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Functional Synthesis of Viewpoints

A Conceptual Model Based on Purpose

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Short Summary: A conceptual model is described to supply a context within which the increasingly isolated fields of knowledge and experience can be related without jeopardizing their autonomy. This is achieved by defining a space such that every viewpoint held in society is uniquely determined and related within that space in terms of its purpose and its ability to organize its subject matter. The properties of the space are such that developmental, directional, unitary and convergent features are emphasized with regard to society as a whole, groups and individuals. The final model effectively constitutes a map of functions or modes of experience by which individuals or groups can relate themselves to other viewpoints. An audio-visual display is described which could illustrate the model and an experiment to validate it is discussed. [NB Images of better quality available separately ([0.5mb pdf](#))]. This paper was one basis for the much later *Functional Classification in an Integrative Matrix of Human Preoccupations* (1982) used as the basis for the subject classification of the *Yearbook of International Organizations* and the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential*

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Introduction

This paper is concerned with the difficulty created by the progressive divergence of viewpoints in society. Holders of many viewpoints find it increasingly difficult to see the relevance of other viewpoints and there is no accepted context through which they may be related. Disagreement is most often considered 'irrationally' as being due to the other party's erroneous viewpoint - which is after all a 'rational' conclusion in terms of the holders viewpoint (cf. R. 'Ardrey's discussion of 'territory', ref. 3,4). A context is required in which the 'rationality' of one viewpoint can be transformed into that of another. As things stand, each node of experience as formalized in fields of knowledge and, activity, is becoming increasingly isolated from its neighbour. This isolation, and the desire for autonomy, has tended to oppose any form of functional synthesis of knowledge and experience within society as a whole, as well as to prevent any recognition of convergence of interests or appreciation of a common sense of direction. This problem is reflected in the individual's difficulty in

integrating his consequently fractionated experience to achieve, some sense of unity, and the difficulty in establishing a personal sense of direction in harmony with that of society to give him a maximum sense of fulfillment.

The importance of these problems has been discussed by, amongst others, Sir Julian Huxley, Aldous Huxley, E. Cassirer, Trigant Burrow, and Colin Wilson (see references). S. Strasser (ref. 19, pp. 191 and 201) emphasizes one aspect of these problems in one field whilst discussing the functional loss of modern science: '...different communities of researchers do not understand one another because they do not want to understand one another....The various groups of theorists...fall apart into all kinds of clans which live in an atmosphere of mutual distrust, aversion and scorn... The man of science.... is no longer able to find a connection between what he thinks and does and the activities of other specialists of entirely different orientations. The end result is that he no longer knows exactly what he is supposed to be doing, for understanding what his special science really is, requires a standpoint lying above this special science itself.' To the extent that these inter-group problems result in a disruptive effect on society, we also need, in Ardrey's terms, to be able to hold a synthetic viewpoint to promote the ends of society as a whole.

The purpose of this paper is to show that viewpoints can be related through a **conceptual model** based on the **purpose** for which the viewpoint is held. 'Purpose' is treated as the purpose for consciously fulfilling a particular organic or psycho-social function, **not** as the goal or final cause of an act, **nor** as the unconscious basis of action.

A purpose-related concept (e.g. direction, intention, relevance, motivation, etc) seemed the ideal key to such a model. The only element common to a multitude of different modes of experience and treatments of data is that each is undertaken for a purpose. Every other element may or may not occur, or will be defined differently - but it is always possible to obtain agreement that for a consciously chosen experience there was a purpose in choosing it, rather than some other mode. The nature of the purpose may be defined differently, but it is always present. A sense of direction seems to be the one concept which a wide-variety of disciplines have in common, in one form or another. Therefore, in order to develop the relationship between each field of knowledge in a model, a factor must be introduced to indicate the purpose resulting in that field. G.W. Allport (ref. 1, pp. 237-8), referring to the elements of the personality, states that 'The justification of any scheme of analysis is always to be found in the purpose for which the analysis is made. A system of elements is 'true' in so far as it fulfills the avowed intention of the analyst. The principal reason why psychologists do not agree with one another in their lists of elements is that each is animated by a slightly different intention. Until the purpose of an analysis and the psychologist's aim are clearly specified (as they seldom are) it is not possible to argue about the suitability of one set of elements or another. For certain purposes it is fitting to view the mind as a congeries of ideas, for other purposes, as a network of neural arcs, or as a system of vectors, or as an hierarchy of sentiments. 'We submit that analogous statements can be equally applied to any differences of opinion in and between other fields of experience.

