a methodology on the basis of these philosophies and was accordingly divided into the positivist phase and the interpretivist phase.

The first phase, between the 1920s and the 1950s, saw the American origins of action research with a growing interest in the application of scientific method to the study of social and educational problems²⁰. Kurt Lewin, introduced Action Research, described it as a form of inquiry that would enable “established laws of social life to be tried and tested in practice”²¹ through a spiral of “cycle of planning, action, fact finding about the results of action”²². This conception of action research, firmly wedded to applied science, was to construct a relationship between social science and social change through social engineering in the name of development. Ontologically, action was seen as involving practical skills and techniques that were assessed for instrumental effectiveness. Embedded in the epistemological assumptions of the positivistic culture, Action Research could legitimize itself as a genuine social science only by confirming to the methodological principles of positivism. And therefore its eventual rejection was not so much for its failure to relate social research to social action as for its inability to confirm to positivist insistence for producing empirical generalization by employing quantitative methods to collect and analyse data²³.

¹⁸ Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, trans. Sarah A. Solovay and John H. Mueller, (New York: Free Press, 1950).

¹⁹ Max Weber, *The Methodology of Social Science*, trans. and eds. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1949).

²⁰ Mike Wallace, “A Historical Review of Action Research: Some Implication for the Education of Teachers in their Management Role,” *Journal of Education for Teaching* 13(2), (1987): 97-115

²¹ Kurt Lewin, “Group Decision and Social Change,” in *Readings in Social Psychology*, eds. Guy Swanson, Theodore Newcomb and Eugene Hartely, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1952), 564.

²² Kurt Lewin, “Action Research and Minority Problems,” *Journal of Social Issues*, (1946), 2(4), 205.

²³ Nevitt Sanford, “Whatever Happened to Action Research,” *Journal of Social Issues*, (1970), 26(4): 3-23.

In similar vein, development was seen as theory of social change that would provide the logic of action for transition of the decolonized but lacking 'third' world towards modernization-industrialization-urbanization. The fact that the development era was ushered by American social engineering and the Truman speech²⁴ only underlines the hitherto foreclosed connection between action research and development. The Western experience of two bygone centuries was the pre-given end of development that was to be emulated by the rest of the world. Planning emerged as the default poesis based in the techne of development theory undertaken by the bureaucratic apparatus of newly formed states of the third world to develop their economies²⁵. Herein, planning worked with the instrumental rationality whereby inputs of scientific knowledge and capital could bring about the output of industrial growth and poverty reduction²⁶. When it failed to bring about the planned change, it was the inability of socio-political and economic institution of the third world rather than the interventionist plans that were seen as causal factors. However, where it differs in trajectory from the action research was the fact that it was never rejected but only adapted to be pursued by different inputs of modernizing institutions.²⁷

The second stage of Action Research and Development Theory coincide with the hermeneutic turn of philosophy that birthed the interpretative methodology. Emanating in education and curriculum research in the early 1970s, it was based in the growing conviction about irrelevance of conventional education research to the practical concerns of school and teachers²⁸. The new version was to enable educational practitioners to test curriculum, policies and proposal in their own classroom to improve pedagogical practices and simulate innovative curriculum change.²⁹ Ontologically, action was referred to practice which was an ethically informed action through which values are pursued. It tests theories implicit in practice as well as practical adequacies of theories tacit in action³⁰ to improve

²⁴ Gustavo Esteva, "Development," in *The Development Dictionary a guide to knowledge as power*, ed. Wolfgang Sachs (London: Zed Books, 2009),1-23.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Colin Leys, *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996).

²⁸ Stephen Kemmis, "Action Research," in *Educational Research, Methodology and Measurement: An international Handbook*, ed. John Keeves (New York: Pergamon, 1997).

²⁹ John Elliott, *The Curriculum Experiment: Making the Challenge of Social Change* (Bristol: Open University Press, 1998).

³⁰ John Elliot, *Action Research for Educational Change* (United Kingdom: MacGraw-Hill Education, 1991); "The Curriculum Experiment: Making the Challenge of Social Change".

practice with norms and standards prescribed by research methodologies³¹. Epistemologically, rejecting positivist methodological orientation in favour of interpretivist one, it adopted case studies using qualitative methods to focus on the perspective of the participants and social actors in form of situation specific studies³².

