

On the Senses of "Theory" and "Praxis"

To be human is not only to live but to live understandingly, and to do so on not only one level but two. Also, just as living understandingly on the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis involves theory as well as praxis, so living understandingly on the secondary level of critical reflection and proper theory involves praxis as well as theory. Recognizing this, we may say that living understandingly on either level involves theory in a broad sense of the word, even as living understandingly on either level involves praxis in a correspondingly broad sense.

But this means that "theory" and "praxis" can both be understood in different senses and are therefore alike "systematically ambiguous." In fact, "theory" has at least three senses that can be clarified by making use of the concept/term "belief," understood as anything held to be true by one who lives understandingly and therefore leads her or his own life. So "theory" can be understood:

(1) in the *proper* sense as comprising all beliefs formed on only one of the two levels of living understandingly, i.e., the secondary level of critical reflection and (yes!) proper theory;

(2) in the *broad* sense as comprising all beliefs formed on both levels of living understandingly, i.e., the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis as well as the secondary level of critical reflection and proper theory; and

(3) in the *narrow* sense as comprising only some beliefs formed on the secondary level of critical reflection and proper theory, i.e., those expressed by saying "so-and-so *is* the case," as distinct from "so-and-so *should be* the case."

So, too, "praxis" has at least three senses that can be clarified by making use of the concept/term "action," understood as anything purposively done by one who lives understandingly and therefore leads her or his own life. Thus "praxis" can be understood:

(1) in the *proper* sense as comprising all actions performed on only one of the two levels of living understandingly, i.e., the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis;

(2) in the *broad* sense as comprising all actions performed on both levels of living understandingly, i.e., the secondary level of critical reflection and proper theory as well as the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis; and

(3) in the *narrow* sense as comprising only some actions performed on the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis, i.e., those that are institutionally unbound, as distinct from institutionally bound.

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