

Preben Bertelsen

Department of Psychology, University of Aarhus

The human resonance in directedness at/by directedness

(Commentary to Jan Bransen: Educatability)

According to Bransen (2008), the particularly human is a response-dependent property, i.e., a capacity emerging in a connectedness between sender and receiver. Bransen uses the redness of a tomato to exemplify a response-dependent property, it will not emerge until experienced by the subject and related to the information given from the tomato in the form of redness. Correspondingly, the particularly human does not exist in itself, it only exists in a connectedness between human beings where one person experiences and relates to another person. Consequently, the particularly human cannot, according to Bransen, be identified empirically from a nonparticipating observer point of view, but only from a participant point of view.

However, not just any respondent-dependent capacity will qualify as particularly human. Most of our biological capacities are not special to us, but something we have in common with most animals. We can move around, we can understand the world – our anatomy and cognitive capacities basically resemble those of most mammals, etc. Such human capacities do not become particularly human by being experienced by human subjects.

Bransen points out, however, that this particularly human response-dependent property enables us to act as responsible actors, that is, we are able to consider and explain our actions in relation to the community, but also able to evaluate, discuss and educate one another's explanations and, consequently, to educate one another's actions and other participants' contributions to the community. The ability to explain one's actions and consequently relate in a responsible manner will arise and develop as response-dependent property when other experiences relate to it in acknowledging, critical and elaborating ways. As Bransen says: "There is a sense of circularity in this claim, but it is not a vicious circularity. [...] it pulls itself out of the hat, so to speak, precisely by our holding one another responsible". We become human beings by experiencing and treating one another as human beings, we become responsible by being experienced and treated as responsible persons.

I feel very sympathetic towards Bransen's project, but have, however, some comments, some of which are

elaborating while other comments are more critical. All comments are based on argumentation that can be found in far more detail in Bertelsen (2005).

My first comment: Intentionality, not rationalized responsibility, is at the core

My first comment is that our mutual way of being humans has some underlying response-dependent capacities and that substantiating responsibility is only a sophisticated exception.

One condition for basing our human life on cooperation, society and culture – our co-existence – is that such co-existential conditions are a common third. That is, we participate in the construction, maintenance and development of co-existential conditions, and we relate ourselves to each other's participation. In a way, this is also stressed by Bransen. However, to have co-existential conditions as a common third project means that we ourselves can and will have intentions with the common third just as we at the same time can and will perceive and relate to others' intentions with the common third.

In other words: The first basic condition for developing into and becoming educated as human beings is that of being intentional beings, that is, being able to be directed at something (the world as a whole and the common third, the co-existence in particular). On the other hand, we are also influenced by the outside world. It imposes conditions for our possible participation, acting and also for our possibility to establish an existence for ourselves and others. The world also imposes cognitive and phenomenological conditions for our possible realization and experience (confer the example with the redness of the tomato which has its possible conditions not only in our biopsychic constitution but also in the information arisen from the tomato). In this way we are also directed by something (the world in general and the common third co-existence in particu-

lar). Consequently, our intentional relationship will always be double: We are directed *at/by* the world and the co-existence as the common third.

However, add to this the precondition that we – in order to be able to become participating contributors to the co-existence as a common third – have to relate to and reflect on others' contributions and participation. This means that we must be able to relate to others' intentions with the co-existence as the common third. In other words, we must be able to be directed *at/by* the others' directedness. Finally, we must in an evaluating way be able to relate to and reflect on our own participation and contribution. We must be able to be directed *at/by* our own directedness. To be directed *at/by* directedness – both one's own and the other's directedness – is thus the other's basic condition that we can be developed and educated as human beings (and thus that we as exceptions can relate to ourselves and one another's rationally substantiated responsibility).

I agree with Bransen that the particularly human is a response-dependent property, but my suggestion is that it is *the* directedness *at/by* directedness – underlined by the notion: “*at/by*”, that is this fundamental response-dependent property.

My second comment: Whom do we exclude with the notion of rationalized responsibility

This fundamental directedness *at/by* directedness first and foremost tacitly permeates our whole everyday life. It lies as a non-articulated fundamental relational structure in our common life and our mutually developed and educated projects. On this background I think that verbal articulated reasons for good ways of directedness *at/by* directedness in our participating projects as to co-existence, are only specialized exceptions of responsibility and sociality. With tongue in cheek, you might ask whether it is first and foremost a kind of elitist academia-centric attitude always to stress the articulation of rational reasons as the finest way of social responsibility. Most of all, the whole preoccupation of articulation may be important to those academics whose most important acts are articulations. I want to stress that we live most of our daily life in a morally responsible way without being able to give rational reasons. Moral wisdom also exists in people's daily practice. People who need not be able to articulate or give linguistically articulated reasons for the good in their directedness *at/by* directedness. Through stressing and articulating rati-

ally substantiated responsibility as the core of the human I think that we will eliminate most of mankind from the good company, and most of everyday life lived on earth is eliminated as not particularly human. By recognizing the tacit responsibility in our everyday directedness *at/by* directedness, most humans will come in from the cold.

