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Directedness at/by directedness as the “beginning of all beginnings”

Robinson deliver a sharp and welcome criticism of contemporary psychology. He identifies four maladies of psychology.

- Psychology is *fragmented*
- Each enclave is *isolated*, each one only able to comprehend and explain the importance of its own projects
- The fragmentation of psychology is caused by an increasing *indifference*
- There can be no accumulation of knowledge, no authentic progress when a *failed theory* continues to animate research

As a cure Robinson offers four features which he sees as the most defining ones of human nature and psychology itself: the *civic*, the *moral*, the *aesthetic* and the *transcendental*.

My comment is a sort of ‘resonance from overseas’, showing that this type of diagnostics and cure are in accordance with what part of Danish psychology is working on as well.

My commentary begins with a presentation of version of general psychology and ends by combining these reflections with Robinson’s diagnosis and suggestions for a cure.

1. General Psychology

General psychology and the ambiguity of psychology. One of the first noticeable things when working with psychological science is its healthy and exuberant *diversity* – and also its confusing *ambiguity*. To more or less every phenomenon with which psychology is preoccupied, there is an abundance of different theories and intervention strategies. Some of these complement and enrich each other by handling each their aspect of the phenomenon. Others are in sharp contrast to each other and take their starting point in conflicting views on the human psyche. On the one hand, this is a healthy guarantee that we not merely turn to easy solutions, and preserve the sound respect for the enormous complexity of the psyche. On the other hand, it seems as if psychology is without internal coherence, and without the unambiguity in explanations and types of intervention, that could be expected from such an important social and human science. Therefore, some believe that psychology is not at all a coherent science, but actually a

heterogeneous combination of different sciences attached to each their domain (e.g. the biological, the social, the humanistic), and that it consequently ought to be divided into these different sciences.

Others believe that psychology in fact is *one* science, but that it can never have character of unity because the very reality with which psychology deals is composed of a multiplicity of *realities* (or social constructions).

The third possibility is that the psyche actually and really constitutes a coherent domain, and that similarly it is possible for psychology to develop into an increasingly more coherent science.

There are two variations of this third view. One argues for developing one coherent theory about the psyche, a Grand Unified Theory.

The other variation states that it may not be possible to develop such G.U.T. It might be possible if we once and for all had a number of partial but completed theories that developed no more. Then, the work would merely involve combining these parts. As with any science however, these parts and the partial disciplines are always under construction, always developing, always being extended and elaborated. This happens – and must happen – in a *decentralized* way in the diversity of individual disciplines and research projects. The task of creating unity in psychology is the task of an ever ongoing coordinating of the multiplicity of theoretical ‘growth areas’ that are under constant development and change. This state of decentralized “growth areas” *can* and unfortunately *has*, as Robinson points out, degenerated into fragmentation, isolation and indifference. This happens when there is no organizing theory at hand and/or if there is no build in methodological and theoretical coordination in the “growth areas” towards knowledge accumulation and an overall general psychological theory.

General psychology, the object of psychology and the coherence of psychology. First of all, one of the main tasks for general psychology is to handle/examine the coherence of psychology as a science. General psychology has to solve this problem by developing some overall meta-scientific models of the human psyche – an psychological anthropological model – to show how the different disciplines and partial theories in psychology can be combined in an accumulating way.

Looked at bottom-up, general psychology is based on knowledge that is created in specific decentralized research areas (the “growth areas”). Looked at top-down, the task of general psychology is to attempt to enrich anyone of these

myriads of research areas precisely by offering an overall theory of the psyche and of the coherence of the science. Enriching these "growth areas" by giving them the methodological and theoretical directedness of how to contribute to an overall anthropology.

When concrete knowledge production is decentralized – as it always should be – it is even more important that the individual practitioner in the profession is aware of and *methodologically obligated* towards coherence between own knowledge production and psychology as such. Thereby, the methodological effort of general psychology – and the methodological effort of the decentralized scientists – is formulated as an effort to examine the compatibility between partial theoretical models, and between one's own partial theory and an overall psychological anthropological model of the psyche which one always should have under construction as well (to counteract the danger that one's own work becomes a fragment, isolated and indifferent)..

2. The starting point of a "psychological general psychology" (or: the beginning of all beginnings)

Connectedness. The basic ontological view in the present version of general psychology is, that the fundamental category in the understanding of the psyche is *connectedness*. Nothing exists in isolation, by itself. Everything exists in some way in connection with its surroundings, that is, with everything else. A diamante exists in its form and maintains its atomic structure on basis of the already existing physical conditions in this universe. At a deeper chemical level, living organisms subsist their existence through exchanges of substances and energy with their surroundings, and on a higher biological level they subsist their existence through behaviour: Behaviour on all levels, from the most primitive animals' simple forward movements to for example, gregarious mammals' complex social behaviour in relation to each other.

