Culture and Ethics

Stephen Downes

December 24, 2021

Down the Staircase

Fear

Regulation

Practices

Culture

Joy

More formal
More institutional
Focused on wrongs

Focused on the good
More personal
Less formal
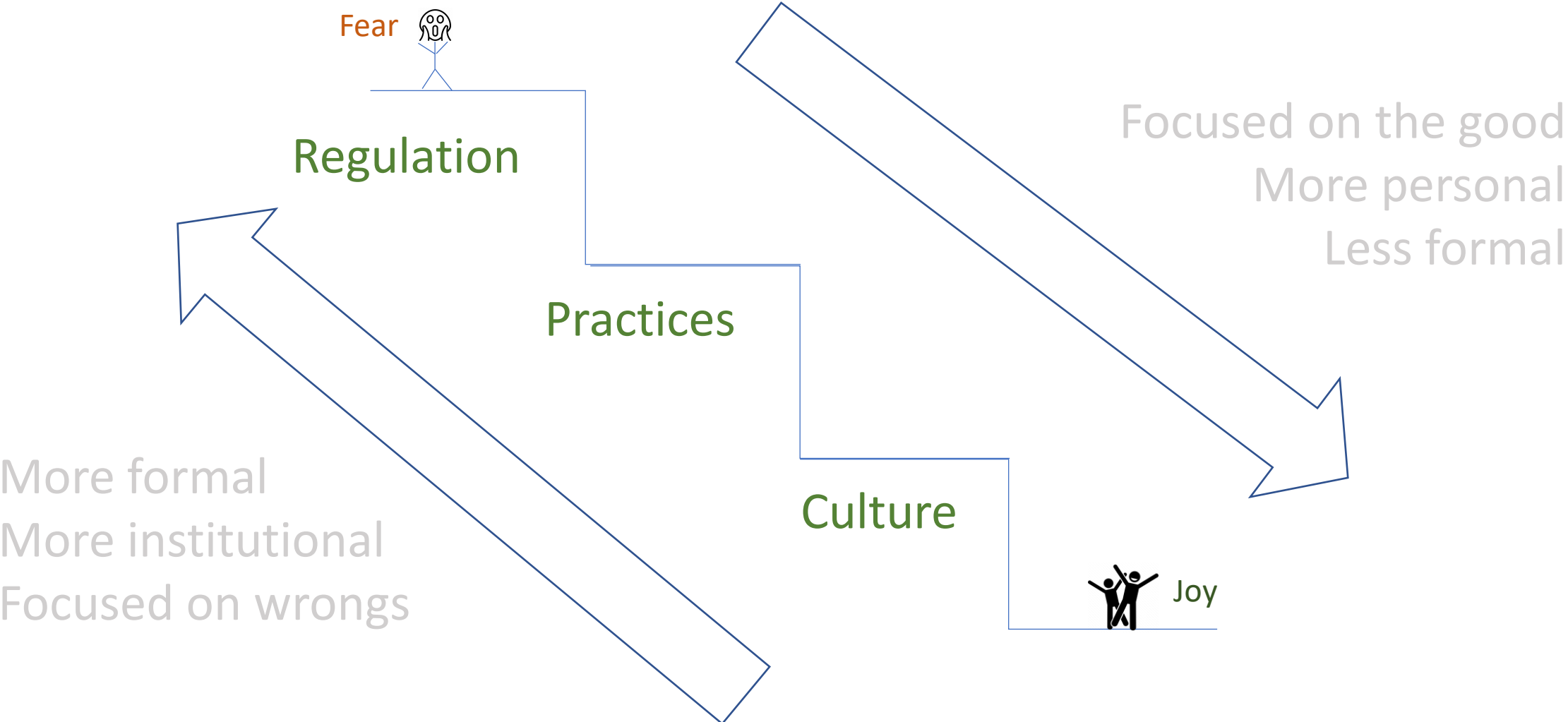
Culture and Ethics?

