northumbria
U N I V E R S I T Y

**Sustainable Cities
Research Institute**

Philosophy into Everyday Life

Report on phase one
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Lyn Dodds

REGENERATION
EXCHANGE
networking good practice in the north east

CONTENTS

Introduction

Regeneration has been part of the government agenda for many years and features in many policies, both aimed at direct regeneration of deprived areas and indirectly at the results of deprivation such as social exclusion, crime, and poor educational achievement.

It is widely accepted that there are mainly two arms to regeneration; improving the physical environment, and improving the quality of life for those who live and work in deprived areas (community renewal). Although regeneration is not necessarily confined to deprived areas it is certainly more predominant in them.

Much regeneration work is carried out in partnerships involving statutory, business and community sectors. Many of the tensions stem from the different interests and aims of the various partners. This is further compounded by the power differences and pressures to deliver government outcomes amongst partners. The conflicting pressures often lead to hasty outcomes resulting in one or more of the partners being unhappy with the outcomes. In severe cases this can lead to disengagement with the process with disastrous results.

The inequalities within a partnership can be compounded as the partnership is not necessarily one that would exist were it not imposed. With the forthcoming 'duty to involve' it is reasonable to suppose that more partnerships will be constructed to fulfil this requirement. The construction of a partnership based on a top down requirement will be one where there is a power imbalance and experience has shown that this leads to difficulties in achieving a fair and equitable outcome. It is crucial to unpick the complex difficulties experienced by partnerships in regeneration to allow the best possible outcomes to be realised. A detached and impartial approach to a mutual understanding of each partners' perspectives and motivation within the partnership may be offered through the practical application of philosophy.

Philosophy is often viewed as the territory of lofty thinkers and not for general application in everyday situations. This myth can prevent the use of tried and tested ways of approaching problems and situations. Socratic dialogue is one such example of a philosophy informing modern partnership practice. To test the usefulness of this approach and make any refinements to ensure the method is fit for purpose is the aim of the project *Philosophy into everyday life.*

Methodology

This project will be developed in two phases:

- Scoping and initial trial of method
- Pilot study (dependent on follow on funding)

The initial phase of this project is one of scoping and developing. Socratic Dialogue as a tool will be trialled in two workshops. The results of will be collated and presented at a further workshop where partners for the pilot may be identified.

The second phase of the project will focus on working with a regeneration partnership to develop a Socratic dialogue approach to resolving the tensions that arise from having partners with unequal power will demonstrate the practical application of a seemingly lofty philosophy into everyday use.

Using a selected partnership this pilot will evaluate the applicability of Socratic dialogue to partnerships and develop a working practice for using philosophy in an everyday working environment. The resulting working practice can then be rolled out to other partnerships which operate with unequal power relations within them.

Socratic Dialogues

The trialling of the Socratic Dialogues was carried out at two workshops with self selecting participants from an invitation sent through the Regeneration Exchange network. A trained Socratic dialogue facilitator conducted both of the workshops which focussed on power in partnerships.

Taking a lived example and working through it to identify where fair and unfair practice is evidenced was the basis of the Socratic Dialogue sessions based around the question 'what is fairness'. Two workshops explored participants' stories relating to where fairness or unfairness had operated in a partnership. The full anonymised transcripts of each workshop are attached as an appendix.

It must be stressed at the outset that the stories as related to the group were purely how it appeared to the person telling the story and that some of the facts may have been unknown and remembered from a particular perspective. This has implications for the use of Socratic Dialogue in its current form and is an issue to be addressed through the pilot study. The implications are discussed later in this report, under methodological implications.

Looking at unfairness as the flip side of fairness the first group explored an example (appendix 1) based on a board meeting and the wider operational

issues of the partnership which contributed to the unfairness of the boards' actions:

> *A Board meeting to pass contentious report. It was known that the report was contentious and that some of the partners were unhappy with its contents. Given 15 minutes to review it rather than reviewing it in sections. The number of reps of one sector had been reduced on the recommendations of a previous report written by the same author as the one being reviewed. Previously agreed rules on voting and representation were superseded by the previous report and now in action. The author of both reports was not chosen in an open process and there was a level of distrust among some of the reps. Also the trusted rep of this particular sector was no longer with them and the new one was not yet embedded as the sector rep and had not legitimated their role with the sector. Time scales on approving the report were originally tight but then extended for seemingly political reasons.*