Development theory sees a shift in the primary actor of development from state as a planning authority to market as the optimal and efficient allocator. The neo-liberal developmental paradigm saw privatization-liberalization-globalization as the new myth and mantra for achieving economic growth through trade. But at the same time, there was also a critical school of thought emerging within the developmental discourse which saw top-down approaches as a major hindrance in the welfare of the people and spoke of redistributive dimensions geared towards social development based on the fulfilment of basic needs of health, education and employment for all. This logic of developmental action went on to change the very conception of development from a purely economic conception to a more 'human' conception even as those more critical of the discourse spoke of letting go of the concept all together³³. It is this critical school of development thinking that will pave the way for re-construction of the concept of development in a post-capitalist way in the twenty first century.

Thus, over the course of the 20th century, Action Research as a methodology and Development Theory as scientific knowledge and therefore logic of action were rooted within the larger philosophical position of social science in general. They both began with a positivist orientation guided towards empirical generalization to an interpretivist position with a more case specific understanding and therefore prescription. However, in the last quarter of the 20th century, the doubt with modernist conceptions of cognitivist knowledge and understanding of reality came under suspicion. With the dawn of the 'post' age, serious questions were raised over the conception of philosophy, methodology and scientific knowledge that had dominated modern times. Thus, fundamental questions were raised on the need to justify Action Research and its methodological rationale based on pre-given

³¹ Carr, "Philosophy, Methodology and Action Research", 422-424.

³² John Elliott, "The Curriculum Experiment: Making the Challenge of Social Change"

³³ Leys, "The Rise and Fall of Development Theory"

philosophies of Durkheim or Weber³⁴. Similar questions were raised vis-à-vis development theory and its capital-centricism especially in the wake of ecological crisis that dawned on the planetary scale making industrial growth as a non-sustainable end. The next section outlines these challenges to the modernist conceptions and its reconstructions through the papers of this volume.

Practical Philosophy, Phronetic Methodology and Practical Knowledge

The modernist claim about the distorting effect of bias and subjectivity was seriously challenged by the ‘cultural’ turn in social sciences. Gadamer offers a compelling critique of modern preoccupation with method that led social science to adopt a methodology alienated from self-understanding. For him, the principle cause for this state of affair was prejudice against prejudice, whereby distorting effect of bias and subjectivity needed to be eliminated to legitimize claims as rational science. However, pure rationality is illusory as it is interpretive elements that determine how perceptions and observations are understood. The act of understanding is always an act of interpretation that cannot deny the authority of effective history thereby making pure rational understanding an impossibility³⁵. Similarly, understanding also involves application – affected by the particular situations to which it is applied, which may involve reflective exposure and rational revision to transcend limits of tradition. Such historical understanding enables us to identify inadequacies of prejudices at work in our understanding.³⁶

This Gadamerian conception of relationship between understanding, interpretation, and application is valid for all inquiry that have human as their object. It yields moral knowledge of values and beliefs which guides choice and judgement in particular practical situations and shape our being-in-the-world through continuous testing and development³⁷. Similarly, meaning of a situation is not an objective quality that can be grasped by setting aside values and beliefs. Understanding is a purely subjective projection of meaning onto essentially

³⁴ Wellace, “A Historical Review of Action Research: some implications for the education of teachers in their managerial role”; Kemmis, "Action Research,".

³⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Garrett Barden and John Cummings (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 250.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 266.

³⁷ John Elliott, “Educational Theory, Practical Philosophy, and Action Research,” *British Journal of Education Studies*, 35(2), (1987): 149-169.

meaningless object by someone who addressed it from the standpoint of one's own historically located consciousness. Meaning is neither an objectively existent property nor a subjective projection. It emerges in the play between things-in-themselves and historically constituted beliefs and values of the interpreter. There are no general or extrinsic standards of rationality which can be appealed to in deciding what constitutes valid understanding. The same object can mean different things to people viewing it from different cultural vantage points with different horizons³⁸. Thus, understanding involves interplay of interpretation, application and meaning making by a subject, in a particular context, based on their historically located consciousness and the values and beliefs embedded therein.

