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## **Jakob Meløe's Praxeology**

### ***An ethnographic approach to research in practical knowledge***

*Catrine Torbjørnsen Halås*

#### **Abstract**

Based on challenges the author has met as a practitioner and later as a novice researcher, the chapter addresses the need to find ways to describe and explore practical knowledge from within, especially what understanding of a situation a professional practitioner bases her assessments and judgments on when conducting her practice. The chapter provides an introduction to the Norwegian philosopher Jakob Meløe's praxeology, a theory of action and perspectives that innovatively combines philosophy and ethnography. The basic idea is as follows: To understand the meaning of people's different concepts about the world, we need to understand the activities and the world in which their concepts are rooted, expressed in an everyday language. The author develops a visualised model that can be used for systematic exploration of various professional practices and analysis of empirical material, as well as argues that Meløe's praxeology is particularly suitable for concrete and critical reflection/analysis of field observations and practice narratives, which in turn forms the basis for metatheoretical reflection.

**Key words:** praxeology, Jakob Meløe, practical knowledge, ethnography

#### **1 A philosophy of practice**

"What are you doing in your practice, and what are your reasons for doing so?" This was the question I encountered when, after 10 years of practice as a social worker, I was introduced to the study of practical knowledge. In the master's programme, I met curious professors asking me to tell them about my practice, not criticising me and telling me what I should do, as I often had experienced from other university professors. This brought me into a field that focuses on the ability to exercise judgment in

a specific situation as one of the characteristics of professional practice. Such judgment rests on our ability to see and understand what a situation requires, to distinguish between what is essential and immaterial, and to assess what the situation requires. The exercise of judgment is always cited around and influenced by the professional practitioner's own experiences. Understanding the basis for exercising this judgment is therefore essential. In research on practical knowledge, it is therefore important that we can carefully describe and highlight what understanding of a situation the professional practitioner bases her assessments and judgments on.

The Norwegian philosopher Jakob Meløe called his philosophy of practice, praxeology. His thoughts, mediated through a number of texts, have significance to the development of research on practical knowledge in Bodø. With inspiration from Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy, he has developed his praxeology as a theory cross-cutting language philosophy and action theory, influenced by perspectives from both phenomenology and pragmatism. He has especially been occupied with studying both fishermen's and Sami practices in Northern Norway, as well as the practice of everyday life.

As research, he unites an ethnographical and philosophical approach to the exploration and understanding of practice. Meløe's praxeology can be used as an approach to understanding the actions of agents in our common daily life world, giving us inputs and concepts that help us in an exploration of practice. First, his thoughts give us a scientific theoretical position for the exploration of practical knowledge and professional practice. He shows us how practice cultures are woven into what we see, and how we interpret and understand what we see. Secondly, he gives us questions we can ask ourselves when we observe and understand what others do. He encourages us to be critically aware of what experiences we see with and the position we understand from, giving us concepts with which to see, think and ask critical questions about the place we observe from. He shows us why it is important not to just listen to what the agent says about her affair: We also have to follow what she does. Thirdly, he shows through the way he writes, a way of working, where his explorative approach becomes visible in his writings. Here we can find the repetitive movement between narrative and reflection, in which he tests reasoning and tries different ways to describe and understand the meaning of the agent's actions in an affair, which appears in itself as an example of how to progress and develop understanding in and about different practices.

This chapter aims to give an introduction to his theory of action and perspectives, and based on that, develop a model that can be used for

systematic exploration of various practices. I will argue that it is particularly suitable for a concrete and critical reflection/analysis of field observations and practice narratives (which in turn forms the basis for a meta-theoretical reflection). But first, let me say something about what has motivated me in writing this text.

## 2 **Why Jakob Meløe?**

It was more than 20 years ago I started in the first class of the master's programme in practical knowledge. Already in the first gathering week, we were asked to write a story about an event that had affected us in our working life, which we, for some reason, could not forget. With expert guidance, we were assisted in writing a focused story to reflect critically and theoretically on a theme that crystallised in the story. The goal was that through working with stories scientifically, we would be able to both articulate our tacit knowledge and, in turn, critically examine our actions and reasoning and what could be considered as good as well as insufficient practice. This way we learned a method for conducting research on the practitioners' practical knowledge.

