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The Fundamentals of Man and Psychology

What does our species do that no other living creature on this earth imitates?

We practise *art*, *cult* and *rite* and we do it from the moment *Homo sapiens sapiens* set foot on earth. At a time when, according to all sensible people (Maslow included), we should have plenty to do just filling our stomachs and clothing our bodies, we have spent much time and energy climbing into inaccessible caves, often far away from our usual settlements, out of all things to decorate these caves from floor to ceiling, as if the needs that were thus satisfied were just as basic as the primary ones. Similarly, we have buried our deceased on beds of flowers, faced towards the rising sun and brought them gifts for the grave to be used in the afterlife. From the outset we are thus, involved in the greatest questions about meaning, context and our role in relation to the present and the hereafter. Basically, man is a religious being, an animal searching for meaning, if you like. And this simple statement is at the same time a fact so enormous that one hardly knows where to begin or end.

What is it actually we with *religio* pull out, tie together, elevate and sanctify in a separate room so full of power that we ourselves fall to our knees and can only approach this special phenomenon in the form of rituals and symbolism? One aspect of human existence has been underlined and surrounded by signs of exclamation and warning, and should one want to know more about the specific human fundamentals, this universal underlining seems to be a good place to start research.

Paradoxically, psychology has been reluctant to undertake this research, and Anglo-American mainstream psychology is probably the one that has predominantly warded it off. Robinson's emphasis on 'The *civic*, the *moral*, the *aesthetic* and the *trandenscental*' as central but neglected areas of research within the psychological knowledge project are, consequently, significant issues on an agenda which I gladly join, and which psychology has kept quiet about for far too long. To neglect these areas is not just unfortunate, it is completely destructive to the establishment of a satisfactory science about the human psyche. So a psychology, which is consistently incapable of integrating and understanding these central and primary human forms, is not at all a psychology, but merely another type of 'cognitive science'.

Thus, I unconditionally share Robinson's goal; it is perhaps more the paths we walk that might diverge. I do not know because Robinson's essay quite neglects the *how*-questions by adopting a critical rather than a constructive angle. Consequently, he shows us the goal but not the paths that lead us there, so it is difficult to know whether or how far we can walk together. Some of his methodological statements certainly call for some comment.

Empiricism, Rationalism and Anything In Between

The psychological area of research is complex. It stretches right from the microbiological processes of health psychology to the macro-structural analyses of the sociological social psychology, and in between there is everything big and small from objective registration of the number of bits in the immediate attention span to high-flown reflections on the nature and history of human beings. Such a professional complexity requires a considerable tolerance of ambiguity by the profession's practitioners, and furthermore, requires a balanced methodological toolbox if this diversity is to be examined at all. However, if the only tool is a hammer, one easily treats everything as nails, which serves no one. Therefore, psychology needs both people who can count, catalogue and explain, as well as people who can describe, interpret and understand, when needed.

In terms of theory of science, the tools of psychology basically originate from two main traditions. An empirical tradition ('There is nothing in the mind that has not been in the senses first'): originating from Locke and Hume who influenced English and American psychology. And a rationalistic-humanistic tradition ('Nothing – besides the mind itself'): originating from Leibniz and Kant and continued by people like Dilthey ('Die Natur erklären wir, das Seelenleben verstehen wir'), which has set the tone for central parts of Continental European psychology.

Whereas the first tradition establishes a scientifically inspired psychology that wants to count, weigh, measure and *explain* causally, the other tradition establishes a more humanistic approach which seeks to penetrate phenomenologically and hermeneutically into the reality of existence, and which above all wants to *understand* its object, the human being, as a final teleological, and intentional creature. On paper these paths are irreconcilable; but why they should be in practice, I cannot explain, understand or accept. Everything at its time, and the research area of psychology is, as mentioned, so complex that all means have to be used if its phenomena are to be examined adequately.

Therefore, let us stop these futile attempts to dichotomise and monopolise the field of methods, and instead give our students a more complex toolbox.

