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## **Katzenelsons essay: Handling og adfærd**

### *Indledning.*

I sin artikel forsøger Boje Katzenelsons, som jeg læser den, at præcisere de begreber, vi bruger i psykologien til at beskrive det, der særligt karakteriserer dens objekt - eller rettere subjekt. Dvs. personer der har viden om sig selv og andre ting og personer i de konkrete situationer i virkeligheden, de befinder sig i; personer, der kan handle sammen og kommunikere den viden de deler med andre personer om disse ting og situationer.

Et forsøger på at præcisere begreber og termer i en bestemmelse af hvad det er at være personer, ser jeg som et vigtigt bidrag i bestræbelserne på at afklare, om der findes grundbegreber inden for psykologien, (på linie med grundbegreberne inden de fysiske og biologiske videnskaber), som er definerende for dens særlige objekt. Dvs. grundbegreber som må være forudsat, og som gør det muligt konsistent at redegøre for, hvorledes psykologiens objekt adskiller sig fra, er andet og mere end blot og bart fysisk objekt eller biologisk organisme.

Jeg er ikke uenig med Boje i det, han skriver, endside i hans sigte; derimod tror jeg, at argumenterne for nogle af de grundbegreber, Boje præsenterer, (dvs. erkendelse og perception, handling, konkrete erkende- og handlesituationer og deres sociale natur, osv.), vil kunne skærpes. I min kommentar skal jeg således forsøge at argumentere for, at relationen mellem de begreber, vi bruger til at beskrive en person med, er af nødvendig art; dvs. ingen af disse begreber har veldefinerede betydninger uafhængigt af eller uden at man refererer til de andre. Dersom det er tilfældet, forekommer det mig at have væsentlige konsekvenser for, hvad vi kan sige - og hvilke spørgsmål vi kan stille - om mennesket, dets erkendelse og handlen. Jeg skal til slut komme ind på nogle af disse konsekvenser. - Ligesom Boje skal jeg begynde med Descartes og hans systematiske tvivl:

*Min kommentar er et sammendrag af argumenter fra en tekst, jeg har skrevet på engelsk; p.gr. af tidsnød har det ikke været muligt at oversætte teksten til dansk.*

### *The necessary relation between the concepts of cognition, action and reality*

What can we say, and what do we necessarily have to say, about persons and the descriptions, knowledge and action of persons? Let us start the analysis where Descartes concluded his systematic doubt about the existence of everything he could think of, including himself, by asserting: I think (or rather: I doubt) therefore I am, (Descartes, 1637/1991). Descartes could not doubt that he doubted, and could not doubt that doubting is an act carried out by someone (regardless of what made him doubt). So, he knew something about himself, namely that he existed as someone, an agent, who could doubt. This, he contends, must be the first principle of the Philosophy he was seeking. However, he continues, examining attentively that which I was, I saw that I could conceive that I had no body, and that there was no world nor place where I might be; but yet that I could not for all that conceive that I was not. On the contrary, I saw from the very fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it very evidently and certainly followed that I was; on the other hand if I had only ceased from thinking, even if all the rest of what I had ever imagined had really existed, I should have no reason for thinking that I had existed. From that I knew that I was a substance the whole essence or nature of which is to think, and that for its existence there is no need of any place, nor does it depend on any material things; so that this 'me' that is to say, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from body, and is even more easy to know than is the latter; and even if body were not, the soul would not cease to be what it is. (Descartes, 1628/1911, p. 101.)

What may seem so deeply puzzling, is how Descartes could conceive of the notion an "I who can think", and thus who "exists", and at the same time maintain that neither the notion "exists", nor that the notions of "I" or "think" had any implications whatsoever. To Descartes it seemed to make perfectly good sense to say that he knew that he existed, but also that he could use the term "exist" about something, of which nothing else could be said or be predicated. And it seemed to him to make good sense to maintain that he could think and talk about something, e.g. about himself, his body and about other material things in the world, and at the same time that he could think that the things he could think and talk of did not exist. Thus, to Descartes it would be equally true to say both "I can think of the cups and glasses on the table out

there in the world", and "I can think that cups, glasses and table exist nowhere at all". Indeed, it appeared obvious to Descartes that he could use the words "I", "my body", "substance", "cups", "table", "glasses", "the world", "out there", and "nowhere", but that these words had no implications, nor did anything exist to which those words might be correctly applied. But so to say, is to say both that such terms may have a perfectly well defined meaning and reference - and that such terms are completely void.

No wonder Descartes found that from this position, no amount of further thinking on his part could annihilate the contradiction; and no wonder that he had to seek refuge in a perfect and amiable God, who could restore for him the relation, so miserably lost during his thinking, between his thinking - together with the words he used to express his thoughts - and that to which they referred, thus restoring the very content, meaning and truth of the thoughts, propositions and words which he seemed to produce and use with such proficiency.