I liked the way the study was based on the practice experience and encouraged us to explore the knowledge that was at stake. I was attracted to the idea of professional knowledge as something that both lives, is learned and developed in practice. The ambition to both explore and challenge living knowledge, from within, also attracted me, and I was surprised over the idea that theoretical knowledge should serve the practice with questions, to seek understanding, before eventually offering explanations and ideas for improvement.

In the first year of study, we examined our own experiences. I wrote an essay about a situation where I had acted differently from what I had learned when studying, where I, based on this concrete experience, reflected on more general understandings of knowledge, how professionals learn and what motivates professional action. The second year of the study dealt with research on the experiences of others. I conducted focus group interviews with social workers, and wrote my exam essay about my experiences, as I was facing challenges in trying to understand others' experiences.

The study felt like entering a room of recognition, where I was not only allowed, but also encouraged, to use my everyday language to name my world. It was a kind of existential feeling where I was also encouraged to

express sensory impressions and emotional reactions, which I had experienced as important components of my professional practice.

During the master's programme, we were introduced to Jakob Meløe, as his perspectives were fundamental to the development of the study. I remember being surprised the first time I heard him when he talked about how children develop concepts. His lesson seemed so simple and naive, as he slowly lingered on his grandson's movements on the kitchen floor. Although it felt basic, I was impatient. Was not research about more than describing a practice?

In my master's thesis, I cooperated with social workers in two regions, researching social work in small municipalities. Here we found that rural social work was often criticised in research for being unprofessional. The problem was that the practice was assessed in light of large society standards, whereas we argued for a need to describe quality based on rural communities' premises (Halås, 2006).

The impatience I felt when I heard Meløe was perhaps my first encounter with what I later, in my doctoral dissertation doing research together with young people in vulnerable life situations, described as the experience of having a «ghost of evidence» sitting on my shoulder:

The ghost asks me if this is research? It tells me that my work is not good enough if I don't use a more recognized method. It tells me that I cannot research my own experiences, because it becomes too subjective. The ghost says that it is not good enough, without heavy theoretical discussions related to the empirical data. In other words, it casts doubt on the durability of my hermeneutic and phenomenologically oriented approach, and of the theories related to participatory research, on which I have based my work. The ghost stresses me and chases me. It makes me turn my gaze outward to defend myself against all these attacks from an invisible, yet equally very present being to me, instead of turning my gaze into the room, what happens and the people sitting around me. (Halås, 2012, p. 175, my translation)

Perhaps this is similar to what Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe as the holy positivist trinity: Generalisation, reliability, and validity, referring to the logic of the natural sciences, giving an idea of evidential scientific knowledge as causal, measurable, neutral, cognitive, universal, generalisable, timeless and replicable. My experience of this ghost of evidence shows how this claim of evidence not only came from outside but was

also embodied in my thinking and acting, informing my reactions to situations. Moreover, it was fighting inside me against this paradigm of practical knowledge that introduced me to a different form of validation of knowledge, focusing on the unique, situated, contextual, embodied, and time-bound, a perspective more occupied with the process of knowing than knowledge as a transferable product. As a novice researcher, I needed perspectives to help me navigate.

When studying for my PhD, I worked together with young people in vulnerable life situations and their professional helpers (Halås, 2012). I found that Meløe offered perspectives, and also questions, helping me to grasp a basic level of validation: a thoroughly, grounded, and comprehensive description of practice. He offered questions that helped me to become aware of our different viewpoints, showing me that although we use the same language, and seemed to understand each other, a common word like "home" can mean quite different things. It showed me how different backgrounds of experience give us different prerequisites for collaboration and create challenges in the collaboration.

After writing my thesis, I read about Engeström's cultural-historical activity system, which visualises how human activity is structured by multiple triadic and relations between subject, object, and community, and between mediating artifacts, rules, and the division of labour (Engeström, 1987, 2001). This inspired me to think that Meløe's perspectives could also be communicated and visualised in a way that could be used as a methodological approach for the systematic exploration of practical knowledge and professional practice.