It is in this context that practical philosophy, which questions the universality of orthodox philosophy of modern age becomes pertinent³⁹. Practical philosophy self-consciously brings practice and experience of human beings into critical conversation with established philosophy to change its nature as well as affecting practice and experience. It aims at being “philosophy as with and for” rather than “philosophy about or applied to”⁴⁰ and cannot be separated from the exploration of fluid and dynamic contexts and culture dependent practices.⁴¹ It is a form of reflective enquiry undertaken by practitioners in order to improve their own practice and the situation in which these practices are carried out. It accepts that knowledge cannot be separated from the practical context in which it is embedded and understanding the distinctive nature of practice is allowed to determine the kind of science appropriate for its development. It was designed to protect practice against unwarranted theoretical incursion and not just test explanatory power and practical usefulness of theoretical knowledge.⁴²

Rehabilitating practical philosophy provides for a philosophical understanding of methodological question of Action Research. Deprived of these historic-cultural and conceptual resources, Action Research cannot be a philosophical analysis of role of human reason in the development of practical knowledge. With them, Action Research can allow for transposition of practical

³⁸ Ibid., 160-61.

³⁹ Tony Cotton and Morwenna Griffiths, “Action Research, Stories, and Practical Philosophy,” *Educational Action Research*, 15(4), (2007): 545-560.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 547.

⁴¹ Ibid., 558.

⁴² Carr, “Philosophy, Methodology and Action Research,” 428.

philosophy into the contemporary cultural context and meaning attached to action, practice, knowledge and philosophy that have been radically reformed. This allows for achievement of effective historical consciousness of Action Research to appreciate it as a methodologically principled scientific enquiry that was not contaminated by prejudice of modernity. It allows for understanding how in transition from practical philosophy to action research, concept of praxis can be improved as a philosophically rooted mode of enquiry⁴³. It allows for an interesting analysis of action which would help people to make better sense of their lives by being in the world with others, listening to them, engaging with them, and making lives together by exercising freedom⁴⁴.

This would lead to transformation of collective understanding of praxis and retain claims of practitioners to test explicit and implicit assumption in their practice, which is culturally embedded, through research that promotes historical consciousness. Thus, Action Research becomes a post modern manifestation of the pre-modern Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy. As a mode of enquiry, its chief task would be to reclaim the sphere of praxis from modern assimilation to the sphere of techne by fostering dialogical communities where open conversation is protected from domination of research methodology⁴⁵. Such a reconstruction of Action Research assumes the possibilities of practical knowledge and draws on philosophies of practice that include practical knowledge, propositional knowledge, and explicit rules⁴⁶.

And within this Action research with its roots in the Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy, ethical values are realized *in* rather than as a result *of* praxis and their meaning can be grasped as concrete form of action. The form of action chosen constitutes an articulation of both the meaning of a situation and the values to be realised in it. The outcome of such reflection is a concrete form of practice that constitutes an achievement of understanding inclusive of interpretation and application⁴⁷. Interpreted in this way, practical philosophy does not resemble 20th century discipline of applied ethics but rather it is the pre-modern roots of 20th

⁴³ Ibid, 432.

⁴⁴ David Coulter, "What counts as action in educational action research," *Educational Action Research*, 10(2), (2002): 189-206 as quoted in Cotton and Griffiths, "Action Research, Stories, and Practical Philosophy," 558.

⁴⁵ Carr, "Philosophy, Methodology and Action Research," 433-34.

⁴⁶ Cotton and Morwenna. "Action Research, Stories, and Practical Philosophy," 546.

⁴⁷ Elliott, "Educational Theory, Practical Philosophy, and Action Research," 162.

century action research that takes ethically informed human practice as its unique object⁴⁸. With such a philosophical root, Action research then has its methodological underpinnings, its logic of action in the concept of phronesis.

Heidegger translates phronesis as *prudential* or practical reason that is circumspect with an eye on the future to secure “for which and the how” embedded in the “situation of action”⁴⁹. It is about using practical wit and keeping intelligence contingent to the context and experience⁵⁰. For Heidegger, phronesis offers the possibility for ‘critically self-reflective model’ of ontological knowledge firmly embedded in the finite world. It is a form of reason based in concrete action and experience distinct from theoretical and speculative reason as well as abstract deduction. Phronesis is thus a form of knowledge capable of critically considering and reflecting upon the condition of its own operation. It settles for the contingent existence of human beings and works with “dynamic contingent principles endemic to ethics”⁵¹. Herein, truth lies in the reciprocity in-between self and other as well as between action and practice that recognize its being-in-the-world and is capable of considering the historico-ethico-political condition of its deployment. Phronesis is firmly situated in and directed towards the finitude of human world as well as human action and it is ethically autarkic and dialogical in nature with both experience and praxis⁵².