The evidence of unfairness was extracted from the example and the reason explored as to why it was considered unfair. The group then selected the top seven items of unfairness which were:

- Lack of balance. (This refers to representation at the board meeting being more in favour of the statutory agencies)
- Imbalance in power. (Seen in a number of instances e.g. use of tight time scale for discussion of what was known to be a contentious report)
- Denying chance to put case (voice). (voting system and unfamiliar representative)
- Not understanding/agreeing the process. (Difficulties in the voting system which had changed from the original agreed format to a new one without discussion)
- Lack of honesty in dealings. (Oral communications not committed to writing, unknown process for selecting representatives)
- Taking away rights. (replacing the rules handbook without fully informing all representatives or involving them in developing the new one)
- Disempowering. (Presenting what is known to be a contentious report with complex issues to be passed as a whole in an unrealistic time scale)

The group concluded that the key to carrying out partnership working in a fair and equitable manner was integrity.

The second group found a number of examples where they felt fairness had been demonstrated and examined the approach taken to revive a struggling partnership (appendix 2):

> *An already existing partnership brought into existence in a top down process was failing. An agent was employed to revive the partnership on behalf of the council. The timing of the appointment was difficult as a major local employer had ceased to operate and another large*

industry in the area was unable to operate due to outside circumstances. The agent approached the task by holding many conversations with a whole range of individuals. The conversations revealed a lot of passion for the area but with many different opinions. The challenge was to get a consensus on their priorities. Previously people had been consulted but ignored so were disengaged. A new consultation was carried out and the issues fed back. A new partnership was emerging and they developed the method of working and rules, buying into achieving a consensus. The partnership became a trust and subscription to the trust was offered for £1 which gave the individual voting rights. An independent chair was appointed and the locals trusted this chair as they were non-political. Locals who did not take up the subscription offer were still consulted regularly through task groups. The partnership then applied for funds and people began to see things happen as a result. A holistic view was taken; projects were undertaken in all areas supported by other funds raised in a 'cocktail of funding'. People resources were then unlocked as many volunteers came forward.

During the exploration of the story the group uncovered examples of fairness, unfairness, and some instances where fairness and unfairness co-existed. Following the same process as the first group the story was recounted and the elements of fairness were then grouped into one of three sub-categories; criteria, pre-conditions, and constitutive. It became difficult to prioritise any of these though the group came up with the notion that for fairness to flourish a distinction between the necessary and the sufficient criteria had to be made. That is there are certain conditions that are necessary to have a fair partnership and process.

This group outlined what it deemed constitutive and necessary for fairness to flourish were:
- Respect
- Dialogue
- Self sustaining rules
- Transparent rules
- Tolerance
- Non-partisan judgement e.g. final pronouncement
- Inclusive: all different perspectives considered

While these are not the exact opposite of what the first group considered made up unfairness there are certain threads running through both examples. To list them would be useful but this would merely be a tick list for partnerships to pay lip service to. Active understanding of all partners' difficulties, by all partners is crucial to begin to address these issues and active understanding within each partnership will not come about from the reading of a report of the journey taken by other groups. Power imbalances can never be removed but there is some evidence to suggest that it may be possible to minimise their effect through each partner having an understanding of the conflicting pressures and agendas of each of the partners.

Methodological Implications

The intention of carrying out the pilot study is to refine the process of the Socratic dialogue to enable different partners to have an insight and appreciation of each others pressures and drivers. As has already been noted the Socratic dialogue focuses on one persons perception events. This is used as a tool for understanding the process of reaching a consensus in order to deepen the investigation. In telling the story of events from one persons' perception it is inevitable that factors contributing to the events will be unknown or unexplained. While this is acceptable in a dialogue whose aim is to encourage 'participants to reflect and think independently and critically' (SFCP 2008) it may be less useful in exploring the pressures and drivers of different partners from each partners angle and arriving at a more informed way of working.