Robinson's criticism is above all aimed at the unfortunate consequences of a one-sided emphasis on the Locke and Hume tradition in Anglo-American mainstream psychology, and this is completely understandable. First of all, this psychology is not very well calibrated to handle the very

phenomena that Robinson has identified as central; furthermore, it is by far the most dominant, quantitatively speaking, in the psychological periodicals. Secondly, many American psychologists are more statisticians than psychologists, and apart from tools to address 'the civic, the moral, the aesthetic and the transcendental', they basically lack elementary education or 'Bildung', according to Robinson, and seen from the Continent, this picture seems somewhat recognisable.

Having said that, I also have to confess that many Continental psychologists show just as enervating one-sidedness, just the other way round. For example, at my own institute, students write no empirical bachelor assignments, and only a decreasing number of empirical master theses (my guess is less than 10%). They write, think and live theoretically. Ask them about narrative approaches and they will speak until someone stops them. Ask them about two measures of reliability, and they will not know what to reply. These students do not need 'Bildung'; they need simple training in elementary experimental and psychometric methods, and this we are working on.

Much Continental university psychology has similarly cultivated speculative and barren theoretical models. Over the years I have seen how these airy models are reified unnoticeably, whereupon new additions are established, without testing whether the foundation is really sound, in an increasingly closed and self-affirming process. Such self-oscillation really threatens all theoretical psychology, and naturally my own anthropological psychology is no exception.

Therefore, from both sides of the Atlantic let us give up the antithetical approaches and instead work towards a psychology which unites empiricism's binding contacts with reality with the Continental tradition's more pensive fundamental thinking; and above all let us be concrete.

Robinson's criticism has been presented before. W. James and G. W. Allport have done it, the Gestalt psychologists touched upon the same matters in the 30's, and in the 50's and 60's all the leaders of humanistic psychology were preoccupied with these issues. So why was this criticism not a lasting influence?

There were probably several reasons; no doubt one of the major ones was that this criticism was only a constructive instruction to a limited extent. And as long as Robinson in his criticism emphasizes 'to locate barriers to progress and coherence within a discipline' rather than constructive analyses which offer 'clear alternatives with argument for their superiority', one might fear that his criticism will not have any concrete consequences either. Critical manifestos usually only appeal to those who are already convinced. Those who are sceptical, in doubt, ignorant and all the others need more concrete instructions if they are to change their direction, for which they cannot be blamed. So basically: If the old methods are no good what do we then use? And before leaving all statistics and opening the experimental cages to make room for phenomenology, hermeneutics and all the new ideas which we do not quite know what are, we could perhaps try some of the standard methods of mainstream psychology on Robinson's subjects to see if they might work after all.

Monkey Business and Morality

I will make an attempt to be constructive myself. Qua my luggage in terms of ideas, I may be closer to Darwin than Robinson has ever been, and therefore I am more likely to look at comparative and evolutionary approaches in a more optimistic light than he is. There are no laws of nature that dictate that such approaches have to be reductionistic. On the contrary, there are many examples of how it has been possible from these angles to reach interesting insights into some of the questions that are connected to Robinson's main areas. Marcel Mauss': 'The Gift' (1925), Tiger and Fox's: The Imperial Animal' (1974) and Fox's: 'The Search for Society' (1989) are all examples of the usability of these approaches, and many more could be mentioned. In recent years, I have been personally involved in naturalistic and experimental primate research, merely with the view to understand more about human sociality and moral.

For example, universally our species seems to be regulated by a reciprocal *Quid pro quo* principle: If you help me, I will help you, and the gift I am giving you, have to be reciprocated at some point. This 'Tit for tat' moral can be found present in all cultures' religious, metaphysical and legal basic texts, and why is this?

Some claim that it is our nature, and religions tend to sanctify and emphasize what is already naturally given to us. Others say that precisely because these reciprocal patterns are not natural in relation to our basically selfish character, they therefore have to be impressed upon us again and again, not least in our children, who find it difficult to share initially. Naturally, that question is not easily answered, but what is it actually like with our closest relatives evolutionarily? Can chimpanzees and bonobos give gifts and do they have reciprocal exchanges according to the 'Tit for tat' model? If this is the case, it could be because these principles were already part of our common ancestors' 'moral equipment' six million years ago before our ways were separated, and then the nature view is strengthened. We will see.

