

THE HERMENEUTIC ARC OF
MAKING ETHICAL DECISIONS:
VISIONING, MONITORING AND MODIFYING – VMM

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We make decisions every two minutes. This is something that we do day in and day out. It is rooted in our existence. How do we make decisions? Reflection plays a major role.

It is through reflection¹ that we first find ourselves. We find ourselves already in the world. We say to ourselves, “Gee I am here.” We find ourselves speaking a language before we know it. We begin to interpret and say to ourselves, “What is the meaning of it all?” As we gain more understanding of the world our interpretations of the world stand within a larger understanding.

If we could not reflect we would not have the possibility to come to meaning. Reflection is fundamental to our existence. The word existence means to stand out, to stand forth. We stand out. Reflection is how we come to know that we know that we know something. It stands out. The reason it stands out is because we have immediately related it to our present horizon. It is meaningful.

Here we have related the new to the familiar. The new information is related to something already known. This is our present understanding. We make interpretations within our understanding. So we stand in our understanding.

Here we see methodological implications rooted in our existence.² We are constantly making interpretations. We are constantly attempting to make sense out of things. So, we make our interpretation within our present understanding. Our interpretations can be infinite but our understanding is always, “At this time I am seeing this.” This is because things change. We can envision something but then when we go to implement it things change because of a temporal gap. The vision is immediate and already obtained. Enacting it is the working out. What we imagine is not always the way things work because imagination is cast before us but to enact it we have to come back and fill in the steps to get there.

With the use of an umbrella we can illustrate this process. An umbrella displays round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, our ideological and our fundamental ground for making ethical decisions.

The umbrella as the hermeneutic arc³ is concerned with illuminating the conditions for the possibility of understanding and its modes of interpretation. It relies on reflection and creative imagination to produce a guiding vision uniting the particular into the general whole.

First we need to illustrate the power of the hermeneutic arc as imagination in order to present an overview of how all of this works.

[Figure 1]

The overall arc of the umbrella is the whole vision. The lower is the part that we work through to get there. The whole and the part work together.

If we imagine something, it is imagined as already obtained. Now if we choose to implement what we have foreseen we have to fill in the steps to get there. The imagination is immediate and the working through to that which was imagined has a temporal gap. What we find is that when we work something out it does not always work out exactly as we imagined it.⁴

This occurs upon the primordial ground that the world is change. Basically we envision things and then implement what has been envisioned but it is not always the same. So if we consider making a decision we have to realize that things do not always work out the way we envision.

Now that we have elucidated how the hermeneutic arc works we can apply this to decision making.

So let us proceed to the idea of a double umbrella.

[Figure 2]

First we need to consider that we are standing in the middle, in the present. The umbrella on the left will illustrate reflection and the umbrella on the right will illustrate projection.

Basically we reflect on the past and we project to the future. We reflect on something. We project a vision, which is then cast before us. When we reflect we consider actualities. When we project we consider possibilities.

In making a decision we move to the umbrella on the left and we reflect on how things were done and how they came about. Reflection is the overall arc of the umbrella, the whole and the working back through is the part. We reflect in the present upon the past and consider all of the

actualities then work back through and come up with alternatives and upon arriving in the present we then synthesize all we have reflected upon.

Next we move to another dimension of our decision making to the umbrella on the right (see Figure 2).

We project in the present to the future, which is the overall arc of the umbrella, the whole and consider possibilities. We even consider the worst case scenarios.

When we work back through we consider all the possibilities and come up with options and upon arriving in the present we then synthesize all we have projected.

Now, we synthesize both the reflected alternatives and the projected possibilities. We then are able to make our decision in the now. We then make our choice, which implies value and when we have value we have ethics.⁵ It should be acknowledged that not every decision is an ethical decision.

Now, we are ready to implement our decision.

[Figure 3]

We leap to the future with our decision. Most people stop here and think that if they have made a sound decision it will hold. They think this is a sign of intelligence. But this is not so!