A number of options present themselves and the pilot will aim to identify which, if any options are relevant. Carry out a Socratic dialogue and from it develop some possible options:

- After the example has been fully worked through go back and have each partner make additions where they have a different perception and/or can shed light on pressures, drivers, or contributing factors.
- agree a set of ground rules
- identify where better communications may have made the partnership more transparent and allow a greater understanding of all partners'
- use the understanding of communication issues to develop an internal communication strategy
- identify areas of possible conflicting interests and develop a strategy for taking these into consideration to reach the best possible outcome
- reaching an understanding of why it is not always possible to have an outcome that is 'fair' to all partners i.e. identify and outline unchangeable parameters

The pilot may reveal that all, some or none of these is possible from using a Socratic dialogue. Other methods of systems thinking will also be trialled such as Appreciative Inquiry Method. All methods used during the pilot will be evaluated for effectiveness and transferability.

References

http://www.scfp.org.uk/socratic_dialogue.htm (11.07.2008)

Background reading

Below is a list of introductory texts to Socratic Dialogue which will provide a fuller explanation and exploration of the method.

Jos Kessels 'Socrates Comes to Market' *Reason in Practice: The Journal of Philosophy of Management* Vol 1 Number 1 2001 pp 49 - 71

Hans Bolten 'Managers Learn Moral Accountability: The Impact of Socratic Dialogue' *Reason in Practice: The Journal of Philosophy of Managemen*t Vol 1 Number 3 2001
pp 21- 34

Nigel Laurie 'Philosophy Goes to Work' In: *Thinking Through Dialogue* (ed) Trevor Curnow pub Practical Philosophy Press 2001

Rene Saran and Barbara Neisser (eds) *Enquiring Minds: Socratic Dialogue in Education* pub Trentham Books 2004 ISBN 1 85856 336 4

Socratic Dialogue Report

What Is Fairness?

EXAMPLES

Compact Code of Practice on funding. Does not address fairness/justice of the distribution of funding - only the process

By having a structured discussion with the residents we got fairness into the regeneration process.

A scholarship holder from South Africa: paying bills himself or by deduction from his scholarship?

Unfairness: a decision went through after a two-two vote (a majority in votes but not sectors)

Sharing a problem in partnership: an atmosphere of equality.

In discussion we discovered the concerns behind the issues

Car parking: made more disabled bays

Climbing: fairness in a decision not affecting the choices of others

CHOSEN EXAMPLE

Instances or aspects of unfairness in the example are in bold **thus.**

Comments added after review are formatted thus: ***[i.e. no direct..]***

1. Board meeting of a partnership. I attended as a support officer of the Sector Reps. ***[i.e. no direct say in the meeting. But it was not a role to have one.]***

2. Agenda item concerned community and voluntary sectors (C&VS): a review of C&VS role in the partnership. An item came up, tabled **to be passed or not** by the Board. It took 45 minutes (not the allocated 15) to discuss.

3. A vote was taken: **two sectors en bloc** were against (**3 votes**); two sectors were for
   (**5 votes**). It was passed 'in principle'.
   [C&VS requested the vote because the chair said the meeting was not here to discuss or amend the proposals which made C&VS feel

guilty at the time they had actually taken up for discussion. The three votes cast were all the C&VS reps present; the five votes cast were from the other two sectors but did not represent all their reps – some of them abstained. When asked what 'in principle' meant the chair said it 'means nothing', displaying a lack of seriousness.}

4. Debate revolved around 4-5 recommendations that C&VS did not agree with. *[Unfair: it was offered as an all or nothing package. The four-five contentious items should have been assigned to a separate meeting to surface the differences.]*

5. The second report was instigated by a Group on the partnership – in response to C&VS concerns about future funding after the end of current funding.

6. The group was set up to write **the report:** *[It was unfair to present to the Board the report when the C&VS were known to be unhappy with some recommendations.]*   Representatives from community sector, voluntary sector, city council, the lead officer of the partnership and an 'independent chair'. I don't know how C&VS reps **were selected**. *[The selection process was unfair.]* They were not 'default reps' (so far as I was concerned) but the CS rep checked that CS was happy with the appointment and that made that rep accountable to the Community Sector.