My third comment: "Us" is a developmental unit, not an essentialist category

Bransen is a bit worried/skeptical as to whether it is possible to “distinguish those who *have* from those who *have not* the capacity to detect whether someone is an appropriate subject for our reactive attitudes” (p. 6) - Well, based on the theoretical and methodological breakthrough within psychology in the past centuries, you need not be quite as skeptical. Based on Premack & Woodruff's (1978) studies whether Primates at all have an idea that others in the primate group have a mind – a perception which Premack & Woodruff coined as theory-of-mind. Much research has been done as to when children develop such a theory-of-mind. If you have to draw a line, the answer must be that around the age of three or four children will have developed an understanding that others have a mind like their own. But research has also shown that the fragile constitutive pre-forms of this theory-of-mind are developed at the beginning of life and gradually developed/shaped until finally being finished at the age of three or four.

Likewise, research in clinical psychology seems to show greater interest in this special capability of relating to others, by (a) adjusting to their way of thinking, feeling and wanting to do something, and (b) correspondingly by reflecting how you yourself relate to the thinking, feeling and wanting aspects of other people's minds. Fonagy and colleagues (e.g. Fonagy et al., 2002) have designated it the capability of mentalizing. According to this research, disorders in mentalization underlie psycho-pathological relation disorders and personality disorders. A special point is that from this perspective there are, in fact, therapeutic possibilities of development for patients with disturbed or missing capabilities to mentalization. As we noted from the developmental psychological perspective, it is not a question of a stepwise and categorical 'either/or' but of smooth transitions between “those” who have not developed/formed mentalization to a sufficient degree and “us” who have.

Hopefully it will appear from the above comments that I consider directedness *at/by* directedness the fundamental anthropological/psychological core as it has a theory-of-mind and as it is able to "mentalize".

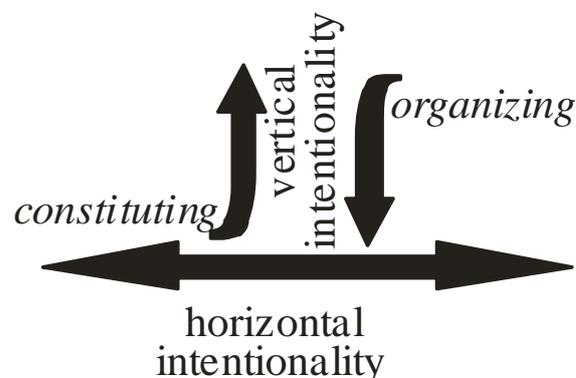
From the above it will appear that directedness *at/by* directedness as fundamental human response-dependent property is not a categorically defined essence. On the contrary, it is a kind of developmental unit. Directedness *at/by* directedness develops evolutionary *natural history* that can be investigated by means of, for instance, comparative primate studies. It develops *culture-historically*, and I think that a central, empirical project - inspired by Bransen - as documentation of this would be to investigate how the moral practice develops cultural-historically, given the capability to produce moral reasons based on a mutual relationship to one another's minds. Furthermore, directedness *at/by* directedness develops *life-historically* (these years this is subject to extensive developmental psychological and clinical studies). Finally I agree with Bransen that a special life-historical development of directedness is identical with that which we find in our mutual *educational projects*, where we to a great extent concentrate on the mutual development of the capability to rationally substantiated social responsibility.

As a consequence of the view that directedness *at/by* directedness as the fundamental human response-dependent property is a developmental unit and not an essential category, we have to soften the "us/them" dichotomy found in Bransen's presentation. As already mentioned, Bransen suggests that "us" is a categorically limited group of well-formulated, articulating and rationally substantiated, well-educated grown-ups within the clinical, normal area. As mentioned before, it may exclude parts of mankind from "us". By understanding the particularly human as an educational unit from a natural-historical, cultural-historical, and life-historical point of view, this unfortunate dichotomy is avoided. Let me stress that, based on the concept of educational units (opposed to categorical essence), I agree with Bransen's concluding thoughts about education as conducive of the particularly human. It can also be said that the human being is a being with a capacity of being led through the successive, proximal developmental and educational zones, which again lead along the developmental path where the capability of giving rational reasons for own social actions is an academic exception of the underlying human capability to be tacitly social responsible in its directedness *at/by* directedness.

