

BOOK REVIEW

PSYCHOLOGY'S PYRRHIC VICTORY

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Review of: "From Soul to Mind" by Edward Reed New Haven, USA: YUP, 1997.

(At the time of writing (2017), the late Edward Reed would still not have reached retirement age. We thus could have expected much vigorous debate about this contrarian classic and the loss is ours.)

Those of us "trained" in psychology in the 20th century encountered many narratives like this from the abstract to a book chapter (Beenfeldt, 2013, P 59);

"Titchener's "introspective" methodology, then, was afflicted with profound congenital defects, rendering it scientifically unviable. For Titchenerian psychology, the highly visible *symptom* of underlying pathology came in the form of the imageless thought controversy."

In short, we were told that introspectionism was seen to work briefly as a methodology in psychology until the "imageless thought controversy". At that point, all hell broke loose, leading to philosophical behaviourism, inter alia. Then came the cognitive revolution, mainly the result of the fact that computer scientists were using terms like "memory" and "thinking" *verboten* in their contemporary psychology. Since then, things have been resolved, or so we were told.

Reed makes several attacks on conventional wisdom. One is explicit; Psychology entered the academy, as it were, misspelled as it took flesh. Logic had been purloined by Frege; the part of experience eventually labelled "authentic" by Heidegger had been reserved for a new, phenomenological, branch of philosophy; worse still, Peirce successfully created a new discipline of semiotics.

The resulting impoverished Psychology has not been a success. The CIA got into the act with horrendous use of involuntary experimental subjects in the attested MK-Ultra project, which indeed could turn out psychopaths like Whitey Bulger. \$6 billion and 25 years after it originated, brain imaging has yet to spawn a single therapy according to Vincent Clarke in his talk at Berkeley in 2017. Freeman et al (2013) produced a minutely documented and byzantine alternative to brain imaging, using EEG and ECOG instead of fmri, that fuses Merleau-Ponty's incarnated mind, chaoplexity theory and quantum field theory.

Reed's solution is radical; Psychology should revisit its romantic period destiny as a "science of the soul" by embracing William James' demand that it become a science of experience.

In this short review, I am going to counter the contrarian by pointing out an implicit part of Reed's argument. This beautifully-written posthumous book abounds with "psychologists" like Mill who are in fact general men of letters (JS Mill), diplomats/popular historians (Hume) and unpaid professors (Kant). In fact, the issue of what should be retained in the academy and not undergirds the unspoken part of Reed's argument.

In the first European university in Bologna, students pooled their private resources to employ teachers who worked for them. The later university of Paris saw both students and faculty in joint ownership. The University of Siena, arguably the oldest publicly-funded university in the world is in its 777th year.

With state involvement, the original models have become corroded to the point that tenure has been abolished in Britain and Russia is about to exemplify the "Real Madrid" model pioneered in Ireland; "superstar" academics flown in a few months a year on huge salaries with the natives providing coolie labour. Conversely, the technology and freely available resources have exploded to the point that a university faculty and administration might now be one person with a smartphone. The brilliant Jim Morrison, shortly before his untimely death, in analogous fashion predicted correctly that advances in studio tech enabled a rock band to be one guy (eg Mike Oldfield) in a studio doing overdubs!

Moreover, in apparent paradox the web has in general resulted in research becoming more and more micro-focused with many huge issues (like mind in Quantum mechanics versus cognition) not being addressed. The state, an increasingly dominant player, inevitably supports dominant paradigms.

In fact, it might well be argued that, in order to fulfil its primary task of educating young men and women, the university has to be intellectually conservative. Taleb (2010) argues that right back to Leibniz, Voltaire and proceeding through Einstein's

annus mirabilis, the university has been behind the cutting-edge. In fact, Taleb (2010) continues, the obsession with Gaussian statistics in academia threatens to create another 2008-like crash. Kaiser (2012) describes the beginnings of quantum information theory in a group of brilliant unemployed scientists, some of whom are still living on welfare.

In the meantime, psychology was thus robbed of logic by Frege and phenomenology by Husserl, leaving an impoverished pseudo-science with linear and scalar models of non-linear phenomena (Reed, 1997). Reed's concerns are not to be ignored (*ibid.*, 220);

“Because scientists...have withdrawn into a much narrower domain, they have repeatedly ceded much of the important territory connecting everyday experience with meaningful self-understanding to religious, nationalist, and popular leaders who are often no more than demagogues.”

Indeed “Kant and Hume through to Descartes” (200) bear no relation to modern philosophy and can better be claimed for psychology. He uses a finer grain to cash out this analysis in academia (200);

“Yet the two most fundamental methods of modern philosophy...both developed in response to the perceived success of the new psychology...the development of both symbolic logic and phenomenology would have been radically different...small wonder that the new professional philosophers latched onto the most provocative antipsychology methodologies possible, phenomenology and logic.”

Frege, it is fair to say, hated the newfangled “science” of psychology and jealously guarded his advances in logic from it. While his allegation of “psychologism” was far-ranging enough to include in its remit much of what we now call the social sciences, the fear that formally inadequate models (sometimes even without a normative basis) would be smuggled into academia via the Trojan horse of psychology has proved well-founded.

What then to do? Arguably, the “bachelors” for whom the university is funded should be able to explore their own subjectivity using the resources they are exposed to in what should be a safe environment. Reed's desideratum that self-understanding can emerge from psychology boils down, sooner rather than later, to telling people what to think.

The result, particularly in the USA, is a response by the students to relativism and massive debt by identity politics on steroid – exactly what Frege might have anticipated. In the meantime, the political right is making hay by offering a normative Judeo-Christian formation to young people. The academy can help with how to think

and feel, but should not dictate specifics.

Of course, Reed (ibid) had dreams of a psychology that would alert us when that speaker was actually a demagogue; he points out that Shelley, following Erasmus Darwin, had hopes for a life-enhancing science of psychology. It is better, I believe, to offload this onto the arts and religion. As for politics, the whole impetus for a liberal arts education is to groom citizens. To attempt to reduce all this to “psychology” (as George Lakoff attempted) is pathological, particularly with the impoverished version of psychology and formally inadequate (ie scalar/linear) tools that Lakoff used.

To conclude, psychology can best contribute to academia by expanding cognitive science to encompass the math models we know the brain is capable of. The brain, according to Von Neumann et al, does not have a “stack” affording computational depth; it achieves results equivalent to 4th order tensors, the Lagrangian and other “semantic” formalisms, by co-ordinate free flows. Let us call this “noetic” reasoning.

Qm adds contact with a realm responsive to is being interrogated in a way we can term “noumenal”. Thus can experience be smuggled back into academia, this time using math that would make Frege proud. The project of these incorporations should suffice for the 21st century!

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