Shyam Cawasjee
Professor level, Emeritus, Department of Psychology, University of Aarhus

Reply to target article: "Inventing the Subject: The Renewal of 'Psychological' Psychology"

> *'To see the face is to speak to the world. Trans-cendence is not optics, but the first ethical gesture.'*
> Emmanuel Levinas.

Dan Robinson's paper is undoubtedly a product of impressive learning and a genuine concern with what it means to be human and what is a 'good life': two closely related questions to which no psychology can rightly turn a deaf ear. In fact I believe what is also implicit in this view is that at the ground level psychology is firstly and unavoidably the study of the total individual being – moral, symbolic and expressive by its very nature – living and acting in the world as is amply manifest in our concepts of common sense and everyday life. I think this conception is also the inspiration behind Robinson's very significant proposals for the renewal of psychology, to which I shall come back later.

Also implicit in what I have said above is that any specific and compartmentalised psychological investigation must be effectively in resonance with the outlined conception of a unified moral being in the world. In other words, a branch that loses its life-line to the main stem and roots cannot ultimately survive as a part of the tree, though it may be kept alive in some in-vitro state. Perhaps, in another context, it is interesting to speculate whether our relatively ahistoric but highly complex, highly reflexive and highly individualised culture tends to fragment the integral dynamics of a unified meaningful life-process, possibly cultivating in-vitro survival kits, adding perhaps to the widespread need for psychological help – for reintegration.

The question of course remains, what kind of reintegration and how? Somehow, the framework that Robinson sketches for inventing the subject and renewal of psychology would in my opinion need to be drawn into any reintegrative project. Moreover I would emphasize that for any meaningful reintegration the fragmentation and compart-mentalisation would need to be transcended by the unity of the person. These might be big issues at a high level of abstraction, but don't they reflect a requirement that human nature places on us? Grand Theories may not be in fashion but we cannot overlook our moral nature and the conception of selfhood that follows from it, a conception that cannot be simply reduced to operational categories. I think what I am stating here follows closely on the heels of Robinson's proposals concerning the kind of psychology that has been notably discounted in our times.

In an important sense Robinson's paper is investigative and open and despite the academic character of the exercise it is clearly stated that we are not to expect any ready-made solutions or *the* alternative theory or theories, which convinced me that it was also necessary to try and capture the imaginative and inspiring spirit of the paper. Hence I shall now refer to certain views expressed by persons who have made an acknowledged contribution to the history of ideas.

Matthew Arnold (1966: 6) in his essay 'Culture and Anarchy', which stands as a landmark in English literary history, states: 'The whole scope of the essay is to recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties, culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world, and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically. This and this alone, is the scope of the following essay.' It is to be noted that the term 'culture' is used here in the sense of the universal and sublime and not in the way we normally tend to use it today.

Susan Haack (1998: 56–57), speaking of Charles Peirce Saunders and defending his common sense realism, says: 'I think of his metaphor of a cable of reasons, adapted from Reid, replacing the Cartesian metaphor of a chain, of his metaphor of the mind as a lake, of which the cognitive is only the thinnest surface …'. This also reminds me of the novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch, who during an interview suggested that humans were far too complex in ways that psychological theories could do justice to and that one should try one's hand at writing novels and then compare the experiences. I believe there are two principal factors that contribute to the richness and meaningfulness of this literary genre. One factor has to do with the dimension of time and history, the making and breaking of lives and communities. This should also remind us of what Aristotle said about the development of character – the creation of what one might call a moral, mature balanced mind – that it requires a lifetime. The other factor is the contextual pattern which weaves and merges the particular and specific with the ever-extending and in some sense endless context to provide a sense of meaning and engagement.

What we have been speaking of here is a realism that contemporary psychology has largely neglected or only taken

up in bits and parts. It may be legitimately said, when psychology goes about its business in ignorance or indifference of this essential realism it runs the risk of creating pseudo-knowledge while it rests secure and complacent in its nest of that 'unfailing methodology' – what Matthew Arnold would call 'stock notions and habits', while Robinson refers to 'business as usual'. In this context let me also add that I basically agree with the view that if we are really seeking knowledge about why things are the way they are, we are not likely to get it from functional explanations or statistical procedures.