Connectedness and levels. From this follows that connectedness exists on all levels from the basic physical and chemical to the most complex biological and mental levels. Therefore, a certain connectedness, for example, the biological connectedness between an organism and its surroundings, such as it is seen in a certain type of behaviour consists of a hierarchy of levels, physical, chemical, biochemical, molecular-biological, ethological, behavioural-biological, etc.

Bottom-up, the lower levels *constitute* the higher ones. Without the physical and chemical levels, the biological ones would not exist. Top-down, the higher levels *organize* the lower ones: biological behaviour unifies and organizes the organism's low-level constitutive capacities to co-operate and thereby constitute the higher levels in exactly this manner, and not any other.

Connectedness and resonance. The most elementary statement about a thing is, therefore, that it exists because of its connections to the surroundings. Thereby, its own qualities is given because of its special types of connectedness. Any characteristic of a thing is therefore also an expression or *resonance* of something else. Obviously, for example, a snowflake's characteristics are information about – or resonance of – for instance, temperatures (that it has not melted for example, shows that it is cold). The myriads of different types of compositions of ice crystals in each snowflake contains equivalent information or resonance of the snowflake's story of creation in the cloud from which it came and the further conditions on its way down.

At the deeper levels of reality, we find the inorganic resonances (snowflakes' characteristics are such deep resonances). Higher up in the biological levels we find resonances in the shape of the organisms' morphology, metabolism and behaviour, and gradually the resonances also take shape of *qualia*, that is, as phenomenological, experienced resonances in the mental connectedness.

The concept of resonance becomes the fundamental qualitative concept of any connectedness. Things are different from each other because of the different resonant connections. Bats are different from snails in the different ways in which they are resonant – and in this case a whole hierarchy of resonances, from molecular biological to behavioural biological. Similarly, the particular human character needs to be qualitatively determined by our special resonance.

Connectedness and intentionality. Everything is connected and everything is in resonance. Yet another thing characterizes the connectedness in biological creatures, more specifically animals (as separated from non-living systems, functional systems, and plants). All animals, from the simple, self-moving organisms to the highest social living mammals (us, amongst others) live in *intentional* connectedness. They (and we) are self-actively and intentionally directed *at* the surroundings, thereby shaping the surroundings while processing them to own advantage. On the other hand they (and we) do not transform the surrounding merely according to individual whims or as a consequence of arbitrary (social) constructions, but rather in *realistic* accordance with the surroundings' actual nature, actual workability and actual life-giving possibilities. The animals (and we) are precisely in this sense also directed *by* the surroundings. In short: a further characteristic of animals' (and our) connectedness is its *directedness* at the surroundings and *by* the surroundings. In short: directedness at/by the surroundings.

Furthermore, human beings are also directed at/by *each other*. We are not merely like good "behaviourists" (and other animals) directed at/by each other's visible behaviour. As "psychologists" we are directed at/by the very *directedness* of each other's actions and experiences. Each of us is directed at/by the very way in which others are directed in their existence. Similarly, we are also reflectively directed at/by our own directedness. We experience the directedness in our own actions; we evaluate it, correct it, and have moral and value-based projects about changing and developing our way of being directed. Looked at *horizontally*, we are directed at/by the world and each other, looked at *vertically*, we are directed

at/by our own directedness. In short: *as human beings we are directed at/by directedness – both the directedness of others and our own directedness*. This notion should be the “beginning of all beginnings” – and the top-down organizing principle of a psychological general psychology.

Robinson rightly criticises certain versions of essentialism and essentialistic evolutionary psychology, and points to the importance of adopting a historical perspective. I am in fully agreement. By adopting a historical perspective on a phenomenon, one tries to identify, describe and explain how this phenomenon *develops over time*. The historical development dynamics are given in a mutual relation between constitution and organization. Such a hierarchically built entity is thereby also to a certain extent *self-organized*. Due to its own organization, it is not merely maintained constitutionally but also because of its own organizing dynamics.

3. The Psyche as Connectedness

This leads to the following definition of the psyche and psychology. The psyche is the *organizing directedness* in any animal organism's *connectedness* with its surroundings. This connectedness is hierarchically structured – and similarly, the psychological science must operate on several levels. On the lowest levels – the ones that *low-level psychology* is preoccupied with – we find the physiological substance and energy exchanges between the organism and the physical surroundings.

