Inescapable Frameworks: Ethics of Care, Ethics of Rights and the *Responsible Research and Innovation* Model

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ABSTRACT

In 1989, in his capital book *Sources of Self* Charles Taylor investigated over the inescapable foundations of our moral choices. According to Taylor (1989, 5) «[m]oral argument and exploration go on only within a world shaped by our deepest moral responses». This moral dimension of the Self makes the clashing ontologies of our values a precondition of our political choices, even in techno-scientific issues.

Up to now no shared definition of *Responsibility, Research and Innovation* (RRI) can be addressed, impeding thus to reach a clear model of governance in Europe. For example, René von Schomberg defines it as

a transparent, interactive process by which societal actors and innovators become mutually responsive to each other with a view to the (ethical) acceptability, sustainability and societal desirability of the innovation process and its marketable products (in order to allow a proper embedding of scientific and technological advances in our society) (von Schomberg 2013: 63).

Instead, Richard Owen and his colleagues defines RRI as «a collective commitment of care for the future through responsive stewardship of science and innovation in the present» (Owen et al. 2013: 36).

This indeterminacy related to the concept of RRI paved the way to two different tendencies of this model (a socio-empirical and a normative version), as well as to a multitude of ethical frameworks linked it that can entail different outcomes within the same model. Utilitarianism, ethics of Kantian origin, ethics of virtue, environmental ethics, discourse ethics, rights-based moralities, all coexist in the same moral horizon and lead to far different meanings of the concept of responsibility. Therefore, RRI can find several basis of justification from the ethical standpoint.

Despite an apparent general consensus, RRI appears therefore as a broad umbrella under which we can identify several different approaches leading to different outcomes. These different outcomes, to which RRI can lead (at least in principle), are not only the product of different political conceptions. There is also an ethical ground, which causes our political divergences, that needs to be considered. Using an expression of Charles Taylor (1989), this level of our decision-making processes is the "unescapable framework" of the idea of responsibility which is embedded in the RRI model we prefer. In this sense, these possible outcomes of the RRI model can be understood as the result of two different types of choices: political and ethical.

At the first level, more superficial, RRI is polarised around two different goals: inclusion on the one side, and the ethical acceptability on the other. These two polarities correspond to what I called the *socio-empirical* and the *normative approach* to RRI. The first, the socio-empirical one, aims at fostering the societal reflection on purposes of innovation in order to choose the ethical principles which should steer innovation time by time. The second, the normative one, aims at using those ethical principles, which are at the basis of our constitutions, as well as of EU treaties, for anchoring governance of research and innovation.

These two tendencies occur at the political level of the RRI framework and build the idea of responsibility upon different conceptual bases. According to the first approach (socio-empirical) responsibility is generated by the public engagement of all parties at stake that determine the values which should shape governance from the internal (Owen *et al.* 2013; Groves 2015). The second approach consider the fundamental ethical principles which are at the basis of the constitutional agreement of our political communities for articulating processes of public engagement and shaping structures of governance, even in the technoscientific field (von Schomberg 2011, 2013). These two approaches refer to a spectrum of ethical frameworks sensitively different.

At the second level, therefore, we could say in a deeper dimension of the human choice, ethical frameworks represent the unescapable dimension of the moral decision in the field of responsibility. Here identity building processes, namely internal processes of forming the Self, occur. I can identify myself under a specific moral conception (a moral onntology) which influences my identity but also my preferences in the field of responsibility. These ethical frameworks constitute the ethical justification of our political choices which are at the centre of the debate on RRI.

It is at this level that ethics of care and ethics of rights must be studied.

Therefore, we must be aware that RRI is not only the result of processes aimed at fostering democratic participation of stakeholders (according to a socio-empirical approach) or at incorporating

basic values of national constitutions and EU treaties in governance tools (according to a normative approach), but also the outcome of reference frameworks which are its starting point from an ethical perspective. Our ethical beliefs, our most intimate attitudes, influence our political preferences in governance.

This has not only ethical consequences but also pragmatic, since these unescapable ethical frameworks produce different practices and different institutional structures, namely *ethos*, different forms of living, that can be mutually indifferent, syntonic or clashing. Therefore, to highlight this level of the human choice is crucial to understand the unexpressed presuppositions that lay at the ground of the RRI model of governance.

In this article I will try to investigate on which ethical framework can be detected at the basis of the discussed idea of responsibility in RRI, by focusing, in particular, on two different traditions: ethics of care and ethics of rights. In this context, I will analyse the clashing pathways of these two traditions, by addressing some limits of the demand of needs to steer responsible behaviour.

Ethics of care arose in contrast to the shortcomings of the model of justice based on rights (its abstractness and its context insensitivity), especially in North-American countries, strongly addressing the question of justice inside our political communities (Scheingold 1974; Kelman 1987; White, Tronto 2004). This polemic trait against ethics of rights is also present in those attempts proposing care ethics as the legitimate ethical foundation of RRI (Puig de Bellacasa 2011; Grinbaum, Groves 2013; Groves 2013, 2015; Simakova, Coenen 2013; Wickson 2016). In the debate on RRI ethics of care led to two different manifestations, ecofeminist ethics (Wickson 2016) and virtue ethics (Groves 2013, 2015), which both maintained the original criticism over the tradition of rights. They propose themselves as a great philosophical justification of the transplantation of 'new governance' paradigm in the field of technoscience. However, these attempts in the field of RRI neglect the original reason of care ethics: the question of justice. Needs can structure processes of public engagement, but they can also lead to unsatisfactory outcomes when the risk of rights violations is not taken into account from the outset. In other words, an ethics based only on needs can violate rights and, therefore, neglect the needs which rights cover: their "underlying reasons". This means that this framework is not able to dismantle the question of justice as care ethics pretended in its original formulation.

On the other side, the discourse on rights can be linked to the hermeneutic tradition (Gadamer 1960; Ricoeur 1983; 1984; 1985; Pastore 2003) which can overcome some criticisms of care ethics, such as their abstractness, indeterminacy, their context insensitivity. This makes this form of ethics

of rights contextualist, culturally-sensitive, open to particularity, narrative, focused on the vulnerability of persons, time-oriented therefore able to tackle risks, known and unknown, of the techno-scientific advance. In this regard, I will also argue, the logic of rights and that of needs do not exclude each other in principle, nor they exclude the mutual support in the development of responsible strategies in research and innovation, in the environmental field, for example. This result could be desirable in order to overcome their own limitations and erase ambiguities which can foster irresponsible outcomes.