Having come thus far, acknowledging the force and realism behind Robinson's project, we also need to ask ourselves about what could be deemed controversial – in both small and big ways – in the paper. After all, Robinson's approach is radical (which I certainly consider as positive) and the paper covers many significant issues and raises a number of important questions.

I don't think Robinson needs to argue further for his proposals concerning the study of the political/civic, the moral, the aesthetic and the transcendental dimensions of human life and existence. I believe that the majority of us would acknowledge the realism and significance of these traits in our everyday experiences.

On the other hand I think there are certain issues which some psychologists would want Robinson to elaborate, providing further arguments and discussion of his views. One of these issues is placing man in the evolutionary framework and looking at links between animals and humans, what some will want to see as the philosophy of naturalism – man as part of nature. There is also an active field of comparative research looking at animal thought and behaviour, particularly primatology where various comparisons are drawn with child development, leading to some interesting debates and discussions, though I am personally quite sceptical about a lot of the theory construction in the area, e.g. what is labelled as theory of mind. Then there are studies concerning the history of man's own evolution for, say, the past 200,000 years, intendedly important for our understanding of the social, cognitive and other psychological structures and functions, see e.g. Mithen (1998).

Robinson has very briefly referred to these areas, taking a clearly critical view of what they can really contribute to psychology. When I reflect on this topic some of the limitations are quite apparent. In his very recent publication, Peter Hobson (2002: 271), an authority on child development, throws light on one of the very significant ways in which humans radically differ from animals: 'This fact – the fact that the human infant is drawn into the feelings and actions of the other – is one that has profound implications. It leads to what we have called "identifying with" other people. Identifying with people is what leads to mental perspective-taking. Mental perspective-taking leads into insight into what it means to have a subjective perspective. And, once the infant understands that, symbolizing becomes possible. Because chimpanzees are not drawn into the feelings and actions of others, they do not identify with other chimpanzees, they do not take or understand perspectives and they fail to symbolize'.

I suppose the human ability to connect with the subjective state of the other, to symbolize, to develop abstractions, to have the richness of imagination, to compare past and present and then make plans for the future, are capacities the understanding of which gains little from animal studies. In this context the limitations are also quite apparent when we look at the nature of human morality in all its depth. While aware of all this I still cannot draw the conclusion that animal studies are not relevant, even important, for the exploration of certain dimensions of human life. In some very basic sense we remain a part of this world, though we have the profound ability to distance ourselves. I will leave the subject and discussion to others and move on to the second issue that comes to mind when reading Robinson's paper.

This issue has to do with the more concrete status and future of the various studies that are going on in the world of psychology. For example, what is the likelihood that a number of these investigations and findings could play a part in the vision of a new psychology? Whether some kind of assimilation of the existing will be possible in relation to the 'new thinking'? Obviously, this is a complicated question which would depend on the nature of the findings and their interpretation and, perhaps more importantly, on the possibilities of reinterpretation. To take one example, I would think that some of the recent studies in infant and child development (Trevarthan 1998, Stern 1985, Hobson 2002) are most likely to interact positively with any new vision of human psychology. One might say that in most cases we would just have to wait and see. However one cannot help thinking that there is a lot of knowledge in bits and parts which would need to be allocated to some position in the new vision of psychology. Importantly, struggling with these problems will help us to better articulate the core features of psychology and develop the perspectives that are at the heart of the discipline, such as human motivation. We must have some main-line thinking, pillars that can hold the different structures. *Ultimately there must be some coherence, the science of man cannot be merely a conglomeration of various bits and pieces*. Robinson's ideas in the form of the renewal of psychology and the inventing of the subject offer some hope in this direction.