A comprehensive model must therefore supply a **context for all purposes** in order to link all the consequent modes of experience. There is however one very important restriction which avoids the apparent conclusion that an unordered, relativistic or pluralistic model would be satisfactory. The latter would be too general to be of any value.

An individual's purposes arise from the necessity to maintain and further those functions governing his existence as a biological and social entity. There is therefore always a **pattern of organic and psycho-social functions** which he must perform or, by delegation within society, have performed for him. The totality of such delegations by all individuals results in the functional organisation of society. The restriction on the unordered collection of purposes above, is that an individual must be able to organize himself so that all his functions are performed, no matter to what degree he specializes. There are therefore only certain permissible combinations of functions open to him and the pattern of functions in society is similarly restricted.

Apart from the stabilizing aspect of functions, man also seems to be involved in the shaping of his environment into a state of **greater order** which is more satisfying to him. In effect one function is to progressively stabilize his position in time. But as a result of the progressive organization of man's environment due to the action of millions of individuals, man has long reached the stage where he is forced (aided by the population and information explosions, and the tension of modern life) to improve continually the organization of old organization. This **developmental process** of convergence on a hypothetical maximum of organization or unification (consistent with the stabilizing function requirements) must be incorporated in the model - both in the case of the long-term development of society and in that of the short-term development of the individual to maturity.

The **additional criteria**, in constructing the model are based on those detailed by Sir Julian Huxley as necessary properties of a satisfactory 'idea system' (ref. 12, 13). The model should:

- emphasize the functional importance to society and the individual of each field of knowledge and experience
- facilitate the individual's efforts to define his purpose and locate the position within this pattern which will give him maximum personal fulfillment as a responsible member of society
- recognize the succession of idea systems necessary to unify experience as the individual and society develop
- recognize the importance of 'outdated' concepts in development and education
- facilitate the planning of future development
- recognize the trend toward increasingly general and unitary concepts whilst maintaining the autonomy of individual specialities
- facilitate communication between isolated specialities
- facilitate the adaptation of new concepts in every field of knowledge to human life and its problems
- stress not only intellectual convergence of interests, but a physical convergence (as is evident in the physical integration of society, e.g. internationalism, communications, world trade, etc)

A most important criterion is that the conceptual model should be **representable in a physical form** to facilitate visualization, comprehension and education.

While I believe the final model to be original, most of the ideas incorporated therein have been developed or mentioned by, amongst

others, Sir Julian Huxley, P. Teilhard de Chardin, R.G. Collingwood, E. Spranger, and H. Read (see references).

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Conclusion

We have attempted to distinguish between 'motive' and 'purpose' in order to provide a model which will bear some relation to an individual's subjective attitude when he acts. It has seemed that the academic approach is only concerned with explaining his actions to the satisfaction of observers, who are not particularly concerned with the criteria in terms of which he makes his decisions. This split between the academic and the practical is illustrated by the fact that for the past five years at least, 'Psychological Abstracts' has contained only one reference to 'purpose', and the latest 'Encyclopedia of Philosophy' (ref. 8) contains only a cross-reference to 'motive'. On the other hand, 'purpose' is increasingly used in politics, daily speech, and business management. In the latter case, 'purpose' is treated as the vital 'principal criterion' for decision (H. Simon, p.4, ref. 20). B.M. Gross bases his whole treatment of the management of organizations on purpose, and E.P. Learned (p.529, ref. 15) rates the determinations of purpose as 'among the *most* important and most neglected of all human activities'. Business management theory does attempt to distinguish between the 'purpose' of an activity and 'motivating' employees to act. This is the distinction between the subjective and the objective sense, and it would appear to be a useful one.

We have attempted to develop a means of establishing the relevance of specialized discipline to the life of an individual. There is however, increasing acceptance of the following propositions:

- i) no man or group of men *can* know everything; ii) a lifetime's work may be required to understand the significance of some specialized fields; iii) knowledge does not need to be useful, and if it is, may be in some degree inferior.

This means that we are reaching the point where the delegation of a function to a specialist becomes decreasingly valuable, for although he can explain or control a phenomenon to the satisfaction of his colleagues, it may be almost impossible for him to relate it to daily life. The counterpart to this effect is that he then runs the danger of being unable to receive information which might contradict his explanation.