Too often for instance corporations form research groups to make a decision and when they do come to a decision the group is disband and the decision is implemented. There is then no one to monitor and modify the decision. Too often people are left wondering why the decision did not work.

Intelligence realizes that the world is change. When we project our synthesis to the future, the overall arc of the umbrella, we at one and the same monitor and modify our decision through time and make adjustments as needed.

If another person attempted to follow out our vision they would not be able to do so to the degree of our understanding. Because of the inside vision the originator is the one who understands. Someone else who has knowledge of it can only take it up in their own way and approximate the vision.⁶ This would be the difference between the composer and the virtuoso.

So, we see that interpretation and understanding are rooted in existence. To do so we need to reflect and this is how we come to meaning. When we come to an understanding we have made a decision at that time. We come to this decision which is a choice and when we have choice we have value and we have meaning.⁷

So, we come to know that values are meanings perceived as related to self. We are value oriented. Life itself is of value because of our temporality. We cannot indefinitely put things off till tomorrow the things we need to do today. We are only here for a short time. It is because of our finiteness that we are rooted in meaning. This is why we save and savor life. This is why we become more decisive. It is for us to make decisions. We are here speaking with responsible human beings. So, how is it that you want to live? What kind of impact in your presence do you want perceived?

An example of living life can be illustrated in the life of Chuang Tzu, Ghandi or Martin Luther King, Jr. One might say that they were just idealists. Nay, we continue to think, feel and live in their presence.

Consider this: there is a girl being brought into life right now who will meet King in time and space six years from now and he will have an impact on her life. She will find herself in relation to King through reflection, that which is already lived, by him, by her.

This vision given to us of lived meaning by Chuang Tzu, Ghandi or King is an exemplar to humanity. With people like these visionaries all our unknown possibilities come alive before our eyes.

Notes

- 1) Reflection is a fundamental theme of philosophy.
- 2) The relation between the existential question and the methodological aspect of understanding is that there is a primary existential understanding that is constitutive for being in the world. It forms the basis for understanding as methodology.
- 3) James W. Kidd, "Hermeneutic Arc of Projective Consciousness", *International Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Spirituality*, 1, no. 1 (1992).
- 4) Not only time itself is involved but any occurrence before, during or after implementing that which has been imagined can have an effect.
- 5) Reflection deals with what is or what are (ontology). Projection deals with what if or what ought to be (ethics).

- 6) Understanding precedes knowledge.
- 7) Choice implies freedom.

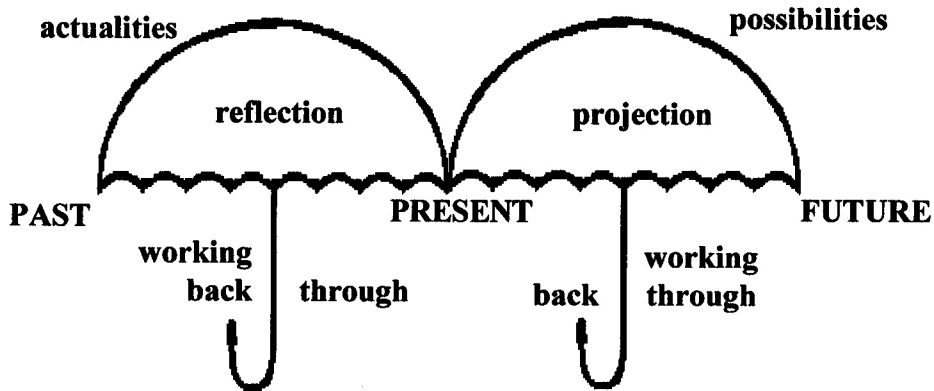
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HERMENEUTIC ARC VMM

Imagination - Figure 1 First imagine



Reflection Projection Dimensions - Figure 2



begin in the now – synthesize in the now – develop options –
 choice implies value which – precedes ethics

Implement Decisions - Figure 3