Let me connect some of my thoughts and what I have written earlier (Cawasjee 2001, 1996) to Robinson's proposal for a 'new psychology', implicitly suggesting the potentialities inherent in Robinson's project and simultaneously putting forward the case for the institution of a teaching programme along these lines.

I have already referred a number of times to the idea that psychology has to define its goals in terms of the unified entity of the individual, that psychology is primarily the study of the 'total individual being, living and acting in the world – the common sense realism of life'. Elsewhere I have argued (Cawasjee 2001: 33–48) for a concept of 'the picture of the world' which I see as a counterpart to the unity of the individual. It is close to the idea that the world exists for us as an inter-connected whole – an idea voiced by philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Heidegger (*ibid.*: 33–36) and supported by various contemporary philosophers and thinkers. But I believe it is so not only in the cognitive sense but is

always there as an abstraction giving meaning to all the elements and particulars in our lives. I have even suggested that there is a form of transcendence in the meaning creating process linking the particular and the picture of the world, a process that is extended and enriched when we share our real world with the others. But I believe that this process is also there in some form in imaginative works such as writing novels. It could be said of 'the picture of the world' that it suggests what Wittgenstein (1966: 6, 45) described as 'The feeling [*Das Gefühl*] of the world as a limited whole is the mystical', though I am not so sure about the word 'limited'. Heidegger's (1978: 176) phrase 'Being in the world as a whole' seems to suggest both 'the picture of the world' and its counterpart 'the unity of the self'. For me it is also important that 'the picture of the world' is linked to the individual's subjective mode of being because it says something about the individual's history and the constitution of the self, which of course must not be interpreted as simply culture relativism (Cawasjee 1996: 40–78).

In my opinion what I have said about the 'unity of the individual' and 'the picture of the world' is compatible and in correspondence with the perspectives drawn by Robinson, namely the political/civic, the moral, the aesthetic and the transcendental. Importantly it is to be noted that these domains are part of the same composite individual – that the civic, moral and aesthetic are not independent of one another. As implicit in Robinson's text they flow into one another. All this may sound complicated and abstract, but there is also the realism we experience that articulates our belief in it.

In relation to the proposal sketched by Robinson and my reflections on it, I am convinced that literature and the arts have a great deal to offer and provide substantial sources that can be effectively used in any teaching programme we may want to develop. In this context let me provide two concrete examples from my own encounters with literary works since reading Robinson's paper and reflecting on the issues raised concerning the neglected 'humanity' of psychology – taking also into view certain ideas which I have been thinking and writing about.

One of the profound issues we have been confronted with has to do with situatedness and contextual immersion vs. cognitive distancing and objective reflection, two parameters that define our mode of contact and relationship to the world. We are often led to assume a subject who is passively and to a large extent 'imperceptibly' drawn in by the situational framework but is also an agent who actively distances herself and reflects on the contextual world. To extract these elements and operationalise them in terms of mind functions does not present a realist picture. It is only when it is seen as a part of lived life with a historical perspective that the realism emerges.

It is interesting to note that this very issue has been a prominent theme in the work of eminent novelists such as Dickens and George Eliot, who were also deeply concerned about the political and ethical elements involved in this human condition. This is a very significant point when we consider the differences in the approach adopted by psychologists and philosophers vs. literary creative writers. Amanda Anderson (2001) in her book *The Powers of Distance* provides a well-documented and engaging discussion of this subject. Again as I see it a good novelist's mode of presenting this problem captures the necessary realism that is lacking in many of the psychological treatments which seek a form of abstract disengaged mentalism. Anderson also brings attention to (*ibid.:* 29) the significant fact of how Eliot in her novel *Daniel Deronda* brings the individual's aesthetic practices into the realm of detachment, e.g. 'the self-fashioning of Deronda's mother', thereby creating a real-life narrative which is often lacking in philosophical or psychological discourses on this subject. Anderson further exemplifies this when she refers to the Habermas –Gadamer debate on reflection and detachment vs. embeddedness and immersion.