### 3 3. Exploring practical knowledge and professional practice

The question of methodology rests on an understanding of the world and how we can learn about the world. In this case, I am seeking for an approach to examine practical knowledge, understood as the knowledge embedded in the act of doing. Steen Wackerhausen (2017) describes how the study of practical knowledge focuses on what lays behind, enables and is reflected in practice. This means that it becomes central to grasp how an agent makes meaning in the world and study the interplay between the world as subjectively and intersubjectively lived, experienced, and created (see chapter 1, by Fuglseth).

What are then special features with practical knowledge within professional praxis? A key characteristic of professional knowledge is that the practitioner uses judgment to find out how abstract knowledge can be

expressed in specific situations. A skilled practitioner has learned an answering ability (Lindseth, 2017), in the form that she is consciously or unconsciously able to meet and respond to the challenges she faces in specific situations. The knowledge is thus expressed in the professional's acting, where she, as the mediating subject, through her perception, interpretation, and creation of meaning, creates what we can call a practical synthesis (Grimen, 2008) to respond to the situation. The question of what is right or good practice, and what is valid knowledge, is thus linked to the situation, and in this way represents an active process of knowing (Polanyi, 1966/1983). Professional knowledge can therefore be understood as knowledge in action, as an active ongoing knowledge work with practical syntheses. This implies a multidimensional understanding of knowledge, where the professional's knowledge is not only about learning or acquiring and being able to combine different sources of knowledge (subjects), but also about learning to master several forms of knowledge: Episteme, techne and phronesis (Aristotle, 1999). These combine different dimensions of knowledge, like the emotional, intellectual, practical and aesthetic (Dewey, 1934/2005), as well as bodily aspects (Merleau-Ponty, 2005). The idea that practical knowledge will be expressed in action is based on a recognition that this form of knowledge has also a silent dimension (Polanyi, 1966/1983) and that knowledge is acquired, carried, and expressed with more than words.

This makes it essential to understand the agent's processes of perception, interpretation, and meaning-making. It is also crucial that we find ways to examine and articulate this kind of practical, partly tacit, knowledge.

Although my first meeting with Meløe gave an expression of naivety, his philosophy has a solid philosophical foundation. Meløe's explorations rest on Wittgenstein's concept of a form of life, Heidegger's concept of a world, and Marx's concept of a mode of production, what he calls for a «*Wittgenstein-cum-Heidegger-cum-Marx description*» (Meløe, 1997, p. 472). For Meløe, the relations between the world and concepts are central. Referring to Wittgenstein's idea of the language game, he is occupied with how our words are tightened up with our practical activities. Meløe shows us how Wittgenstein replaces ideas of building theoretical foundations with the concept of an activity/ practice/ form of life, and he replaces the concept of «resting on» with the concept of «being situated within» (Meløe, 1997, p. 441).

He claims that we do not have a better understanding of what is said, not by the word nor its meanings, than our comprehension of the inter-related practical activities, and that we cannot understand a remark without understanding the explanation that it gives:

The cut between (our understanding of) remarks and (our understanding of) explanations seems to parallel the cut between (our knowledge of) language and (our knowledge of) the world...(...)... Understanding explanations is no part of what I learn when I learn to speak. But in learning about the affairs of the world I also learn to explain and to understand the explanations that others give, as much of it, that is, as I have learned about the affairs of the world. (Meløe, 2005, p. 114)

Leaning on Heidegger's concept of the world implicates accepting that the agent is already situated in a world together with her surroundings. When you have completed a description of a thing, you will have described a great deal of the forms of life or the world. When we point at something, we point from within that world at something in that world.

There is an implication from that to what is the proper language in which to speak about that world – it is the language that is spoken within that world. In that language, there are no descriptions of a man or a woman at work which is not ripe with implications about the world within which that man or woman is working. To understand such a description is to understand that world. (Meløe, 1997, p. 442)

The heritage of Marx lays in the recognition that «...*the life of work, the working life of men and women, is at the kernel of any form of life. There is where a description of a form of life should begin*» (Meløe, 1997, p. 442). Meløe rests his philosophy on all of these three, as he finds that all three concepts will become richer by being understood in the light of each other. He claims that understanding a word is not a question of describing meanings of the world, but about knowing the meaning of a word. With this, he means that a word refers to the practice and that this practice happens within a world.