7. C&VS representation on the partnership was **reduced** by the first report. *[Without much involvement. Agreed rules and rep numbers were 'chucked out' without replacement or explanation; basic assumptions about equal partnership were overturned.]*

    The author was offered by the Government Office and next thing I knew it was **the person** who wrote the first report (the one that had lead to the reduction in C&VS reps).   *[I saw that the author had a slanted view and didn't know how they were chosen.]*

8. I was surprised that the first report made no mention of Sector Voice in the area.

9. The author wrote the scoping report for the Group sub-group.

    I believe the author was pushing the national Government agenda. *[Unfair: did not look at the local situation enough.]*

    The author did give both sides when reporting orally to the Board.   *[What was said was not committed in writing.]*

10. The initial Handbook setting up the partnership gave guidance and rules including voting. But the first report superseded the structure and I was told the 'Handbook' was finished.   *[Rules the C&VS could point to had gone.}*

11. The original Plan said the partnership was equal i.e. each sector had equal rights. No reference was made to sectoral weightings – only the number of reps would count in voting. *[Agreed and accepted then.]*

I thought equal partnership meant all sectors were equal. *[The sector lost numbers.]*

The sector rep on the sub-group was suddenly not there. The **replacement did not check with the sector that s/he was acceptable** to the sector. *. [The process should have stalled: (i) to check the rep was acceptable; (ii) let the new rep familiarise themselves and (iii) to allow for the shock to subside]*

12. The first report changed the structure of the partnership. The C&VS said representation should remain the same but the Board accepted the report recommendations.

13. Context: there was unfairness in the sectoral imbalance. One sectors funding was to be cut but no review was done of other sectors.

14. I felt it was unfair to have a one month deadline – which others have since extended for political and other reasons.

15. Changes occurred with no clear basis for them.

3(i) Unfairness occurred in voting being done by others besides C&SV. Was it unfair for those not affected to have a vote.

Or was it fair to let all vote after a 45 minutes discussion?

Or should voting have been used since it was rarely done? Was using it here disrespectful of minority interests. There was a need for recognition of special needs/interests/rights.

Or was the decision specified in an unfair way?

EVIDENCE OF UNFAIRNESS IN THE EXAMPLE

Evidence	Justification Value-principle-rule
Recommendations to be addressed as a whole – not assigned to a separate meeting	♦ Forced a false choice ♦ Close down further debate
Time allocation (15 minutes) for a contentious issue	♦ Prevents us considering it fully ♦ Pressures us to agree
Harassed into stopping debate	♦ Pressures to agree ♦ Treats as of different status
Passing 'means nothing' (disrespectful)	♦ Disempowering ♦ Devalues 'everything'
C&VS forced by being isolated and	♦ They shouldn't have to do that

having to state their position by means of voting	
Presentation of report to the Board when C&VS were known to be unhappy with some recommendations – and were part authors	♦ Misrepresented
C&VS reps selection process was unfair	♦ Not: 　-　known by 　-　communicated 　-　understood
Mutually agreed partnership was overturned without agreement by first report	♦ Result of exercising power without "full agreement"
Authors appointment process was not transparent	♦ Not transparent
Author did not look at the local situation enough	♦ Bias shown
Oral comments were not committed in writing	♦ Misleading ♦ Written report did not present the best case
The lost balance of reps meant a heavier emphasis on the public sector	♦ Lack of balance
Lack of a moratorium to appoint a replacement rep trained and familiar with the situation	♦ Disadvantaged one voice
Not all parties' funding was reviewed	♦ Unequal treatment of sectors
Lack of say in the process including setting deadlines	♦ Disrespectful ♦ Disempowering

UNFAIRNESS: THE TOP 7 ITEMS

- ♦ Lack of balance
- ♦ Imbalance in power
- ♦ Denying chance to put case (voice)
- ♦ Not understanding/agreeing the process
- ♦ Lack of honesty in dealings
- ♦ Taking away rights
- ♦ Disempowering

Integrity the key?
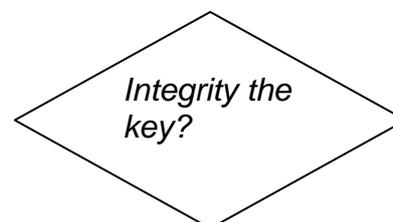
PARKING

- ♦ Shouldn't the voluntary sector have called 'foul' after the first report?

Socratic Dialogue Report

What Is Fairness?

Example

The elocution prize 'awarded' 40 years later

How fairness relates to overseas farmers and British farmers?

Police pre-judged gypsies

I was left with very little choice but to cover this situation. Fair or unfair?

My punch and judy booking was 'revised'. I was not trusted – and at short notice

MSc student caught: had not paid fees and could not attend mother's funeral because would loose return visa. University refused to help. Fair? (Later resolved: student paid fee by instalment by working part-time.)