- Max Weber
  - In capitalism, all that matters is the increased acquisition of wealth. "God helps those who help themselves." (p. 115)
  - "Emancipation from economic traditionalism" (p.36) requires "definite and highly developed ethical qualities", e.g. "scrupulous honesty" (p. 69)
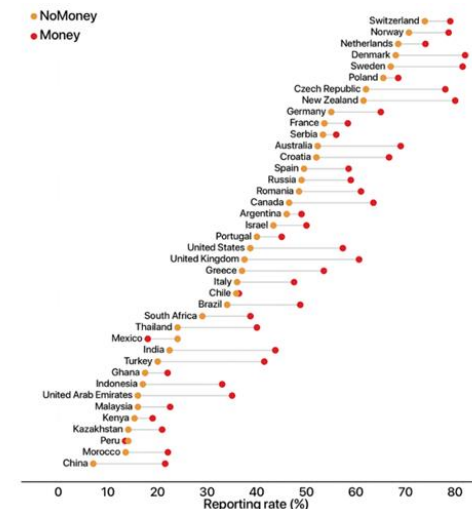 - This allows specialization, which leads to skills, and an increase in quality (p. 161)
- Avadon: dual morality thesis
  - So morality is a pre-condition of capitalism…?

Max Weber, 1904: https://archive.org/details/protestantethics00webe
Avadon: https://www.classicalethics.com/
Cover image: https://www.intheblack.com/articles/2017/07/01/how-does-culture-affect-ethics

Social Practice Theory

Social practice theory (quoted Holland & Lave, 2009)

- E.g. environmentalists, wine merchants in Porto
- attends to the integration of emotion, motivation and agency into cultural-historical activity theory
- incorporates careful attention to tension, conflict and difference in participation in cultural activities
- calls for the close study of the relations of cultural activities to both local and trans-local institutional arrangements and practice
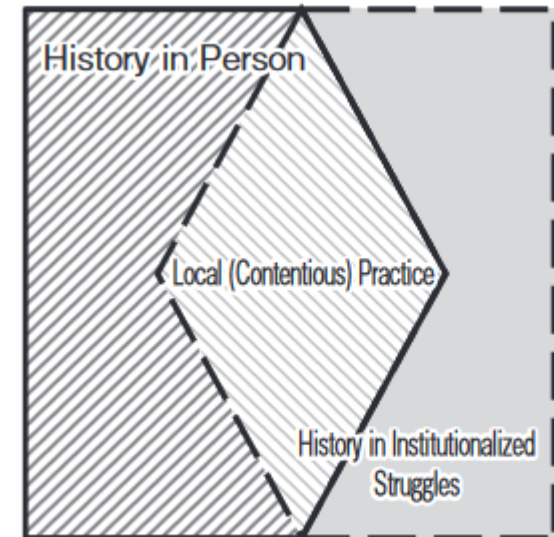
Relations between history in person and history in institutionalized struggles (Adapted from Holland & Lave, 2001, p. 7)

Holland and Lave: https://kansai-u.repo.nii.ac.jp/?action=repository_action_common_download&item_id=783&item_no=1&attribute_id=19&file_no=1 Via https://wiobyrne.com/building-ethical-communities/

Dominant Narratives and Social Change

- Julian Stodd: "there is always a conflict boundary: either an uncontrolled social one, or a formalised State one. Social change may happen at the intersection of these systems"

- Me: Change happens through growth, birth and death. It happens through movement and inertia. Only some change is caused by friction.

https://julianstodd.wordpress.com/2021/12/21/the-state-and-social-change/
https://www.downes.ca/post/73127

Design

- Architectures of Control

- Dark Patterns
  - "a user interface that has been carefully crafted to trick users into doing things, such as buying overpriced insurance with their purchase or signing up for recurring bills."

- Design Justice
  - "an approach to design that is led by marginalized communities and that aims explicitly to challenge, rather than reproduce, structural inequalities."

Dan Lockton - http://www.danlockton.co.uk/research/Architectures_of_Control_v1_01.pdf
https://architectures.danlockton.co.uk/2005/11/16/welcome/
Harry Brignull - https://www.darkpatterns.org/
Sasha Costanza-Chock https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/design-justice

Beyond Design

Ethics goes here....

Ton Zylstra: two things that I have a certain dislike for,:

- "The first concerns treating the philosophy of technology, information and data ethics in general as a purely philosophical and scientific debate. It... then has no immediate bearing on the things organisations... do in practice"

- "The second concerns seeing 'Ethics by design' as a sufficient fix."

Ton Zylstra, Ethics as a practice #GlobalEthicsDay2020 : Ethics as a Practice (EaaP) (all quoted)
https://www.zylstra.org/blog/2020/10/globalethicsday2020-ethics-as-a-practice-eaap/