It may well be said that it became clear to Descartes that it was necessary to introduce yet another principle for his Philosophy, namely a principle about the existence of material reality, which could restore the possibility that his thoughts and words were about anything, and thus had any meaning or truth. But however clearly Descartes saw the necessity of such a principle, and thus the possibility of a relation between "I", "thoughts", "words", "material things", "space", "world", and so on, he never realised that the principle about this relation had to be of a logical nature. That is he, as well as his followers, failed to realise that we cannot talk sensibly<sup>1</sup> about material objects without presupposing, necessarily, that we have knowledge about material objects and a language in which we can talk correctly about them. And, conversely, that we cannot talk sensibly about our thoughts, knowledge or perceptions of objects in material reality, without presupposing, necessarily, that such objects exist as things we may perceive, have knowledge about, and put forward propositions which are correct or true. What he and others failed to see, then, was that although things in the physical "realm" exist independently of our thoughts, knowledge and descriptions of them, such thoughts, knowledge and descriptions of things do not exist, nor have any meaning, independently of, or without referring to these things. Had he or they realised this, the history of Philosophy of Cognition and Language over the last three hundred years would have looked very different.

Having thus realized that we have to presuppose that a necessary relation exists between, on the one hand, our cognition and description of things in reality and, on the other, those things in reality, we may turn to the concepts entailed in the description of a person or an agent, who may act in a world about which he or she has knowledge.

First, being a person in concrete situations in reality of which one has knowledge, implies knowing that one has a physical body, which exists in a world made up of physical things of which one is part. Conversely, it would not make sense to say that we are agents who may investigate, and thus

carry out actions and manipulate things in reality, thereby gaining knowledge about the things and their properties - but we ourselves and our bodies do not exist in reality. Nor would it make sense to say that the things which our action and knowledge concern only exist in virtue of being objects of our action and knowledge.

To be a person thus capable of acting with and having knowledge about things - and other persons - in the world, is to be someone who may distinguish oneself and be different from those other things and persons. Indeed, to be a person is to be someone who may identify and designate oneself as someone, an "I", who exists at particular places at particular times, i.e. relative to other things or persons existing around oneself in reality at those times. Hence, part of the knowledge of being able to identify and designate oneself as a person, an "I", is knowing that one can thus identify and designate oneself only relative to other things and persons from which one differs. I cannot be a person who knows only about myself, but of nothing else.

Thus, although the knowledge of a person about himself and other things cannot be reduced to the knowledge he has about himself and other things in any of the situations in which he finds himself in reality, his knowledge about himself as a person or an "I" who exists, does not exist in isolation from or independently of the knowledge he has of himself and of other things existing in those situations. Indeed, a person or an "I" who knows that he exists, cannot be someone existing beyond the "here and now" of concrete situations in which he has this knowledge, i.e. he cannot know of himself that he exists (or has existed) independently of being at the same time a person who knows that he exists (or has existed) in some concrete situation.<sup>2</sup>

An essential part of the knowledge of a person of things or other persons is knowledge about the possibilities of observation and action one has with regard to those things or persons - e.g. what one may do to or with them, and what may be observed to happen to them - or to oneself as the case may be - as a consequence. Indeed, to be a person is to be someone who may find oneself in different situations, i.e. situations in which one may have other or different possibilities of observation and action with regard to the same things - or to different things - existing in those situations. Thus, to be a person is to know that more and different things may be known about things and oneself than are already known, in the present situation as well as in different situations. Now, if one's knowledge of what things are, implies knowing what one can do to them, then to be a person having this knowledge implies being an agent who knows that one may initiate such acts. If, furthermore, knowledge of what things are, implies knowing what happens - to the things or to oneself - as a consequence of the acts one carries out with them, then to act with things must imply projecting, (or anticipating), such

<sup>2</sup> So, in passing, farewell thou troublesome transcendental "I" or "ego". And farewell to the equally troublesome Wittgensteinian version of this notion of an "Ego" as a "singular perspective centre being the limit of the world, but none of its contents". (Wittgenstein, 1958)

<sup>1</sup> i.e. without contradicting ourselves or talking nonsense.

consequences of one's acts, i.e. consequences which change one's future possibilities of action with regard to things. Indeed, I think we shall have to agree with Zinkernagel, (1962), that to act must be understood logically as changing one's possibilities of action.

An act may be characterised as an event - an event which produces other events, which are intended by the agent who initiates the act. Thus, crucial to an event characterized as an act is that what happens is made to happen by someone who may designate himself an agent of the act and, thus, someone who intends to initiate some change or other in his possibilities of action. Put differently, we cannot talk about action without or independently of a notion of intention, and cannot talk about intentions without or independently of a notion of persons capable of designating themselves as agents of action.

An action of a person, i.e. some activity or other carried out with the intention to change the states or events of reality and, thus, to change one's possibilities of action, may be opposed to that of a reaction or a response causally determined by some state or event in reality. Moreover, if to act implies having possibilities of action - and of knowing what they are - then to carry out an act may be understood logically as having made a choice among possibilities of actions - as opposed to reacting or responding in causally determined ways.

I contend that action thus defined is something which may only be ascribed to persons, having knowledge about states and events in reality, and to whom intentions may be ascribed to changes those states and events, - but not to physical systems or organisms, the processes and behaviour of which may be characterised solely in terms of causally determined reactions or responses to states and events in reality. Conversely, a person is someone who, in contrast to such physical systems and organisms, may carry out actions.