Phronesis sees encounter with the other as the site from which both self-critique and critique is possible. Its goal is finite truth that emerges out of mediated encounter between existing and relating being. The phronetic turn renders truth practical – finite, particular and in relation with the with-which of the world. Phronesis is concerned with human things (*anthropina*), arising out of lived experience or *situated empiricism* thus rendering it praxis-oriented⁵³. It is an intellectual and moral virtue inseparable from practice and constitutive of moral consciousness to do the right thing in the right place at the right time in the right way. It is acquired by those seeking to achieve standard of excellence inherent in

⁴⁸ Carr, “Philosophy, Methodology and Action Research,” 428.

⁴⁹ Bernasconi, “Heidegger’s Deconstruction of Phronesis,” as quoted in Kriti, “The Feminine in Philosophy: Recovering the Umbilical Cord of Praxis” of this volume.

⁵⁰ Kriti, “The Feminine in Philosophy: Recovering the Umbilical Cord of Praxis”

⁵¹ Long, “The ontological reappropriation of phronesis,” 36-37.

⁵² Dhar and Chakrabarti, “Marxism as Asketic, Spirituality as Phronetic: Rethinking Praxis,” 573-74.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 574.

practice to make wise and prudent judgement about what in a particular situation constitutes appropriate expression of good⁵⁴.

Phronesis takes account of the context in which practical principles get tested, changed and reformulated and underlying values and beliefs are subjected to critique⁵⁵. As a mode of ethical reasoning, it gives central role to deliberation, reflection and judgement. Deliberation as a process opens both means and ends to questioning. It is reflective as both means and ends are modified by reflecting on each other. And judgement is essential as it is a reasoned decision about what to do in a given situation that can be defended discursively and justified as appropriate to the circumstances it is applied to. Thus, phronesis is inseparable from and can only be acquired in practice. It can't be developed or improved by appealing to theoretical philosophy and abstract idea of good. It is embedded in praxis and the concrete situation in which it is applied and advanced by forms of practical philosophy and is concerned with practical knowledge that guides praxis. It is philosophical as it seeks to raise praxis to the level of self-conscious awareness so as to subject understanding of practice to critical examination⁵⁶.

With a phronetic methodology, scientific knowledge refocuses on 'human sensuous activity' to show that "the dispute over reality and unreality of thinking is a practical question and it is in practice that truth is to be proven"⁵⁷. Herein, "truth is a moral notion... employed in a sense of 'real' and 'good'...applied to beautiful deeds" and therefore "not a cognitive notion but an experimental notion... predicated on our own moral experience"⁵⁸. Such a notion of truth is also rooted in Heideggerian concept of *dasein* disclosed by the achievement of phronesis that "surveys the concrete situation of action"⁵⁹ that is related to the *with-which*. This phronetic rewriting of truth is not born out of annihilation of uncertainty endemic to truth but out of each particular and practical encounter with other and the world in which it is

⁵⁴ Carr, "Philosophy, methodology and action Research," 426-27.

⁵⁵ Elliott, "Educational Theory, Practical Philosophy and Action Research," 162.

⁵⁶ Carr, "Philosophy, Methodology and Action Research," 426-27.

⁵⁷ Dhar and Chakrabarti, "Marxism as Asketic, Spirituality as Phronetic: Rethinking Praxis," 566.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 569.

⁵⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Plato's "Sophist"* as quoted in Dhar and Chakrabarti, "Marxism as Asketic, Spirituality as Phronetic: Rethinking Praxis," 572-73.

embedded. Herein truth is emanating out of being-in-the-world, its irreducible sociality and practicality tied to “conscientious apprehension” and “fairness”⁶⁰.

It also accounts for Foucauldian view of philosophy as the praxis of self-transformation that focuses on what enables the subject to have access to the truth, its conditions and limits. In askesis, Foucault conceptualizes “the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth”⁶¹. This is rooted in “the how of truth ... that brings the subject’s being into play”⁶² and problematizes the cognitive notion of truth by bringing it face to face with the hitherto neglected praxis-based ethic of the self⁶³. It displaces the ethical from the cognitive to the practical and from the phronetic to the ascetic to replace the cognitive notion of ethics with the practical and the self-transformative perspective. It is an art of living desire involving the asketic praxis of necessary transformations of the self, a praxis that keeps eros alive.⁶⁴

