

LUBOMÍR KOSTROŇ

## PSYCHOLOGY: A NEW VIEW ON HOLISTIC APPROACH

If the understanding of man's behavior represents one of the developmental barriers and possibly a key to the global problems' solution, then successes reached by psychology are clearly inadequate.

I belong among those, who are dissatisfied with the state of contemporary theoretical psychology and seek for ways to make it more adequate in regard to tasks we all face.

I found myself to share the opinion, that theoretical psychology does not cope with some of the discoveries which theoretical physics made already at the beginning of this century, it did not transform their underlying ideas into the conceptual framework of psychology.

As a result, we have countless number of particular theoretical approaches to a vast number of problems of differing levels of generality in theory and practise, a real Babylonian mess of professional terminology. Unbearable width of approaches, ranging from narrowly focused empirical research in a positivistic "hard science" tradition, to very subjective speculations on the boarder with "occult sciences" — with an effort to establish an individuality of „soft sciences“ somewhere in the middle.

I respect the standpoint of a number of dissatisfied psychologists, that some traditionally psychological concepts may not be scientifically approached (Koch S., 1981). The use of such criteria of scientific status for a theory as are the degree of formalization and quantification, high degree of explanatory power and the legitimacy of generalizations, even predictive power, will reveal that very few concepts, models and procedures in psychology qualify.

Within the context of our country and also of my generation, there is an exceptional opportunity to seek for a new paradigm in psychological theory building. The ties of one-sided and universal marxistic philosophy disappeared. Also, the positivistic approach to the scientific endeavour seems to undergo a transformation. The dramatical threat of a growing number of global problems forces us to seek for new answers and solutions. Even though the development of knowledge in natural sciences taught us

that there are no definite answers to global questions, new rearrangement of known concepts results into useful discoveries.

If nuclear physicists reached a conclusion voiced by Niels Bohr, that "I am convinced today, that theoretical physics is basically a philosophy", then for the search of a new quality in theoretical psychology it is valid twice as much.

Who, among us, may declare explicitly the philosophical foundations of his (her) scientific endeavour in psychology? Who, among us, is prepared to transform recent changes in philosophy of scientific work into psychological theorizing — either in respect to the subject matter of his (her) work — or in respect to the methodological approaches used?

If nuclear physicists reached rather sceptical conclusions, that

- there is no absolute space and time, both may be curved,
- sequences of causes and their consequences are subjective views,
- knowledge and understanding are relative and of probabilistic nature,
- objects (ment particles) are rather events and processes, than static entities, they change during their interaction with the environment and observers standpoint,
- in order to understand the internal structure of objects, it is necessary to understand the environment: either we understand things as whole — or nothing,

how are we going to absorb it? How would outlines of "quantum psychology" look like? To which areas of psychological theorizing would it apply? How come that — up to my knowledge — there are so very few psychologists who would take a chance and play this intellectual game? The body of foreign literature available to us is growing fast and much of it inspires us to do so. As Bronowsky says "knowledge is something very personal, responsible and it is an endless adventure on borders of uncertainty" (Bronowsky, 1985). Where are the men of courage (willing to play) in our psychology?

As far as my philosophical base for next psychological theorizing is concerned — I go for holism of John Smuts and his descendants.

I am convinced that this standpoint may be right for me to rethink the working field of psychology again. From earlier times I know, that without an explicit psychological theory of environment, we may not generalize conclusions over individual subjects justly. I am certain, that just due to the absence of psychological theory devoted to the environment, the psychology of personality models are logical traps — with their explanatory and perhaps even predictive powers severely limited. Also, social psychology, though better off, does not have an adequate theory of environment at its disposal. What we really need is a "typology of situations" as a hard core of environmental psychology theory. Contemporary approaches toward the psychology of environment, focused upon the influence of physical stimulæ upon man, studies in proxemics and place relevant behavior are really not what I mean.

Cultural psychology might be much closer. Nevertheless, an adequate theory of environment, a taxonomy of psychological space dimensions, is lacking. What seems to be clear is, that there is a basic uncertainty even

in respect how to approach a problem stated this way. It may very well be, that shortcomings of personality models theorizing and problems in defining "psychological space" will be solved by the developments of a new science of consciousness — much of what C. G. Jung would like to hear. Wholeness, high degree of contradictory change, uncertainty, multi-dimensionality — those are just some parts of the puzzle.