Within a given realm of human activities, or within a given practice, there is a network of implications between activities and activities, between activities and artifacts, and between artifacts and their natural surroundings, and between artifacts and artifacts. Within that realm, each such implication exhibits a necessary truth.» (Meløe, 2005, p. 135)

The idea is that the properties of an object appear to us through our work with it, where what appears to us means that we receive concepts



for it, concepts to look at, concepts to act on and concepts to work and think with.

#### 4 Combining philosophy with ethnography

When we do research, we use an approach, procedure, or what we could call a method, to find answers. As I seek to refine Meløe's perspectives as a research approach, I find it proper to identify this as a practical, cultural-historical, and language philosophical activity; as a philosophy-cum-ethnography research approach. In the work on my dissertation, I described it as philosophy, which gave me ideas and thoughts to reflect on the experience, while ethnography helped me to find a position to be in and describe the field and what I had experienced in the field (Halås, 2012).

For Meløe, philosophy is a place for questions, where the question is the place for conceptual work, and when we have succeeded with that, when the activity or affair we are exploring has gained a concept, they are moved out of philosophy (Meløe, 1975, p. 254). Referring to Socrates' image of philosophy as a midwifery activity, one can understand philosophy as the work of bringing the conceptless to a concept, to make the even poorly articulated, well-articulated, so that it can be brought into the public world of language and further processed there. At the same time, what we are trying to grasp, we already know. A philosophical activity can then be understood as work with clarification of reality, as an in-depth practical or moral understanding of ourselves and our situation. From such a perspective, philosophical work always becomes a work in the first person, singular or plural. The concepts embodied in practice must be the practitioner's concepts.

Occupied with questions related to the act of observation and seeing, working with language, action, and meaning-making, recognising that practices are woven into our situated cultural-historical background, the road to ethnography is short. Ethnographic research provides images of a culture, with a description of human and social actions and phenomena, where data appear as presentations of social phenomena or social practices. The spotlight is on bringing out the social world from a participant's perspective, in the recognition that meaning is created in interaction between people and must be determined situationally with the inclusion of context (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2005). It is acknowledged that the researcher's descriptions and interpretations will be influenced by her subjective and theoretical assumptions. As situated, contextual and multidimensional,

mensional knowledge best can be grasped in narratives; the narrative ethnography provides a first-person narrative of events in the field. It is about shedding light on the constitutive elements of the interaction and about emphasising the time-bound and social context in which knowledge is created (Ehn & Klein, 1994). Where Geertz (1993) uses the term «thick descriptions», Meløe refers to how actions are thickly situated, using concepts like the agent's «invisible terrain» or landscape.

Ethnographic analysis is neither systematic nor comprehensive, in the sense that it relates to the entire data set; it is rather more selective and limited in approach. The themes that the researcher highlights can then be said to have emerged in a dialogue between the data and analytical ideas (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). In an interplay between these two processes, something comes to the fore and something comes to the background. Within such thinking, the researcher's reactions can be a source of knowledge, where analysing one's subjectivity and understanding oneself as an observer and participant become important. If we are to take seriously this challenge of analysing one's subjectivity, an important part of this will be to become aware of one's cultural connection and horizon of understanding in the face of the Other as an analytical approach.

## 5 Meløe's perspectives

As Meløe's concern is about the connections between our concepts of the world and the world, our ability to see becomes central in his writing. He highlights connections between seeing, understanding, and doing (Meløe, 1979a, 1989, 2017). In several texts, he uses chess as an example. In «About to see» (Meløe, 2017) he allows us to follow him as an observer of a chess game and in the resolution of a mathematical task in geometry. With this as a starting point, he shows how our ability to see and understand what is happening in a specific practice is developed through doing, and how we learn to do by doing—and think about what we have done. Furthermore, he shows how conceptual communities rest on a practical understanding of what is happening within a practice community. In another text with the same title (Meløe, 1979a), and in «Seeing what there is to see» (Meløe, 1989), he makes our ability to see and to understand a matter of knowledge. We have a skilled eye when we see what is to be seen: *«I see what is to see when I see the affair with the concepts that are built into the affair itself»* (Meløe, 1979a, p. 23, my translation). On the other hand, there are two ways of not seeing what there is to see: Firstly, I do not see enough, or have an incompetent eye when I cannot see what

is to be seen, because I am not experienced enough and lack the concepts or techniques, etc., that are built into the affair I consider, and I know it (Meløe, 1979a, pp. 25–26). Secondly, I am unable to see at all when I am blind or have a dead eye, where I am not conscious that I do not see what is embedded in the affair. He described not seeing and not knowing that we are not seeing (what there is to see) as a kind of non-existence. If I am blind to, for example, chess, it does not exist in my world. This insight challenges me as a researcher: What is possible for me to see in concrete practice?