Volunteer school workers now require CRB before commencement.

Student group projects: the international students leave much of the work to me.

Bank sold my husband an insurance package but then delayed in including me. Fair treatment?

Democratically elected representatives: is it fair to exclude the involvement of other people in decision making?

Chosen Example

FAIRNESS AND UNFAIRNESS IN THE EXAMPLE

Instances or aspects of **fairness** in the example are in bold **thus.**
Instances or aspects of unfairness in the example are shaded thus.
Instances of **both fairness and unfairness** are in shaded bold underlined **thus**

1. In 1999 I was employed by a rural Council as a Project Officer. The village was chosen top down as part of the Market Towns Initiative (from DEFRA via the Countryside Agency). This funded sustainable regeneration through partnerships.

   I came in to **revive partnership** working in the village on behalf of the Council – to do a **relate exercise** and a **holistic exercise** to **see what was needed** to bring people together to resolve local issues and problems. The village had been

chosen as one of a range of towns by the Countryside Agency. ==Partnership working from the SRB has broken down== from past experiences and people ==holding on to different sides== of arguments.

Two weeks after I arrived foot and mouth broke out and the factory (which had been the town's main employer for 50 years) closed. School leavers in the town had low aspirations and had tended to take jobs in the paint factory and stay local. School leavers had literacy and numeracy problems and very few went on to university.

2. I had **conversations** with a whole **range of individuals** about their view of local issues. I started by saying: 'you are all very ==**passionate**== about your town – but are **passionate in different ways**. How can we **harness this** so that it all **pulls in the same direction** instead of 10'?

3. Different camps had different views as to who was in charge and who should have the final say over issues such as: who cuts the grass? Who decides if there should be another dog bin?

   The different camps were: the Town Council, Chamber of Trade, Parish Councils, and young people (youth groups and clubs). Young people were ==consulted but ignored==.

4. They all felt it was ==not fair that other's had the right not to listen== to them and ==take on their point of view==. But really there was not much of a power base to be fighting over. It was really a matter of local politics and image or status in a small town.

5. I had started as a sole worker but was later joined by 6 others. We **researched** what the issues were and **fed it back** to them to establish what for them were the issues and what for them were **their priorities**. We found:

   (i)   young people were
   (ii)   **access** to services:
           - for old people eg hospital, doctor, shops, transport
           - young people
           - **vulnerable** people

6. **We asked them**: 'what do we need to do to make these things better?'
A partnership was emerging willing to look at ways of working and putting **rule**s around it including getting a chair, voting, employing casting votes – plus a commitment to make every effort to decide by **consensus.**

7. Money became available as part of the scheme to tackle the issues and fund me from the District Council and **the county Strategic Partnership** setting up a framework to address people's needs.

8. The partnership became a charity and joined the **Development Trust Association**. Membership was **open to anyone willing to subscribe for a £1 share**. The Partnership Board was chaired by a local Methodist minister, a **non-political** appointment which made an important difference and was seen as having the **good of all residents at heart**. He had no other motives. His appointment was an important symbol.

   The Partnership board comprised **representatives from Parish Councils, other local councils, the voluntary sector, business plus some elected**

individuals. Reporting to the Partnership Board were Task Groups. These provided a way of pooling local people outside the Partnership Board and carried out particular tasks such as steering a project. Members included **youth groups, older people and some service providers**.

The Partnership could now apply for funds. The funds supported projects that brought people together and from which people saw something happening as a result. These included tree planting and creating a walk to the local tourist attraction, street scenes, shop fronts and public realm improvements.

A holistic view was taken; projects were undertaken in all areas supported by other funds raised in a 'cocktail of funding'. These projects included a lunch club for older people (with 125 regular participants), exercise classes, and healthy living programmes.

9. This unlocked people resources already in the town and **much was done by volunteers in the town**. And this created a **self-sustaining mechanism** for addressing local problems and **mobilising local social capital**.

