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On issues of plurality and practice in considering planning's public interest

Mick Lennon

School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy

University College Dublin, Ireland

The 'public interest' has waxed and waned as a concept of concern in planning theory over the years. Even when not explicitly under discussion, it is often implicitly present beneath other monikers, such as 'justice', 'rights' or 'capabilities' (Basta, 2015, 2017; Fainstein, 2010; Lennon et al., 2019). Indeed, as the public interest is conventionally considered the *raison d'être* legitimising planning activity, it would be difficult for things to be otherwise. Against this backdrop, the recent appearance of numerous papers in this journal overtly seeking to reconsider what the public interest might entail suggests to me that we once again find ourselves in a waxing phase on this central topic to our discipline (Maidment, 2016; Mattila, 2016; Moroni, 2019; Tait, 2016). It is into this discussion that my paper was inserted (Lennon, 2017). Soon afterwards Willem Salet published his enlightening treatise that merges institutionalism with pragmatism to demonstrate how 'planning needs both the dialectic of the practical and the institutional' to understand the good (Salet, 2018: 63). Having studied his argument, I was both flattered and apprehensive to be notified that he had produced a comment on my paper. Thankfully, Willem Salet does justice to my views through his attentive summary. Where critical comment is provided, this is undertaken in a constructive discussion that seeks clarification rather than contestation. Hence, for the most part it appears that we are whistling the same tune, albeit perhaps in a different key. Accordingly, rather than indignantly challenging ill-informed assertions I find myself furnishing clarifications that consolidate my perspective.

Clarification A: Willem Salet questions whether my perspective is constrained by the 'closed self-referential nature of moral deliberation' he sees in the MacIntyrean viewpoint by suggesting that 'at the moment of deliberation in ongoing practices different and more plural norms and values are raised'. My response to this is to direct the reader to the section of my paper that notes how 'a tradition encompasses modes of thinking, acting and evaluating in different fields of endeavour' (Lennon, 2017, 159), such that a tradition-informed (first order) practice is a 'moral-political' activity defined by motivation for intrinsic excellence rather than extrinsic reward. At first blush it may indeed appear that tradition-informed practices are self-referential. However, as elaborated in the paper, my view is that planning is a 'second order' practice concerned with 'arbitrating between the various competing issues that manifest in making a decision', thereby involving the 'ordering of those concerns advanced by the established practices of others' (Lennon, 2017, 160). In this complex context, the plural norms and values of multiple traditions are inevitably raised, evaluated and ordered during the decision-making process in determining what best represents the public interest. Hence, there is an inherent openness to processes of change in planning's moral tradition as 'how the public interest is reasoned is both shaped by and shapes the tradition of moral reasoning that gives definition to the concept of the public interest' (Lennon, 2017, 158). For example,

in a national housing crisis characterised by homelessness consequent on a shortage of residential properties, such as that currently being experienced in Ireland, a planner must adjudicate between often competing values around social justice, nature conservation, architectural heritage protection, and the limits of private property rights to name just a few. Moreover, he or she must also consider the very register (deontological or utilitarian) on which politically charged housing decisions must be made (Campbell and Marshall, 2002). This does not, nor cannot, occur in a tradition somehow sealed off from the plurality of norms and values circulating in first order practices. Rather, planning is temporally and socially situated within an intersubjectively constituted, transmitted and transformed tradition of second order open reasoning consequent on the very nature of the multiple forms of first order reasoning it mediates.

Clarification B: Willem Salet draws similarities between his concept of public norms and the broad contours of a tradition as defined in my paper. However, he suggests that 'aspirations' (purposive deliberations of politics and planning) as deployed in 'concrete situations' may offer a more nuanced explanation of moral performance in action. While I don't discount the value of this pragmatic approach to examining meaning in action (Wagenaar, 2011), I fear that this discussion somewhat elides the point I make in my paper. My argument is not that morally informed actions should not be understood as 'related to particular intentions or problems in current situations' as intimated by Willem Salet, but rather that 'the subject' engaged in a second order practice such as planning is 'neither predetermined by a tradition nor fully free of one. Instead, he or she simply starts from within a tradition of worldly engagement' (Lennon, 2017, 161). In this sense, my argument is not a pragmatic one. Yet, nor is it one that negates a pragmatic approach to the scrutiny of practice. Rather, what I contend is that the initial scope for purposive action is contoured by the tradition of reason from which one starts. This is not to equate moral agents with moral dupes. Instead, it suggests a form of structuration where the moral horizon informs the vectors of activity just as these vectors profile the moral horizon brought into view. It is a moral engagement that doesn't predetermine a method (e.g. negotiation or imposition of regulation). It is one that seeks 'to enhance the excellence of a tradition through excellence in practice that both constitutes the purpose of and morally justifies a tradition-informed practice' (Lennon, 2017, 161). Finding one's way through the moral fog of daily planning activity is thereby not achieved by a simple suite of measures applied template-like when engaging with the world: it involves substantive reasoning on what is the right thing to do and what is the right way to do it. This unfolds through a narrative of the self as agent finding moral direction on the plane of action (Lennon, 2015). It is a dialogue between the abstract and the actual. Hence, the 'virtuous planner' is the planner who's motivation is guided by a desire for practice excellence, wherein excellence requires 'situated ethical judgment' that can potentially direct the evaluative process along different pathways. However, the choice of which pathway(s) to follow is informed by and potentially transformative of the evolving tradition of planning that gives shape and purpose to this second order practice.

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