However, philosophers like Charles Taylor (1989: 143, 160–3) [see also Cawasjee (1998: 42–70) on 'History of Inwardness and Individualism'] have been very influential in driving home the point that the Cartesian–Lockean revolution characterised by disengagement, objectification and control is very significant for our understanding of the modern self and the heightened sense of inwardness that goes with it. There is no doubt that this becomes a significant perspective in our attempts to unravel the civil, moral and aesthetic dimensions of man.

My second example refers to my experience with Wordsworth's (1991: 86–101) lyrical ballad, 'The Idiot Boy'. What this literary and aesthetic experience demonstrated for me is singularly important for psychology. It is the fact that every particular event involving a particular individual provides a certain concreteness of experience which is importantly missing in abstract theorising. Not to suggest that theorising has no purpose, but to understand that something very significant is left out when we as detached social scientists are engaged in abstract theorising about other humans.

Being acquainted with the theorising in child development and related theories concerning mongolism and autism, the experience of this poem was quite striking when it felt like being in the presence of a particular individual in a real world. This effect was probably enhanced by the lyric form – the rhythm and rhyme. I think the concrete illustrations provided here are to be seen as possibilities in the adventure of a new psychology or a renewal of psychology. However the future of this venture should not depend on the participants having to be convinced that this cancels out everything else – there is no oath of allegiance, only the belief in the human spirit of play and adventure: to think, to explore and sometimes to shatter the conventional modus.

I entertain the hope that in the near future Robinson's proposal defined in terms of the civic/political, moral, aesthetic and transcendental will be seriously reflected upon and articulated as a teaching programme that could be incorporated in a psychology curriculum.

For the present I am sure Robinson's courageous and inspiring paper and the discussion that follow will contribute considerably to at least one major school of thinking in present-day Danish psychology, which Boje Katzenelson did much to organise and inspire some fifteen years back under the banner of anthropological psychology. In recent years Preben Bertelsen has done much to carry this tradition further.

Finally I do wish to add a note of thanks to Dan Robinson for the manner in which he both, accepted my request (in consultation with Preben Bertelsen) to write a key-note paper and gave freely of his time for the discussions that followed at Oxford. I found that his extensive knowledge was only matched by his generosity when he had already committed himself to much else. I am left pondering as to when I last came across the concept of generosity in serious psychological literature.

Retreating back to the present, I am sure Robinson's courageous and inspiring paper and the discussions that follow – and of course the controversies as well – will contribute considerably to at least one major school of thinking in present-day Danish psychology, which Boje Katzenelson did much to organise and inspire some fifteen years back under the banner of anthropological psychology. [1]

References

Anderson, A. 2001. *The Powers of Distance*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Arnold, M. 1996. *Culture and Anarchy*. Ed. J.D. Wilson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cawasjee, S. 1996. *The Stranger and Other Essays*. Oxford: New Cherwell Press.

Cawasjee, S. 1998. *Understanding Culture*. Oxford: New Cherwell Press.

_____2001. *Solitude and Companionship*. Oxford: New Cherwell Press.

Haack, S. 1998. *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Heidegger, M. 1978. *Being and Time*. Trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Hobson, P. 2002. *The Cradle of Thought*. London: Macmillan.

Mithen, S. 1998. *The Prehistory of the Mind*. London: Phoenix.

Stern, D.N. 1985. *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*. New York: Basic Books.

Taylor, C. 1989. *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Trevarthan, C. 1998. 'The concept and foundations of infant intersubjectivity.' In S. Bråten (ed). *Intersubjective Communication and Emotion in Early Ontogeny*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wittgenstein, L. 1966. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. D.F. Pears & B.F. McGuinness. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Wordsworth, W. & S.T. Coleridge. 1991. *Lyrical Ballads*. Ed. R.L. Brett & A.R. Joues (second edition). London: Routledge.

[1] Acknowledgements. I am very grateful to Svend Brinkmann for patiently listening to and providing helpful comments on some of my thoughts and ideas.