In «Seeing what there is to see» Meløe (1989) states that there is a difference between the agent in action and the observer, and that the skilled observer is the one that can take the place of the agent: «The skilled observer of a surgeon at work is another surgeon» (ibid., p. 53). The agent perceptions or observations Meløe refers to are «...those observations that guide the agent's observations. There is a sense of the word «observe» where it means to let oneself be guided by, or abide by, and that sense should be brought into the sense of 'seeing' or 'hearing', when it is what the agent is seeing or hearing that we talk about» (Meløe, 1989, p. 54). When we are observing, we should strive at «seeing what there is to see» (ibid.), to be able to grasp the action as well-defined, from the agent's point of view. And to grasp this, we need to dwell with the agent's actions before we engage in the agent's understandings: «...and we should study the grammar of the prose<sup>1</sup> written or spoken language in its ordinary form, without metrical structure before we embark upon the grammar of the poetry<sup>2</sup> literary work in which special intensity is given to the expression of feelings and ideas by the use of distinctive style and rhythm; poems collectively or as a genre of literature.» (ibid.). Meløe states when a concept is situated within a particular practice, a remark is «thickly situated», as satiated within a particular situation.

Meløe shows a practical approach to the basic phenomenal recognition, as he states that the same object takes a different shape depending on where you see it from. Being able to put yourself in someone else's place (or arrangement) is necessary to understand what others are doing and say (Meløe, 1979b). We cannot understand people if we do not understand their world: «*Without a sense of the world, you also have no*

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1 Written or spoken language in its ordinary form, without metrical structure

2 Literary work in which special intensity is given to the expression of feelings and ideas by the use of distinctive style and rhythm; poems collectively or as a genre of literature.

*sense of people*» (1979c, p. 48, my translation). He postulates three basic sentences as a premise for understanding the agent and his world:

An agent acts within and with respect to a world.

If we do not understand the world the agent is acting within or concerning, we also do not understand what the agent is doing.

If you do not understand what the agent is doing, do not direct your gaze (only) towards the agents. Gauge the place the agent sees from and direct your gaze to what the agent is pointing his sights towards. (ibid., my translation)

To the understanding of a remark, there belongs both an understanding of the situation in which it is made, the occasion for its making, etc., and an understanding of that which the remark is about (Meløe, 1992, p. 132). Understanding someone else's action is not only about knowing the landscape in which the action is exercised; it must also accommodate the justification for the action. In the article «The Agent and His World», Meløe (1973) writes about how in our examination of a practical operation we must look for what seems constituent to the practice. Here he aims to identify the smallest possible cut of our world that is necessarily part of a practical operation, or as he puts it: «*The necessary world of the agent is also the smallest inequitable arrangement within which his operations are intelligible*» (Meløe, 1973, p. 142, my translation), where the intelligible refers to what information is needed to understand the meaning of an action. In the text, he gives us good questions for the exploration of practice: What kind of landscape does an operation give its identity? What kind of subjects, objects, and tools are included and make the action possible? This is what he calls the actions tautological landscape. What is the necessary knowledge the agent must have to operate? Overall, the various parts constitute the tautology of the action.

In the description, we must seek to bring out all that it takes to give the action meaning and to understand the action in the situation. In short, this is about bringing out the action (what is done), intentions (what is sensed/sensed intellectually and bodily, felt and imagined), and the context (what is around, and that forms the framework for it, such as people, things, place, all the things that need to be included to give meaning and identity to an action).

Summing up: If we want to understand the meaning of people's different concepts about the world, we need to understand the activities and the world in which their concepts are rooted.