If I will speculate on some basic postulates of psychological space of man (as did some well known psychologists before — E. Brunswik, E. C. Tolman, K. Lewin — just to name older classics), then I realize that:

- the reality is of many layers and there may be more paradigms in existence simultaneously — under condition, that they are mutually compatible, homogeneous or complementary,
- only some parts of psychological space are accessible to scientific treatment, some defy it — which is what remains to be discussed,
- objectivity and subjectivity in mutually permeable. The interpretation of meaning in respect to external objects is given by values shared by the subject. The value orientation is, however, endless in variability and context — even though they are some typical for a given time and culture,
- if we want to study dynamical changes of the psychological space, we have to take them out of context. If we want to study events' context, we have to break changes into particular steps. Either way we lose the second part of relevant circumstances.

The theory of psychological environment will have to be concerned with an image of three, relatively autonomous areas:

- personality of an individual (internal "me", still broken up into consciousness and subconsciousness),
- surrounding psychological space of an individual,
- macro-space of social psychology and culture.

These three worlds are, however, one — as relativistic physicists say. Their distinction results from differing points of view and is otherwise meaningless.

Anyway, the image of external psychological space will have to have define and structure the following characteristics:

- the extent of the space,
- the content of the space filled up by conscious objects, focuses and shaded areas of subconsciousness, imaginary and real objects with their attributed meanings — goals, barriers, indifferent ones. The structure of mutual relations among objects,
- internal and external boundaries — with a difficult distinction of what is inside or outside,
- a statement regarding dynamics of the field as a whole and its distinguishable objects,
- the time orientation and parameters (linearity, nonlinearity of time, direction of time) of the whole and its parts.

Subjective interests may well serve as a gravitation in the space with "black holes" being terms beyond norms of usual. All this is subjected to

individual differences, changes over time during ontogenesis, cross-cultural differences.

An important concept will be — of course — situations, something like objects in a focus of consciousness, a cross-road of possible developmental trajectories within that part of psychological space, over which one has certain control. Our cognition, decision-making and behavior then reflects our dual determination — individual and social, subjective meaning attributed to external objects. Our behavior resembles light in many ways — we behave like both: particles and waves.

I believe, that a satisfactory psychological theory of environment was not postulated yet due to these reasons:

- theoretical psychologists are too much submerged into solving the puzzle of subjectivity itself, integrating a personality theory model and lack the necessary distance to sustain a complete, holistic, integrative view,

- psychological environment image has to be n-dimensional. We are thus determined by the limits of our own imagination — we may imagine just three dimensional spaces with time being the fourth dimension. Even mathematicians, working with n-dimensional spaces are not of much use: they do not know how to handle quite vague, uncertain and unspecified concepts,

- sufficiently integrative and holistic approach is not available for the contemporary science based upon conceptual thinking. What we also need, is to include phenomena which defy conceptual thinking and communication (intuition based decision-making may serve as an example).

To discuss these basic theoretical and philosophical problems with more productive outcomes, it is necessary to invite specialists from more disciplines together:

- psychologists, philosophers of science and methodologists who know what they want to express and also are able to say which existing parts of the puzzle are compatible,

- mathematicians, specialists on dynamical modelling of deterministic and stochastic processes,

- specialists on visualization means (artists, computer and holography specialists).

We have to set a basic and broad network of relevant concepts, leave unspecified — but important spaces unstructured, have them visualized — to obtain some working image.

An adequate image of non-material world of man is all the more important to understand the real world we live in.

A qualitative increase of understanding which we have to obtain is similar to that one reached by weather-forecasters. The difference is, that our backwardness will result into more fateful consequences that just to get sprinkled by rain.

**NOTES**

**Bronowski Jacob: The Raise of man, Odeon, Praha, 1985.**

**Koch Sigmund: The Nature and Limits of Psychological Knowledge, American Psychologist, 36, 3, 275—269, 1981.**