To Robinson, such an approach to moral may be sacrilegious, I do not know. To me it is…well, natural and as we may well face a question of attitude here, I will merely exemplify, not argue or convince. A more phenomenological approach may illustrate the point. When I observe a group of chimpanzees or bonoboos, I clearly sense that I could move in immediately, and basically know what it was all about. There would be a lot of joy, worries and rules that we could immediately share, as well as some new ones I would have to learn. But all in all it is family! Lemurs, capybaras and iguanas are not. With the lemurs there would be some common orientations, with the capybaras even fewer, and if I moved in with the iguanas I would not even know what was up or down. However, with the primates I find a social geometry which is immediately recognisable and sympathetical, consequently, I am in no doubt that those who are interested in the basic forms of sociality and moral, can learn something here.

By looking at the experimental method more generally, it has clear limitations, e.g. with regards to its ability in the artificial parenthesis of the laboratory to simulate

complex social processes and interactions, which Robinson emphasizes. Undoubtedly, it also has some possibilities, even in relation to Robinson's four main points, and let us be concrete again. Personally, I have, for example, examined some of the questions regarding human moral and sociality by letting strangers meet under experimental conditions, where I, without their knowledge, had the opportunity to examine the rules of small talk which they spontaneously practised in front of each other while waiting for an experiment to begin, for which they had both signed up. Like anybody else I have had such meetings a number of times under more ecological conditions, when we as strangers naturally meet each other, and I have probably learnt something as well. But this insight can be tested, and here the laboratory gives me a unique opportunity to test and examine systematically! When you cut away life's own natural coincidences and situational artificialities and merely concentrate on 162 standard meetings under the same conditions, it becomes both possible to test your own prejudice and to see a pattern, if there is one! And above all, others can then test this data both experimentally and personally, when readers in their own ecology meet strangers and attempt the bridge building of small talk.

However, we may regard this question differently. A suspicion is further confirmed when I consider how Robinson rejects Millgram's obedience experiments. To me Millgram's number of experiments is almost the paradigmatic example of how far the experimental social psychology can actually reach in its discussion of *central* human questions. It is often the case that the majority of experiments which are conducted within psychology, gives us cause to say something very precise about questions of absolutely no importance humanly or socially. Here Millgram's experiments are a clear exception. The world simply deserves these experiments, not least because they more or less say it all about our species' incredible readiness to obey authorities, and thereby about the 'banality of evil', which also Hannah Arendt found in her analyses of the war criminals at the Nuremberg trials.

So in my opinion, there is still hope for the experimental method. Both in relation to Robinson's points, as well as, to many of the other questions, big and small, with which psychology is preoccupied. Having said that however, psychology, to a very large extent, clearly needs to develop new methods, not least in relation to Robinson's main points, and here Anglo-American mainstream psychology has obviously been too passive and intolerant towards ambiguity.

'Art,who?'

The human drive to artistic expression pervades all cultures, historical as well as contemporary, and is as such a central aspect of human existence, both as an enormous source of insight into man's self-understanding and to his encounters with the world. All art is simply *'objectified life encounters'*: Life captured and maintained as form, in short, and the piece of art as the objectification of this *life-form*. These encounters will, especially in relation to great art, despite its particularity, state something eternal and general, and thereby *factual* about human beings and their existence. For example, in literature we can learn how a living personality is constituted, and coherent as a consistent and dynamic entity, and this in a way that far supersedes the atomistic accumulation of inconsistent behaviour data and isolated individual traits of mainstream psychology. And when the legendary Greek heroes, or the characters in Shakespeare's dramas, continuously fascinate us, it is precisely because these characters, from Odysseus to Lady Macbeth, through their particular forms, all manage to incarnate the most basic and general conditions of life. So the factual truth is certainly not the prerogative of science, and though this insight is practically common sense in the humanities, psychology has for various reasons found it difficult to understand and use this.