10. The **reluctance to allow people to the table has gone** five years later. The process is now under review.

EVIDENCE OF FAIRNESS IN THE EXAMPLE

Evidence	Reasons
Revive partnership	♦ Represented different voices ♦ Gave power as well as voice ♦ Recognised need to bring together to rescue and prevent more unfairness
Relate exercise	♦ Attempt to get things back in kilter – to heal and get out of the damaging situation
Holistic – to see what was needed	♦ Looking at things in the round – not just the business and public realms improvements but also culture, people, etc.
Conversation	♦ Two-way dialogue – includes listening ♦ No set outcome: exploratory open-ended ♦ Good will and respect
Consensus	♦ Taking all views into consideration ♦ Implies a shared aim and goal for the area ♦ Implies taking people with you – a more considered approach – not rushing to get on
Northumberland Strategic Partnership	♦ Remove the politics from the assessment of needs ♦ Based on wide partnership input ♦ Evidence-based ♦ Structured approach fed into the decisions
Non-political	♦ Implied pastoral view of the community ♦ No formal political allegiance – no party line ♦ Inclusive ♦ Perceived as independent and respected

Good of all residents at heart	♦ Ditto

Development Trust Association	♦ Explicit about being embedded in the community eg
	   - committed to representation
	   - inclusive ways of working
	   - delivery at the local level
	♦ Open about ways of working

Fed it back	♦ Checks we have the right understanding ♦ Includes community in the process including the development of outcomes ♦ Can enable an action plan ♦ Can identify a right direction ♦ Challenges both ways eg crime and fear of crime
Their priorities	♦ Bottom up process ♦ Ownership
Access	♦ Equal opportunities (Julian le Grand book)
Vulnerable	♦ Some need help to access: positive recognition
We asked them	♦ See above: research etc
Rules	♦ Not imposed but negotiated via an inclusive workshop ♦ Transparency: we all know what rules govern mechanisms and processes ♦ Reviewed annually
Range of individuals	♦ Attempt to include as many as possible ♦ Respect: seeking views ♦ Looking at the whole picture and different perspectives ♦ Breaking down barriers and dispelling myths ♦ Relieving emotional tensions
Passionate	♦ Care ♦ Pride ♦ Love of ♦ Recognising passion showed empathy ♦ Willing to sacrifice ♦ Conveyed Kirsten's non-partisan standpoint
Harness passions to pull in same direction	♦ Create opportunities for the community ♦ Common aim makes the achievement of tangible outcomes for the whole community more achievable
Researched	♦ Objective: helps keep a balance ♦ Gets the facts to do the right thing
Board and task group membership	♦ Inclusivity ♦ Range of views represented ♦ Allows for bottom up approach ♦ Proactive approach to involving more than just the articulate

Much done by volunteers in the town	◆ Involved the unpaid (lay involvement) as well as professionals ◆ Open to all – no qualifications required ◆ Take responsibility for the community – unpaid ◆ Equality of opportunity ◆ Recognising skills even if unpaid
Self-sustaining mechanism	◆ 'Independent suspension' ◆ Future is provided for ◆ Self-reliance
Reluctance to allow people to the table has gone	◆ Inclusivity ◆ Greater tolerance ◆ Understanding of each other's world ◆ From adversarial relationship to shared problem-solving (eg Wednesday afternoon shop closing)

FAIRNESS: THE CRITERIA

◆ Two-way dialogue with good will and respect
◆ Holistic view – 'round picture'
◆ Tolerance
◆ Looking backwards before looking forwards
◆ Self-sustaining
◆ Investigate facts and check understanding
◆ Bottom up priorities (non-elitist)
◆ Equal opportunities
◆ Dispelling myths/challenging
◆ Inclusivity and involving people
◆ Take all views into consideration
◆ Independence
◆ Judgement from a non-partisan and objective standpoint
◆ Basis of judgement must be known and transparent

PRE-CONDITIONS

◆ Looking back
◆ Objective standpoint
◆ Equal opportunities
◆ Hold a view
◆ Desire/will to get to a fair decision – good will
◆ Challenge
◆ Holistic approach
◆ Investigating facts
◆ Getting understanding of the different perspectives
◆ Shared understanding of decision criteria and process

CONSTITUTIVE

◆ Respect
◆ Dialogue
◆ Self-sustaining rules

- ◆ Transparent rules
- ◆ Tolerance
- ◆ Non-partisan judgement eg final pronouncement
- ◆ Inclusive: all different perspectives considered

DISTINGUISH

Necessary from sufficient criteria

Starting with the story

'The judgement is in the perception'
Aristotle