Worst of all, however, is that we are back where we started prior to the division of labour. The only persons who know about the control of the phenomenon are so 'far away' communication-wise, that it is easier to repeat the investigations if one wants to **use** the answer, than to try to locate reports of previous investigations and relate the language of the explanation to one's own problem. In other words, although an objective explanation has been provided, it is so distant that it does not fulfil any social function and is effectively a subjective explanation because it is so private. This may appear to be an extreme case, but all specialized information is to some degree inaccessible and thus non-functional - increased specialization increases non-functionality, unless provision is made for the flow back of useful information. In effect such specialized areas become worlds of their own and the information generated is only functional and objective to those worlds. (See Appendix I for a typology of explanations.)

In this model we have attempted to approach these problems by putting everything on a **functional basis** immediately related and comprehensible to the individual or group concerned. A need for an answer must take the form of a functional problem, so that by specializing through that function in terms of the functional map, one *must* come to the area in which information is being generated or, the problem. At the same time one can understand the adjustment in viewpoint necessary to comprehend the data generated. Each individual can therefore recognise what is or is not relevant to the development of his functions.

The model maps out the location of the distant castles where specialised knowledge may be obtained so that each individual can tell where to go and how to get there so as to be able to relate the knowledge eventually obtained back to the starting point - and not forget the origin of his problem.

We have taken the approach that individuals and groups should be studied as phenomena in their own right, as was suggested by Teilhard de Chardin. Generally, we only dare to discuss phenomena which can in some way be measured on the physical world surface. This is because we have developed the necessary objectivity and conceptual equipment to detach ourselves from the thing we are measuring. But this is only a fairly recent historical development, as can be seen by the high degree of subjectivity and personal involvement of the alchemists and astrologers, in what were to become the sciences of chemistry and astronomy. Can we not therefore say that there may come a time when we can isolate or detach ourselves from our emotions and thoughts in order to be able to analyse them in an analogous manner.

The problem is to develop the conceptual and experimental techniques to isolate constants. We will have to feel our way slowly and clumsily, not knowing quite what we are looking for, as was the case with the early scientists. Only in this way can we find a means of 'backing out' of our subjective involvement in these constant factors we are seeking. But we have an advantage. We have already developed many useful and complex models in a wide variety of sciences, whereas early researchers only had mythical, religious and magical models to aid their thought processes. Using some of these scientific models as guides (as is done in operations research), we can seek out analogous situations to which they might apply the fields of emotional and mental experience. In this paper we have used combinations of the solar system and Bohr atom models.

The search for 'mental atoms' is not a new one. G.W. Allport (ref. 1) mentions that it has gone out of fashion although he suggests that the psychologists favouring factor analysis hope that personality can eventually be reduced to a schedule resembling the periodical table

in chemistry (p. 243), and that the elements will bear some relation to the genetic units of inheritance.

The final model appears to embody all the desired properties, namely, representation of synthesized experience, convergence, direction, functionalism, developmental features, importance of the individual, etc. It is simple in principle but the conceptual relationship between ordinary and inverse space is sufficiently complex to provide a context for the wide variety of points of view and interests, to explain their apparent isolation and to recognize the necessity for their autonomy. In addition, the model appears to include many features which have been recognised intuitively and are accepted in daily speech. The model 'space' has the structure and properties of a very complex mandala in the psychoanalytical sense.

Testing the model in practice, perhaps in the manner outlined, would establish whether the 'viewpoint shell' feature can be used as a basis for explaining group and individual typology, development and interaction in society. An important consequence of the validity of the model would be that the nature of the succeeding viewpoints required for the development of an idea, an individual, groups and society, and the possibilities inherent in them, could be predicted - if the parallel between succeeding shell viewpoints holds, as with elements in the periodic table. The model would then also provide a context through which many other scientific models could be brought to bear on emotional and mental phenomena. The functional classification of disciplines would provide the individual with a 'map' and a technique for moving through many fields of experience, as formalised in society, since the classification is the 'lengthened shadow' of his own make-up.

Finally, the justification for developing this model has been that there are so few comprehensive models, that any contribution may be considered as a worthwhile basis for discussion. As a model it should be judged on whether it is a **useful** and fruitful means of linking the various effects of **conscious** experience discussed, rather than on whether it is a true representation of the situation.

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