Finally, this conception of truth stands in contrast to grand narrative generated by philosophers and in turn makes space for the heterogeneity of language games – *petits recits*– or little stories with which the society operates. It reveals how different little stories belong to a range of discourses that are unlikely to be compared with each other. Communication between them is possible but there will always be a *differend* i.e. linkages without final resolution or consensus. Herein, there is no possibility of universal truth only particular ones to allow the teller and the listeners to re-assess their understanding of the world and their possible actions within it⁶⁵. This pragmatic theory of truth, of what works, is of limited use with valuable points and restrictions. Little stories draw on both correspondence and coherence theories of truth, told in the context where power and truth are intertwined as power and knowledge. This is predicated on prior Heideggerian understanding of truth as simultaneously covering and uncovering of being. The truth of uncovering of being is not only assessed by standard test of correspondence and coherence but also by power/knowledge analysis.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Dhar and Chakrabarti, “Marxism as Asketic, Spirituality as Phronetic: Rethinking Praxis,” 573-74.

⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *The hermeneutics of the subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981-82* trans. Graham Burchell, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 13.

⁶² Dhar and Chakrabarti, “Marxism as Asketic, Spirituality as Phronetic: Rethinking Praxis,” 575.

⁶³ Foucault, “The hermeneutics of the subject: Lectures at the College de France,” 29.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁵ Cotton and Griffiths. “Action Research, Stories and Practical Philosophy,” 550.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

With practical philosophy, phronetic methodology and practical knowledge, subjective dimension of research is brought back to account for hermeneutic aspects of human understanding. Herein, philosophy has to account for fluid and dynamic context as well as culturally dependent practice within which understanding is embedded. With historical roots in practical philosophy, Action Research acquires conceptual tools appropriate for the ontology of 'action' and epistemology of practical knowledge. Such a reconstructed Action Research would help people make better sense of their lives by being, relating and making sense of their world. Ethical values are realized in the form of action chosen, reflecting on both the meaning of the situation and values to be realized in it. Such philosophical consideration makes methodology contingent and circumspect, making it focus on practical processes to be followed in any given context. It is acquired in pursuit of standard of excellence inherent in practice to make wise and prudent judgement. Thus, as a methodology rooted in ethical reasoning it is deliberative, reflective and involves making discursively defensible and appropriately justifiable judgement. This allows for critically reflective rationality that is based in concrete action and experience, reflecting on the conditions of its own operation and truth, human and practical, arising out of lived experience.

Herein, truth lies at the cusp of doing-knowing-relating that recognizes its being-in-the-world and is capable of considering the historico-ethico-political condition of its deployment. As scientific knowledge, it refocuses on 'human sensuous activity' to see truth as a moral notion that is 'real' and 'good' and an experimental notion based in experience. It does not aim to eliminate uncertainty but it is rooted in particular and practical encounter with the other, in its embedded world. It also accounts for self-transformation that enables the subject to have access to the truth, its conditions and limits. It is rooted in the how of truth that brings the subject's being into play while keeping the eros alive. Finally, in contrast to grand narrative of truth, such a conception of truth focuses on heterogeneity of language games to argue against the possibility of universal truth. It involves particular truths that allow the speaker and listeners to re-assess understanding of the world and their possible actions within it. It is this re-conceptualized relation of philosophy-methodology-knowledge that the research papers in this volume explore in diverse developmental contexts.

Reconstructed Action Research Methodologies in Developmental Contexts

Building on the foregone discussion on the relation between philosophy-methodology-knowledge, that overcomes the modernist fetish with pure thought and the hyper-separation between thought and action, the research papers in this volume are concerned about the loss of depth in knowledge production⁶⁷. They draw upon Husserl's conception of life-world (*Lebenswelt*), conceived as "self-evident or given" state-of-affairs which subjects collectively experience and which includes the everyday experience of life⁶⁸. This collective inter-subjective perception was seen as the ground for all shared human experience and is influenced by Heidegger's conception of being-in-the-world. Similar views were dwelled in by Habermas in his conception of communication as socially and culturally sedimented linguistic meanings. Herein, communicative actions were governed by practical rationality unlike technical rationality that governs the system of instrumentality⁶⁹. It is this being-in-the-world and the practical rationality that Kriti evokes in her lament about incompleteness of the recovery of practical philosophy in the absence of its relationship with the feminine logic of action.