## 6 Jakob Meløe's praxeology as an analytical framework

Through his praxeology, Meløe unites an ethnographical and philosophical approach to the exploration of practice. He shows us how practice cultures are woven into what we see, and how we interpret and understand what we see, and he gives us concepts to see and think with and ask critical questions about the place we look from. He shows us why it is important not just to listen to what the intern says about her affair: We have to follow what she does.

I find it helpful to illustrate Meløe's perspectives in the form of a model that is a suitable basis for describing and analysing practices. By refining the theory in a model, the functions of the different aspects become more easily visible as an analytical unit for the activity that is to be developed and studied (Postholm, 2019, p. 14).

[Fig4 Ch 5 Halås]

The model illustrates different questions and relations to explore. Examples of this are «Who is the agent?», «Where is the agent?», «What kind of situation is this?», «What does the agent do?», «Where is she placed?», «What are the objects/ artifacts necessary to perform the task?» and so on. Further, it can help us systematically explore the relations between the different aspects.

This can help us to acquire a thickly situated description of the agent's actions and intentions, as it helps us to gain an articulated trustworthy picture of the agent's actions, perceptions, interpretation, and meaning-making in concrete actions or situations, and through that, a picture of the agent's world. Through this, we receive a good foundation for exploring the agent's practical knowledge, as what lays behind it enables and is reflected in professional practices, as well as a foundation for a more critical examination of, for example, positions, conflicts or tensions between positions, blind spots, or gaps.

In my own research I found that the young people I was cooperating with were first and foremost carriers of experience-based knowledge. This form of knowledge appears mainly in the form of every day and action-oriented narratives. Addressing the 'doings', asking "show me, or tell me, what you do", we found that such narratives could serve as a common meeting point for the various actors in the collaboration.

## 7 Jakob Meløe's method

Meløe describes the good social scientist first and foremost as a person with experience from different worlds. Secondly, it is a person who makes an effort in her thinking, and finally, if she has learned to analyse data based on a theory or two, it can come in useful. This way Meløe states his devotion and dedication to the lively everyday life and the need to understand from within. His loyalty to strive to describe and understand from within, as a foundation of a possible next step, is a discussion considering theoretical perspectives or other positions.

What is then Meløe's method? How do we proceed? I find his approach particularly suitable for the concrete and critical reflection/ analysis of field observations and practice narratives (which, in turn, forms the basis for a metatheoretical reflection). To understand his approach, what is then more natural than follow his advice, and see what he does when he examines an action. This brings me back to my reading and listening to him.

When I think of Meløe, I envision an older white-haired man walking back and forth on the lecture podium as he speaks. He conjured up a picture of his grandson John at 9 months crawling around the kitchen floor around his mother's feet, trying to imagine what the world looks like to the little boy. Eventually, he draws attention to the chair standing on the floor, asking rhetorically what John sees when he sees the chair from his point of view and his perspective. How is our understanding of concepts formed, he asks? Through his lecture, he shows very concretely how one can imagine that the concept of chair has linguistic, theoretical, and practical content for John through the boy's gradual experiences of the way the chair is used in the kitchen, an experience the little boy brings with him in the face of similar objects, which are also called «chairs». The lecture is built up similarly to many of Meløe's texts, where he slowly and with great detail invites us into action, framed by some form of practice. He alternates between the investigative narrative and the constant new questions that drive him forward in his investigations. Occasionally he makes a stop, in the form of a kind of conclusion or in the form of a postulate. This he uses as a reason to stand on in his further investigations, while at the same time as he tests and tries it, often dragging in other examples.

In one of his papers, Meløe describes his method as follows: «*The method of investigating the concept of a harbor, therefore, is this: Situate*

*yourself within the practice that this object belongs to, and then investigate the object and its contribution to that practice»* (Meløe, 1992, p. 131). It is so simple and so difficult.