On the next level – which we could call the middle level – are the evolutionarily developed animal life forms with their intentional behavioural directedness at/by the biological life world. These behavioural types of connectedness are what the *middle-level psychology* is preoccupied with.

This middle level is bottom-up constitutive for the even higher intentional connectedness of human *activity*, and on the other hand behaviour is top-down organized by activity. That is: Human actions are different from animal behaviour in that *behaviour* by itself is organized as a directedness at/by the surroundings, including other animals' behaviour. Human *actions* are organized by being directed at/by *the directedness* in other people's actions and ways of being, as well as being directed at/by the directedness in one's own actions and ways of being.¹ *High-level psychology* focuses on the psyche at the level where connectedness is intentionally directed at/by directedness, both others' directedness and one's own directedness. this.

Only a psychology that includes the complete hierarchy of low, middle and high-level theories is a psychology that focuses on the entire human area, respectively of all levels in the human psyche. A high-level psychology that does not comprehend its phenomena as constituted by

low-level phenomena is an 'airy' psychology without sufficient explanatory power. And likewise, a low-level or middle-level psychology that does not comprehend its phenomena as organized, also is in deficit of explanatory power.

4. A reply to Robinson's Four Dimensions

We can now return to the four dimensions Robinson points to as the basis of a 'psychological psychology'. They can now be associated with – or made compatible with – the here presented general psychology model of the human psyche as four dimensions or qualities in the psyche's action-based, intentional directedness at/by (others' and own) directedness.

The civic dimension: Fundamentally, we depend on each other, physically and biologically. We depend on producing the physical and biological basis for our existence to cover our physical and biological needs through cooperation and division of labour. However, we also depend on co-existence in a far more radical way. Obviously, we could not, in solitude, keep up with all that which makes life meaningful: attachment to our dear ones, socially being together, cultural productions of technological, artistic-aesthetic and epistemological nature. Everything that the individual's life project is generally directed at/by as actual life fulfilling values in a good life. All of this only exists – and can only fill each our lives with meaning – as a consequence of co-existence, not least the co-existence that consists of and is sustained by the directedness at/by directedness.

The moral dimension. It is quite simply practical reasonable to preserve and further develop such a valuable and shared way of living and co-existence. *Practical reason* can in this context be determined as the particular way in which the individual's activities are shaped, so that they are directed at/by the sustenance and further development of this shared and particular human co-existing way of living. Our actions are formed as practical reasonable when they are directed at/by human co-existence. In this way, The psyche is practical reasonable, meaningfully self-organized and directed at/by other directedness. Of course psychology must then also look at the moral dimension.

The aesthetic dimension: By looking at the intentional connectedness as *intentio* (the inside-out of intentionality as connectedness), it characterizes our directedness as activity *towards* something; in the way we seize life, fulfil ourselves, *and express* ourselves. In actively expressing ourselves, we make an *impression* on the world – we shape it, produce, create. With our expressions, we also make an impression on other people, for better or worse, consciously and unconsciously. With their impression of us (and of our expressions) they thereby relate to us one way or another. On the other hand, then, by looking as the intentional connectedness as *intentum* (the outside-in of intentionality as connectedness) intentionality is characterized as the way, *we see ourselves in the impressions we make on other people, and*

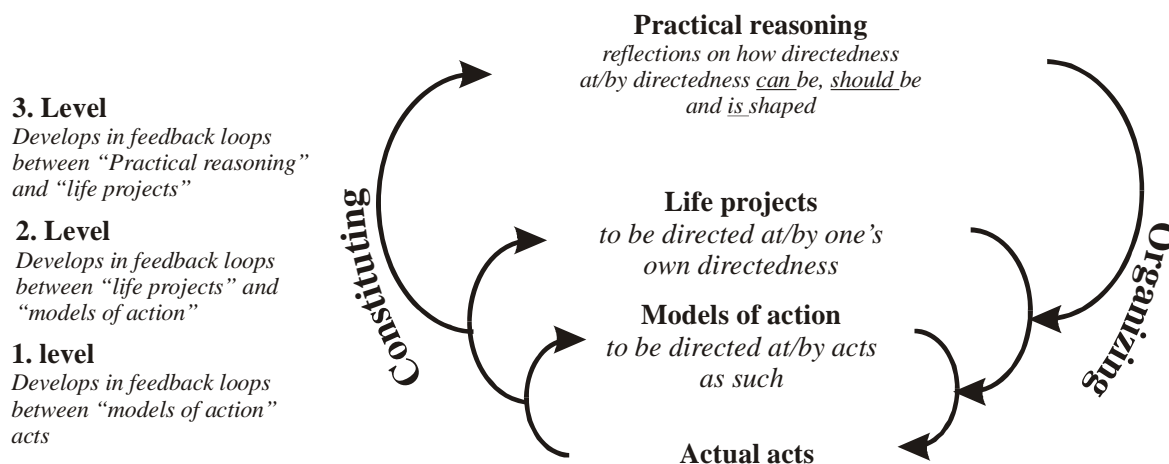
¹ Chimpanzees and bonobos are capable of showing a bit more than behavioural activity and perform elementary types of actions, which demonstrate that a certain degree of self-reflection and directedness at/by directedness is present.