For her, following praxis, phronesis and the feminine together lead to a different kind of knowledge that is attached, involved, and embedded in everyday life. The transformative practice embedded in practical philosophy must get back in touch with the feminine way of thought and action that has been hitherto lost to philosophy. Taking cases of Theano of Crotona and Diotima of Mantinea, she argues that philosophy and philosophizing for women were not an uncomplicated process of thinking but had to make sense in the real world. Their philosophy was deeply entrenched in questions of 'how to think' rather than 'what to think'. For these women philosophers, depth in philosophy lies in continuous and deep engagement of over-determined reality with theory and practice. It is with such a view that she speaks of becoming-in-the-world, which involves not simple activism but rather reconstructive work in an effort to rethink becoming as a perspective to life, labour

⁶⁷ Kriti, "The Feminine in Philosophy: Recovering the Umbilical Cord of Praxis"

⁶⁸ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1936/1970), 108-109.

⁶⁹ Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981).

and love. With *Chinhari*, a reconstruction initiative is imagined that believes in becoming in/of the social reflected on, imagined and created as a gendered collective⁷⁰. Khanna too draws on the conceptions of life world and being-in-the-world to open up radical possibilities of interpretation and meaning making. She reveals how the monological developmental telos and the image of lacking rural can be overcome by counter-narratives embedded in the life-world of *dehaat*⁷¹.

In this research rooted in being-in-the-(life)world, immersion becomes integral as a method to practitioner of action research. It focuses on begin-knowing-relating-doing of the researcher rooted in experiences and engagements of “psychoanalytically sensitive manner with the adivasi life worlds”. The attempt is ‘to co-research rigorously with the community on questions, issues, problems, relevant to the community’s hope, despair and desire, to collaboratively arrive at an action research problematic with the community. The researcher then develops a ‘framework of actioning the co- researched finding(s), and finally researching the actioning process’ in a critical reflexive manner⁷². Gaiind sees immersion as a methodological exercise that is not just experiential but also the situated empirics of common people's lives through practice of ethically informed action. Herein, representation is questioned and becomes responsible for transformation that happens in the engagement over the making of the film. In contemporary politics, instead of thought being temporalized as one kind of practice, practice was de-temporalized with contingency and particularity to reclaim freedom of practice. The practical imagination of creative coming together through to create memory from an imagined historicized past to possibility of future with *Jayar* was both means as well as end of immersion⁷³.

Rose argues that using the method of immersive stays, she encountered narratives that uncovered the hegemonised performativity to reveal hostilities between members of various communities. It exposes her to the fallacy of gender empowerment, and continued practices of untouchability despite attempts to abolish it. These disagreements performed in absence of an audience damaged collective

⁷⁰ Kriti, “The Feminine in Philosophy: Recovering the Umbilical Cord of Praxis”

⁷¹ Nikita Khanna, “Revisiting Methodology: Scripting, Stage and Transformation,” this volume.

⁷² Anup Dhar, “Action Research: Writing on Righting Wrongs.” Last modified April, 2015, [researchgate.net/publication/274953109_Action_Research_Writing_on_Righting_Wrongs](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274953109_Action_Research_Writing_on_Righting_Wrongs).

⁷³ Arpit Gaiind, “Becoming through Film (Making): Politics of contingency and re-presentation”, this volume.

goals and individual character.⁷⁴ Bisht adds that immersion begins with focus on being, with the constraints and freedoms of strangers living the everyday life in the immersion site. This everyday living is to get a sense of the community's lived experiences. With evolving relationship between the self and the other over the course of living everyday lives together lead to knowing and interpretation of historically effected consciousness. This allows the researcher to become a part of the lifeworld of the community for understanding the meaning of their subjectivity and developmental desires. Such relation and knowing takes one to transformational doing on subjectivity of those involved whereby the community can recognize its own desire without confounding or hiding behind demand of the other⁷⁵.

For Seal, such immersion allows for an attempt to find ways to bring diverse bodies of knowledge to work together. It highlights the importance of ontological exploration through acts of knowing-relating-doing over epistemic inquiries and is coupled with deliberation-reflection-judgement. Such an ontological exploration facilitates learning as imbibed knowledge through the act of relating while staying with the people and sharing their everyday life. Immersive stays shape behaviour of the researcher, informed by tacit understanding of developing bonds and facilitates the exercise of dealing with these contingencies and yet managing to make sense of various detours and digression to arrive at the end. It acts of hermeneutic exploration of context and its contingent demand that develops a philosophy of methods premised on the organic interaction with co-researchers. This is not to bridge theory and practice but to theorize practice while in pursuit of truth finding the right in contextual contingencies⁷⁶.