However, so far psychology's relation to art – to the extent that there has even been one ('Art, who?') – has been sporadic and incidental. From the psychophysical tradition we know a little about the preferred shapes, colours and compositorial relations. From Gestalt psychology a little about the elements' dynamic interplay and from trait psychology something about how aesthetical preferences and sensibility correlate with certain personal traits. Common to these examinations is, however, that it is single traits in the one who is experiencing it or in the experience of art, as well as the psychology of aesthetical feelings, which they have been interested in, rather than the more basic questions which are connected to the anthropological *'why'* of art and the ontological nature of the piece of art as such. Thus, relating to what a piece of art actually is as a phenomenon has been neglected, and thereby it has never become explicit how it is possible on basis of such a particular and subjective product to state something general about human beings and their existence.

Therefore, along with Robinson, I can only regret that psychology has almost completely chosen to ignore the enormous stores of knowledge in art; at the same time I must again maintain that those who seriously want to change this unfortunate neglect, have to start by developing maps and tools whereby such an examination can even begin.

On the personal level, we have all tried to become enriched in the encounter with a piece of art, just as we have experienced that others have not always been able to share our experience, so too can two people obtain quite different insights out of the same piece of art. And this poses no problem as such. On the personal level, one person's experiences and interpretations are not necessarily more correct than another's; the decisive thing is what is meaningful to the individual.

Such a 'subjective pragmatism' where truth is what works for me, is however not sufficient, when on realistic grounds we wish to establish a piece of art as an object for the psychological knowledge project. Here we have to differentiate between what in German hermeneutics is called *'Sinngebung'* (the interpreter's transfer of meaning to the object, as with a Rorschach card) and *'Auslegung'* (interpretation of the object's own contents), and at the same time try to list criteria for the latter.

In the hermeneutic space which the interpretation establishes, there will of course always exist a creative

dialogue between *intentio operis* (the rights and intentions of the work) and *intentio lectoris* (the interpreter's ditto). However, lately the interpreter's rights – not least within the more pragmatic and de-constructive hermeneutics of post-modernism - have been strongly overemphasised, as if the piece does not represent a reality in its own right, and personally, I believe such tendency has led to much nebulous talk. So therefore: Criteria. But which criteria? Elsewhere I (Høgh-Olesen, 1999) have attempted to answer this question in depth, but here there is only room for a suggestion.

The Validity of Interpretation – An Outline

When we encounter a piece of art, the phenomenal field is filled with a stream of elementary, sensory impressions, diffuse moods and basic feelings of like-dislike. In the encounter of personal knowledge horizons, these raw impressions take shape and assume significance which can be processed and categorised. These elements of understanding activate, firstly, new associations that enrich the experience with other perspectives, and it is through this interaction of sensing, experience, association and a new experience that an understanding gradually grows. To the hermeneutics the watermark that testifies to the validity of the understanding is that the individual has systematically managed to arrange this ambiguity of impressions and experiences, resulting in the appearance of a meaningful and concise *gestalt*. Again here we have to ask: When is a gestalt meaningful and how do we ensure that a certain interpretation is a plausible suggestion of the piece's 'own contents', and not merely the interpreter's very private Sinngebung?

As Collingwood shows in his significant 'An Essay on Metaphysics', the concept of 'science' refers in its original meaning to a 'corpus of systematic and organised thinking within a certain area' (Collingwood, 1969, p. 4).

First of all, as a minimum we must therefore demand that the constructed interpretation builds on a *systematic* classification of the multiple impressions and elements of understanding that are the recourse basis of the experience, and 'systematic' means that the interpreter must be able both to account for the different impressions and elements from which the constructed unity originates, as well as, for the interrelated connections between the impressions and elements.