## 8 Meløe`s contribution

This model is a supplement to other praxis theories focusing on how human action must be understood in light of historic, cultural, and material perspectives, occupied with interactions between agents and the world, as (before mentioned) Engestrøm`s cultural-historical activity system and Kemmis`s theory of practice architectures. Engestrøm`s (1987, 2001) cultural-historical activity system builds on activity theory, with roots in sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978), both of which have started from Marxist perspectives. As mentioned earlier, the model visualises how human activity is structured. Kemmis et al. (2014) offer a theory of practice architectures, followed by a model of focusing on relations between sayings, doings, and relating of practice, namely (a) particular cultural-discursive contents and conditions that exist in the site (in the dimension of semantic space and the medium of language); (b) particular material-economic contents and conditions in the site (in the dimension of physical space-time and the medium of work/activity); and (c) particular social-political contents and conditions obtaining in the site (in the dimension of social space and the medium of solidarity and power) (ibid., p. 34).

Comparing Meløe with these two, I find that Engestrøm`s model clearly addresses individual and collective dimensions and that Kemmis et al.`s models clearly address power – dynamics. What Meløe offers is a patient and loyal dwelling with the agent`s actions, and with that he holds me back, to ask again and again until I have a meaningful intelligible description of the action. This can be helpful, as it often is a temptation to start explaining the agent`s perspectives. It helps me as a researcher to fulfil the first level of validation of my investigations, such as acquiring a trustworthy description as the foundation for further explorations.

Does this mean that the critical perspectives first follow after we have made this thick description? This is partly correct. On the one hand, one could say that the critical examination of the practice follows afterward. However, on the other hand, the dedicated exploration of the agent`s actions and the world could represent a critical perspective in itself. The site of many of Meløe`s explorations are in coastal communities and Sami cultures, as well as everyday life practices. All of them are practices that in

today's society are colonised by the knowledge of society's forms of knowledge and values. Meløe describes the problem with this: «*Only those ways of looking at the world that is public to some community are valid, and they are valid only where they are public because only then do they let a world be seen. Where my way of looking at the world is not valid, there I am a stranger.*» (Meløe, 1983). This is the same way we experience that professionals experience that their value-based affairs are colonised and threatened by new public management and evidence–management systems, as earlier visualised by me as the evidence - ghost.

Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) describe researchers' activities as ethico-political and show how qualitative descriptions are saturated with moral and ethical issues. They address the need to give thick descriptions, as contextualised narratives focusing on the particular example, being aware of our preunderstandings, allowing the objects object to what we do to them and say about them: "*Being ethical means being open to other people, acting for the sake of their good, trying to see others as they are, rather than imposing one's own ideas and biases on them*" (ibid.). By describing the rationales of the actors and these societies, the in itself can represent a critical perspective. As it was in my master's project, where we saw that external judgments of rural social workers' practices were preoccupied with standards developed in an urban context, it also shows the importance for the researcher to be conscious about her own beliefs (as described in Remco and Bollinger's chapter 12)

Further, one could say that Meløe provides a special contribution to research, as he engages and connects human action with our humanity. I read his explorations as a critique of how the modern knowledge society has lost its connections to basic human conditions: «*And the concepts of economics get their human connections through farming, fishing, handicrafts, and other good forms of human life. But if we make economic calculations the story of why we do what we do, of what it is to be human, we lose our understanding both of ourselves and others. The very point of making an occasional calculation also gets lost*» (Meløe, 1993, p. 117). Meløe offers perspectives bringing human activity back to human reasoning.

My ambition has been to offer a model, as a contribution to a systematic exploration of practices. At the same time, it is important to underline that the model is a visualisation, and that the most important is to understand the philosophical perspectives, guiding your research, "*...where truthfulness is more important than absolute truth, and where practical*



wisdom—the skill of clear perception and judgment—becomes more important than theoretical understanding and the ability to use abstract procedures.” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005)

At the beginning of this chapter, I described how I as a novice researcher was seeking a way to handle and navigate between the tensions of different paradigms of knowledge. As a practitioner I had felt submissive when meeting professors criticising the practice, telling me what I should do, without really knowing or being curious about what we as practitioners were doing and why. As a novice researcher, I needed to find a philosophical foundation, combined with a research approach, to explore practice from within. Here I found Meløe’s way of examining the agent in her world, as a way to illuminate and handle the power – dynamics between practitioners and researchers, and to become aware of the dynamics between micropolitics and macropolitics, especially how the ghost of evidence colonises professional lives at different levels. I find that by following Meløe’s ideas, the practitioners, researcher’s and society’s view of the situation is both made aware of and may be challenged.

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