Coming to the issue of 'reflective writing' of such action research, it draws on Foucault's concept of archaeology to explore how 'things said' come into being, how they are articulated, interpreted, and transformed. In this context, the appropriate obligation for discourse oriented deconstructive writing would be to seek to engage readers and effect of power and exclusions implicated in writing. Thus, there is a need for continuous reflection on the possible effect of one's writing, even when one can never predict absolutely what those effects will be⁷⁷. This critical reflection on

⁷⁴ Anushka Rose, "Looking through the veil", this volume.

⁷⁵ Gautam Bisht, "Cultivating a sense of Psychoanalytical Development Practice: Process is purpose", this volume.

⁷⁶ Arunopol Seal, "A requiem for method", this volume.

⁷⁷ Maggie Maclure, *Discourses in educational and social research*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), 118; as quoted in Cotton and Griffiths. "Action Research, Stories and Practical Philosophy," 556.

writing has to account for overcoming difficulties of language of rational debate that gives self-expression power to speakers and listeners to prepare space for open and inclusive narrative to transform silence into dialogue that disrupt theories and re-thinking them⁷⁸.

Khanna elaborates on the process of 'reflective writing' as a methodology that is contingent emergent and indicative of new becoming through a process of scripting and performing. Such acts of scripting become the means to decolonize minds and methodology by creating a non-invasive vocabulary through a reflexive and deliberative mutual constitutivity of the process and end. Such an imagination lies at the cusp of an uneasy yet deep knowing-being-doing and overcomes the limits of development's discursive language and its conception of rural by reconstructing *dehaat*. The psychic context of trauma of subjectivation and humiliation involved therein is overcome in this process of scripting to create a shared space for sharing of experience to become the site of resistance⁷⁹.

Similarly, as a listener, Rose implores the action researcher to closely examine responses, narratives, and testimonials they encounter that often shroud experiences contrary to a dominant narrative. These contrary experiences offer fleeting opportunity to go beyond the obvious and follow fault-lines that undo the popular narratives that reinforce hegemonic projection⁸⁰. And Shikha attempts to overcome the limitation of anthropology's view of Othered way of life in terms of difference seen through dichotomies of modernity and tradition to subsume otherness into sameness. She does so by unpacking the making of the meanings of experience that offers genesis for a certain kind of praxis. This praxis articulates the community's ethics of cohabitation that don't exist in the standard language of risk associated with pre-marital pregnancy and reproductive health but as a new "sexual wellbeing"⁸¹. Gaind argues that significance of action research work lies as the schemata of methodological process undertaken and how they lend themselves to political relevance of the project of representation. For him, question of self-representation is a question of transformation of the subject involving multiplicity through coming

⁷⁸ Cotton and Griffiths. "Action Research, Stories and Practical Philosophy," 557.

⁷⁹ Khanna, "Revisiting Methodology: Scripting, Stage and Transformation"

⁸⁰ Rose, "Looking through the veil"

⁸¹ Shashi Shikha, "Participatory Co-inquiry/Co-researching: Collective re-imagining of sexuality in cohabitation," this volume.

together of people in the logic of ‘impersonal individuation of singularities’ rather than particularities⁸².

More often than not, development has been about improving the life conditions of people subjected to it. However this shift in focus to lifeworld of the people, it is important to understand the distinction between the two concepts and how it plays out in the conception of development. Differentiating lifeworld from life conditions, Bjorn Kraus defined life conditions as “person’s material and immaterial circumstances in life” whereas lifeworld is defined as “person’s subjective construction of reality, which he or she forms under the condition of his or her life circumstances”⁸³. It is here that we can (re)construct the idea of development from being rooted in life condition and its improvement to phronetic practice in the realm of lifeworlds. This involves a whole range of shifts. For Shikha, these shifts involve movement from informing to discussing, for intervention to co-working and from risk to well-being. It involves listening, relating and communicating rather than participatory appraisal and reflective action that lets go of expert, has an ethic of representing the researched, reality, experience and writing. It reconstructs the existing theories on knowledge of tribe and reviewing of existing action based on narratives from the field⁸⁴.