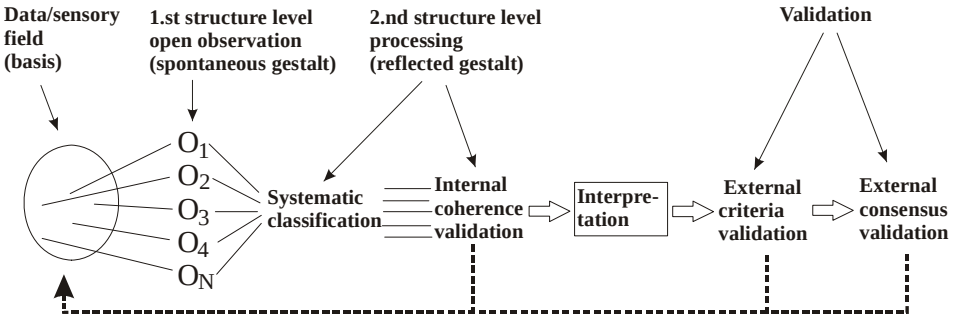
Secondly, another demand is that the multiple impressions and elements of understanding on which the interpretation is constructed are both mutually *coherent* and confirm each other, and thereby 'in themselves' seem to establish a common type of meaning and context which the researcher will then specify and name. The criteria of coherence is known all the way back to Augustin's '*De Doctrina Christiana'* which establishes that any interpretation of a given part of a piece, as well as the works of a period, is acceptable, provided it is confirmed by other parts of the same piece or period. In this way the inner structure of the work limits the *intentio lectoris.*

Thirdly, this internal validation should be supplemented with an *external criteria validation* along the formula: If this is…what must then also be. For example, if I on basis of a number of Renaissance texts argue that out of the closed and static universe of the Middle Ages, a modern, open-to-the-world, potent, transcendent *individual,* inspired by a 'Faustic soul', as Spengler (1959) expressed it, suddenly steps out, this interpretation would be supported if in the period's other creations from paintings to discovery voyages, I can see that such a modern, individualised conqueror has seen the light of the day and taken possession of the stage as the ideal form. And actually you can.

Not least the pictorial art is here revealing because art from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance share a number of set religious motives and icons, which are nonetheless presented entirely differently in the respective periods. Whereas St George and the David characters are humble, anonymous figures in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance representations of these are self-conscious aristocrats without a shadow of religious humility (see e.g. Donatello and Michelangelo's creations). Even the Jesus figure which is traditionally portrayed as a frail, tormented character, assumes titanic dimensions in the Renaissance pictures, of which Michelangelo's Doomsday picture in the Sixtine Chapel is merely one of many examples. And this is how he must be depicted if Renaissance man with his new feeling of self is to identify with him.

Fourthly, these internal validations of coherence and external criteria validations should preferably be confirmed by other specialists in the field, and thereby supported by an *external consensus validation*, and this demand must naturally also be made on the presented interpretation as a unity. If my interpretation is to be more than merely a private *Sinngebung,* it must evidently be confirmed and recognised by the majority of other experts to whom it is presented. Here comes the factor of intuition, which is part of every interpretation, likewise to stand its test!

The model illustrates the hermeneutic procedure and as the feedback arrows show in this process you may have to return to the studied field of data several times to make new observations ($o_{1, 2}$….).



However, as we all know the scientific community is not a contextually independent body.

This community, as historical manifestation, is subjected to the horizon of pre-knowledge which history is, and therefore the contextual validation can never be final. *Sub specie aeternitatis* it may very well be that our current interpretation is biased. This apparently disillusioned condition must, however, not reduce those previously presented minimum requirements. On the contrary, what separates the scientific interpretation from the erratic or non-binding point of view is precisely that the first one, thanks to these specifications, can be tested. We can put our 'prejudice at stake', as Gadamer (1960) expresses it, and it is precisely this constant and conscious 'putting at stake' that is the nature of scientific efforts.

Though science in many ways is moral practice rather than value-neutral studies, as mainstream psychology naively assumes; still, it does not exempt us from methods, statistics or 'counting and cataloguing'. Having said that, I still wish to thank Robinson for an inspiring essay and the editor for the opportunity to take part in this discussion.

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