on the world generally. We mirror ourselves in others and in the world. Basically, this is the way in which we get to know ourselves, become conscious of ourselves – in short: become a self.

Let us furthermore see this notion of intentio/intentum and expression/impression in terms of *resonance*. At the deeper levels of reality, connectedness is inorganic resonances. At the higher biological levels, we find resonances in the form of organisms' morphology, metabolism and behaviour, and gradually the resonances also take shape of qualia as phenomenological resonances in the mental connectedness. Qualia – seen as, for example, *this* individual's way of experiencing the redness of a colour – can be determined as a highly organized type of resonance. Qualia are the resonant qualities of biological organisms' connectedness with the surroundings. Qualia are the impressions/expressions whereby the special characteristic of species comes into existence. Consequently, psychology must also focus on the qualia impressions/expressions which are essential aspects of our *human* psyche as aesthetic connectedness.

The transcendental dimension. The transcendental dimension is concerned with high-level psychology and the directedness at/by directedness. This high-level can be further divided into three subordinate levels.

We set ourselves small and big goals, we become involved in them with particular types of directednesses whereby they appear in a particular meaningful way to us, and as something we can act in relation to in specific ways. One can therefore say that we have certain *meaningfull models of action* whereby we see our surroundings; models of action which is the organization of the acts by which we realize our goals. At the *first subordinate level of the high-level psyche*, we find that our basic active connections with the world are organized via the constitutive/organizing feedback loops between models of action and acts. On the one hand, the models frame the efforts of implementing acts. On the other hand, these models of actions is continuously adjusted according to successful or unsuccessful experiences in trying to implement the acts.



The model shows three subordinate levels of the high-level psyche. The first loop (indicated with the lowest placed double arrows) is between the model of action and actual acts: The next loop is between all these models of action of the world and the more generally organized life project (indicated as the next set of double arrows that comes from and leads to the lower system of arrows). The top loop is between the organizing life projects and overall, organizing practical reasoning – that is, reasoning about which life projects one ought to strive towards.

At the next subordinate level of high-level psyche, we find the overall (conscious as well as unconscious) *life project*, that is, the overall organization of all the first subordinate level's myriads of acts that provide life as such with a personal directedness and meaning. The development of this second subordinate level is based on the development that takes place via the feedback loops between the life project (or projects) and the immediate models of action, or, in other words, a development based on reflection of one's own life contents and fundamental values (what one finds right and good to

strive towards and lets one's acts from the first subordinate level be influenced by).

On the third subordinate level of high-level psyche – and so far the top level in this model – we find yet another overall organization when one is consciously and reflectively directed at/by practical reason. That is, reflections of ethical, legal, social, political, psychological, and even spiritual nature. Speculations about what life is about and how one can make deeper and more competent deliberations about it. The development of reflections of the kind 'what life is all about'

involves that the development of one's personal life project on the second subordinate level does not happen blindly or as pure trial and error.

5. Conclusion

My outline of a basic general psychological model is thus, a hierarchical model that regards the psyche as intentional connectedness. Starting with such an understanding of the psyche and such a basic model, general psychology can solve its most essential problems: making psychology's many growth areas compatible and thus making knowledge

accumulation possible. With the concept of 'directed at/by directedness' as a fundamental psychological characteristic of human connectedness with the surroundings, such an anthropology or theoretical psychological model of the human psyche can develop the same kind of central dimensions in a 'psychological psychology' as Robinson does in his target article. I thrust this anthropological psychological model of top-down organizing directedness at/by directedness to be the core notion of a "psychological general psychology" which should facilitate knowledge accumulation and which should be the cure of fragmentation, isolation and indifference.