Now, it may be objected that not all behaviour of persons may be characterised as actions, and that at least some of the behaviour of persons are reactions to events or responses to states in reality. Indeed, it has been argued that the actions of persons, because the reasons for their initiation are some prevailing states in the world, may themselves be described purely as events causally determined by such states.<sup>3</sup> Thus, when describing the action of persons we may make do with terms which refer to acts as events, and describe the occurrence of acts, their cause and effect, in the same causal and deterministic terms by which events in physical reality are described and characterised. The purpose of this argument has invariably been to narrow down the difference between human beings and physical systems or biological organisms, and to argue that the difference - if there is any - is not fundamental, nor one of principle. If so, the possibility exists of somehow reducing the action of persons to events describable in terms of the conditions and principles that govern events of physical systems or biological organisms. And it has been argued that the possibility exists, conversely, of somehow deriving the conditions and principles governing the action of people from

those governing the processes and behaviour of physical systems and biological organisms. According to the assumptions of the latter view, at least some of the conditions applying to the action of persons may be found - at least in a primitive or rudimentary form - in the activities and responses of physical systems and biological organisms, e.g. organisms which made their appearance on the evolutionary ladder prior to that of human beings, or physical systems, (such as computers), that have been designed to carry out tasks which, if carried out by human beings, would be described in terms of actions.

However, I think we shall have to admit that it is not at all clear what is meant by saying that the processes of physical systems or the behaviour of biological organisms bear in them the rudiments of actions of persons, or that features of such processes or behaviour are comparable to those of action - whilst in embryo. What does it mean to say, for example, that the processes of a physical system or the behaviour of a biological organism may be characterised as that of making choices between possibilities - albeit in a primitive form - or that such choices rely on knowledge about the world and the possibilities of action in the world available to the system or organism - if only in a primitive form? Or, what does it mean to say that physical systems or biological organisms may designate themselves as agents of intentional acts - if only in a rudimentary way?

And if only some of these primitive forerunners comparable to features of action are present, it is not at all clear in what way they may be said to be comparable. Does it mean, for example, that a physical system or biological organism, say an amoeba, may carry out intentional actions, but without having knowledge about possibilities of action available to it, and among which it may choose? Indeed, what sense would it make to talk about intentions, (or something comparable to intentions), of a physical system or an amoeba, which does not find itself in concrete situations in physical reality where it has knowledge about such possibilities of action, and relative to which such intentions may be determined? Or, does it mean that a physical system or an amoeba may act, and thus initiate changes in its future possibilities of action - but without being an agent, who may designate itself as the initiator of these changes, or without being an agent who may anticipate the consequences of its action in terms of changes in its possibilities of action? Indeed, if taken one by one, what features and how many entailed in the action of persons may be missing or left out in the processes of a physical system or behaviour of an amoeba, and still be said to be comparable to features constituting action of persons?

It seems to me that the discussion above has shown that it does not make sense to talk about the presence of any one of the features constituting an act without or independently of talking about the presence of all the others. Nor do terms for any one of the features of an act have well defined meanings independently of or without reference to the others. That is, it seems that the relation between these notions is a necessary relation. For this reason I do not find it particularly interesting to discuss whether it may be said of an amoeba or a physical system (say, a computer), that it may designate itself

<sup>3</sup> Arguments for this view may be found within Behaviourism in psychology and in Logical Behaviourism, as well as in various versions of materialism.

as an initiator of its action, or of making choices, or of having intentions, or of having the knowledge of reality which is required in order to form intentions about what acts to carry out in reality; that is, I find it uninteresting to discuss whether such features, taken one by one, may be said to be part of the processes or states of physical systems or biological organisms. For, again, if none of the features of the action of a person may be said to exist independently of the others, then none of the terms referring to such features have well-defined meanings and applications for instances of activity or behaviour lacking any one of the features of action.<sup>4</sup>

The foregoing arguments seem to be just as much arguments why the action of person cannot be reduced to or explained in terms of the processes and functioning of physical systems or biological organisms: Let it be assumed that these processes and this functioning are describable in purely physical, causal and deterministic terms. That this be the case may come to be known by persons, who can carry out investigations and, thus, carry out intentional acts upon and correctly describe the processes and functioning of physical systems and biological organisms in these terms. I.e. person about whom it is presupposed, therefore, that they cannot at the same time be described in those terms, but who may realize that the conditions and principles for their own functioning fundamentally differ from those governing physical systems and biological organisms.

## Referencer

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<sup>4</sup> It has to be admitted that most of our highly developed behavioural skills are also highly automated, that is, they are executed with little or no conscious awareness of the individual behavioural components and their sequence which constitute such skills. The point is well taken, however, that faults, ("slips" and "lapses"), which occur during the execution of such skills are best characterized - indeed, they are experienced by us - as actions not as planned, (Reason, 1979). Hence, such faults in automated skills of persons, and by implication such skills, cannot be accounted for without or independently of reference to the intentions, knowledge and anticipated outcome of persons who execute them.