My fourth comment: Realism vs. social constructionism

My fourth comment concerns the risk of social constructionism formulated by Bransen. Well, at least so it seems to me who adopt a realist point of view. I agree with Bransen that the particularly human (in my term) is a *developmental unit* that we (also in my term) together pull out of the hat as a common third. But the risk of social constructionism, in which the particularly human becomes a purely arbitrary construction, is very close if the model is not combined with the models trying to illustrate what are the real, material conditions. A realist (the opposite of constructionist) will have to ask: Which real possibility conditions are found in our material and social outside world for the responsible co-existential lives we may live? What do we have to *be able to*, and what do we *want to*, from a psychological point of view, in order to be able to participate in the development of the common human co-existence? Which real possibilities are at the core of our psychological capacities to be able to and want to participate in the common human project?

I am quite aware of the fact that when you ask that kind of questions, it is like helplessly being absorbed by the black hole of determinism, from where no thoughts of freedom, autonomy and emergence will escape. Elsewhere (Bertelsen, 2005) I have tried to demonstrate that it is actually possible in a non-constructionist way to unite the thought of human conditions with the thought of the free will. In short, the directedness *at/by* directedness should not only be regarded as a *horizontal* connectedness but as a *vertical* connectedness, i.e. to regard directedness *at/by* directedness as *directedness at/by one's own horizontal directedness...* (at/by something in the world or some other person's directedness).



In this perspective, our horizontal directedness (at/by something in the world or some other person) appears –

seen from above-and-downwards as organized by our mutual, deliberative and rationalistic reflections how our social life practice (horizontal) is to be formed. In this sense we are – seen from above-and-downwards – directed *at* our own life practice (horizontal). But at the same time we also have to relate to this life practice and the psychological possibilities we have in order *to be able to* and *want to* realize this life practice that forms the basis of our being able to and wanting to reflect on and realize this life practice. In other words: our life practice and our psychological capacities and will to have and to realize are constituent for (a) how we organize it and (b) the fact that we are at all able to organize it. And, again seen from below-and-upwards, our organizing directedness is directed by our constitutive life practices and our psychological capacities to and will to realize these life practices. Again we see it as a response-dependent property, which means that directedness directed *by* our constitutive life practices and our psychological capacities to and will to realize these life practices. We see this response-dependent property, which means that we are directed *at/by* something (in casu our intentional and social responsible life practices).

I agree with Bransen that we can and will form ourselves (from above-and-downwards), but I would like to add: always on a constituent basis (seen from below-and-upwards). In a horizontal sense this basis is given both by the fact that we from a psychological point of view are able to and also strive for (seen from inside-and-out) and by the underlying social dynamics and structures characterizing co-existent communities (seen from outside-and-inwards).

My fifth comment: Response-dependence – normativity and qualia

The above considerations about directedness *at/by* directedness are all formulated from an observer's point of view – but these are more or less also Bransen's own considerations stated in the article. None of the statements in the target article are formulated from a special participant point of view. Such an observer point of view is necessary if we have to stick to the critically responsible realistic point of view, opposed to an irresponsible and arbitrary social constructionalistic point of view.

However, I agree that if we have to focus on the particularly human we also need to focus on the particular-

ly response-dependent forms of directedness *at/by* directedness. I also agree that we can only focus on them via a participant point of view. According to Nagel (1974) we need to ask the question “what is it like to be a human?” As long as we operate from an observer point of view – Nagel (1986) calls it “The view from nowhere” – we will only get hold of those universal conditions that are not particularly human conditions lying in the intentional structures which would be valid to *any* intelligent social being (be it an intelligent bat from Alpha Centauri or next-next generation intelligent socially directed biochips from Intel). I agree that what particularly divides human beings from other beings capable of directedness *at/by* directedness must be found in the particularly response-dependent *content* which we have developed on the basis of our cultural history, political history and moral history. As previously mentioned, it is not the fact that we give moral reasons which separates us from other socially intelligent beings – socially intelligent biochips moving informatively around in cyberspace could do that as well – but the particularly human normative form of these arguments might separate us from such other beings.

Perhaps other beings would, perhaps they would not, out of historical reasons develop the same type of normativity – who knows? What I believe would clearly separate the response-dependent content in our directedness *at/by* directedness from other beings is the *qualia* forms of the content (confer the redness of the tomato) of our thinking, feeling and striving – and as an exception, our responsible reasons. There must be a difference in the *qualia* occurring in the response-dependence between beings with a human body, physiologically carbon-based filled with estrogen and testosterone, etc., and beings which might be based on silicone for instance, microchips (see e.g. Hameroff, 1997; Bertelsen, 2005, chapters 6 & 8). In other words, if we want to get hold of the particularly human in our response-dependent way of being directed *at/by* directedness we may not focus on comparatively universal Kantian characteristics like morally substantiated practical sense – but on the *qualia* forms constituted on our physiology and bodily morphology.

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