Bisht elaborates on this psychoanalytical development practice that prioritizes subject formation over economic growth thereby giving ontological precedence to the process over product. Taking up the case of education sector, he show the distinction between working *for* and working *with* the community. Here, the former creates dependency without being in touch with the unconscious desire of the community as the focus remains centred around the deprived identity of the beneficiary. However, the latter involves equality to develop co-intensity of desire with a focus on subjectivity of the co-participants. It involves interpretation of historically effected consciousness to become a part of the lifeworld of the community to understand the meaning of their subjectivity and developmental desires without confounding or hiding behind demand of the other. Thus, psychoanalytical development practice

⁸² Gaiind, “Becoming through Film (Making): Politics of contingency and re-presentation”

⁸³ Bjorn Kraus, “The life we live and the Life we Experience: Introducing the Epistemological Difference between “Lifeworld” (Lebenswelt) and “Life Conditions” (Lebenslage),” *Social Work and Society, International Online Journal*, 13(2), 4.

⁸⁴ Shikha, “Participatory Co-inquiry/Co-researching: Collective re-imagining of sexuality in cohabitation”

puts its own mission into question so as to expand the horizon of how community develops itself⁸⁵.

Across these works, becoming-in-the-lifeworld is the central object in the ontology of the action research. Speaking of Becoming in the world, hope is for transformation in consciousness by revival of practical philosophy and feminine logic of action, not simply activism but rather reconstructive work. This is an effort to rethink becoming from a posteriori sexual difference to one understood as perspective to life, labour and love embedded in being-in-the-world and brings in this perspective to practice⁸⁶. For Khanna, the act of writing orients subject position, identify and align its meaning to signal a movement towards becoming of dehaati subjectivity. Herein theatre is not limited to a traumatic event but also a therapeutic process of self-discovery by bringing the body of dehaat closer to flows that sustain it by engendering doing-living-being to open possibility of becoming a dehaati⁸⁷. Gaiind sees logic of becoming as a shift towards moment of writing that becomes the question of practice and the film (making) becomes a question of creation, aesthetics and politics. This creative becoming is a point of ontological departure from moral writing to ethical writing and from a-priori personal individuation to a multiplicity of decentred community. Action research for Gaiind becomes the condition of existence and a methodology of existential becoming⁸⁸.

Thus, the papers of this volume highlight the importance of *lifeworld* and being-in-the-world in the re-construction of both methodologies and as practices in developmental context. By focusing on collective inter-subjective perception that grounds all shared human experience (including development) such an Action Research tries to generate knowledge that is attached, involved, and embedded in the everyday life. With its emphasis on 'how to think', it tries to understand be(com)ing-in-the-(life)world through reconstructive work to open up radical possibilities. With immersion, the action researcher living the everyday lifeworld of the immersion setting, research happens at the cusp of being-knowing-relating-doing that is critical and reflective of its own conditions of operation. This allows for understanding

⁸⁵ Bisht, "Cultivating a sense of Psychoanalytical Development Practice: Process is purpose"

⁸⁶ Kriti, "The Feminine in Philosophy: Recovering the Umbilical Cord of Praxis"

⁸⁷ Khanna, "Revisiting Methodology: Scripting, Stage and Transformation" .

⁸⁸ Gaiind, "Becoming through Film (Making): Politics of contingency and re-presentation"

historically effected consciousness to open up questions of subjectivity and developmental desires without being usurped by demands of the other.

With an awareness of reflective and deconstructive writing, these action research scholars focus on writing about ‘righting wrongs’. Through this the scholars seek to give the reader an experience of their immersive understanding of the situation that necessitated the actions undertaken. At the same time, it follows ethics of representation that is non-judgemental about the lifeworld of the researched and in fact situate their meaning in the research. In doing so, the attempt is to overcome the teleological dichotomies of development’s discursive language and reconstruct a meaning system rooted in the world of the third. To be able to undertake such writing, listening-relating-communicating becomes a practical rather than an instrumental task rooted in the little stories of the communities they are working with.

Finally we refocus the concept of development to improvement of lifeworld rather than living conditions alone, these works shift from informing the third world to discussing with the world of the third. It brings together a diversity of knowledge leading to creation of discursive democracy rather than tyranny of the expert. The focus is on the subjectivity of the other rather than the identity of the poor and focus is on developing co-intensity of desire without being absorbed within the hegemonic discourse of the Development. In doing so it questions and reflects upon its own knowing and doing rather than trying to remedy the knowing-doing of the lifeworld of the researched. And it is this practice of becoming through critical and reflective deliberation over the being-knowing-relating-doing that constitutes the process as well as the end of action research methodologies in development contexts.

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