

## Book Review

**Donata Schoeller and Vera Saller (Eds.):** Thinking thinking: Practicing radical reflection. Verlag Karl Alber Freiburg/Munchen 2016, 240 pages, ISBN 978-3-495-48820-1

The volume of essays addresses the challenges of “radical-reflective turn” as an opportunity “to face the fragility and sensitivity of thinking and articulating as a responsive process” (p.12). What is radical about the reflective approach of these essays is that they take into account the experience of thinking; the way language is used to describe thinking; and feeling tones that play a major role in thinking and articulating.

The essays in the volume draw from 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century researches in philosophy and psychotherapy, mainly focusing on C.S. Peirce, Thomas Reid, Wilfred R. Bion, Jung, Freud, Rogers etc. However, they do not rearticulate the well established positions of these pioneer thinkers or take sides with them. Rather, they claim to take their work ahead of these researches by suggesting new directions in scientific, philosophical, psycho-therapeutic and socio-practical terms. These new routes are opened up by introducing a starting point of enquiry that is part of the interactive process of thinking itself. The responsiveness of the emergent process of thinking and articulating is further explored in the responsive conditions of the process.

The “radical reflective” approach of these essays is distinct from traditional approaches on various accounts. First of all, the contributors do not subscribe to already given methodologies to describe their subject matter. Nor do they delve into solipsistic explorations of internal subjectivity. Unlike traditional epistemology that posits an unchangeable structure of cognition and logic as the source of order in experience; they support “an experientially grown order” that allows for growth of knowledge and change of experience. The authors emphasize that inter-subjectivity, body-environment, socio-historical conditions and person-so-

ciality relations are fundamental to meaning making and development of intelligence. They view that thinking is a dynamic, embodied and emergent process of thought and articulation, which is not entirely under conscious control. Nor is it entirely arbitrary. Thinking process “oscillates between felt, discursive and symbolized phases; it can grow, evolve, become more vivid or it may even shut down by how we attend to it and how it is being verbalized” (p.11). This is why they argue that the conditions for thinking go beyond “the logical, syntactical and semantic structures of propositions” (p.11) as generally understood by traditional logic.

There are three main challenges that the editors identify as “methodological hurdles” in the pursuit of these essays. The first hurdle in their path is posed by the established epistemological procedures that view definitions of experience, propositions that can be analyzed or mental states that can be represented or measured as the starting point of their enquiry. These traditional epistemological procedures stand rejected by them. This is mainly because they view “assertions, concepts, perceptions and ideas not as the starting point of a reflective process, but as the products of interaction and experiential dynamics” (p.12). One of their primary concerns is to reflect on the features of lived experience and action in relation to cognitive process. Such a pursuit requires developing new vocabularies and creating unprecedented scientific and philosophic pathways.

The second challenge addressed by these essays lies in offering solutions to what is referred to as the background problem in philosophy. Analytic language philosophers like Searle, G. Ryle, Dreyfus, Polanyi etc. understand cognition as constitutive of a background. This background seems impossible to be analyzed and represented in prepositions. Similar problems also occur in what is articulated as the “frame problem” by Dreyfus (Dreyfus, 1992; Wheeler, 2008); the distinction between “knowing how” and “knowing that” by Gilbert Ryle and “tacit knowledge” by Michael Polanyi (1962&1958). Searle finds that the background problem arises because of restrictions of a vocabulary which is well developed to express

intentions, language, mind, beliefs etc but not to express how they come about. Using such restricted vocabulary leads to a vicious cycle or an unending regress (Searle). Polanyi views that a scientist or philosopher does not only draw on explicit knowledge to do his or her work, but on forms of knowledge that need to be conceived according to their tacit, incorporated dimensions. The framework that constitutes the very approach to topics and questions by a scientist manifest in as basic a way as bodily competences like riding a bike—they need no extra attention. Such reflective framing to approach a problem remains “essentially inarticulable” (Polanyi, 1962, p.60). The book seeks to open up new routes to address the “inarticulable” and unrepresented part of the thinking process.

Finally, the volume addresses the problem of achieving objectivity of scientific method. The traditional view of scientific method is in terms of cultivating objectivity that demands as much distancing as possible from the first person perspective. The authors of this volume view that the traditional approach to the scientific method ignores the fact that how deeply “the objectifying methods themselves are grounded in the experiential process of what it is like to think” (p.14). They engage with these objectives of reflecting on the tacit, background-like experiences for the scientific process. They face these challenges to inquire into the dynamic of an intentional focus and to expand extant vocabularies.

There are two gaps that the authors claim to fill up through their research. The first is to provide evidence and a starting point of interaction for the role of “the changing, volatile and implicit processes that lead to insights, beliefs or claims” in cognition related researches in philosophical discourses. Second, they aim to provide discussion and evidence for “the function of cognition and the process of thinking” that is taken for granted in psychoanalytic theories and debates. The contributors do both theoretical research and are practitioners in their areas of research. Implicitly, they are concerned with “the sensitive interface of theory and practice, i.e. how the consequences of theories of mind, feeling and language have the power to impact daily communication, conflict resolution, education and therapy” (p.16).

Each contributor conceives “the *ongoing process* of thinking and articulating, thus

demonstrating from different sides and approaches what it means to reflect radically” (p.16). They reject thinking in terms of dualistic frameworks (of static either/or patterns) e.g. “separating the conceptual from the pre-conceptual, the private from the public, the mind from the body, the body from the (socio-cultural and natural) environment” (p.16). The contributors demonstrate “how conceiving thinking and articulating as a process involves an understanding of the first person in an interactive inseparability with its environment, immersed in social relations—as the ground from where we think and speak” (p.16). They practice different methods that can be “summarized as first-, second-, and third-person approaches, carefully interwoven” (p.16). They aim to develop and expand traditional vocabulary with new vocabulary that “addresses an interactive dimension of thinking about thinking” (p.16-17). Thereby, they go beyond a critique of dualistic frameworks.

There are nine essays in the collection divided into two parts of the book. With regard to their first aim to give a starting point for discussing the role of changing and volatile processes that lead to insights in cognition, the book introduces us to new vocabularies: *elicitation* method, *felt sensing*, *enkinesthesia*, and *close talking*. Claire Petitmengin develops the Elicitation method. It is an interview technique that combines first, second and third person approaches. This method helps in developing interview questions that support a defocused awareness and re-direct the focus of attention to how the interviewee thinks—to provide descriptions. Claire’s method shows another dimension of creativity at the level of the body: “inter-action between people as well as within oneself, navigating between discursive, pre-discursive, trans-modal and gestural dimensions of experience, are capacities involved in the maturation of an idea—as well as in its inquiry.” (p.18)

Eugene Gendlin sheds light on “felt sensing” which is an implicit kind of order involved when one thinks or speaks. By separating the implicit precision of felt or “experienced meaning” from its articulation, he dis-

tinguishes between an implicit and a conceptual order (“experienced meaning and “symbols”) and the interactive relation between them in forming, shifting and creating meaning. He answers William James’ question viz., how to address theoretically the anticipatory intention of saying something without replacing it with words that come later. His interventions bear serious consequences for basic notions such as body, language, space, time and situation. His approach presses us to re-conceive meaning in deep continuity with body environment interaction.

The term *enkinaesthesia* is introduced by Susan Stuart to mark the context of lived experiences. She makes clear how verbalized ideas and notions are just the tip of an iceberg that hides the embodied conditions out of which they emerge. Instead of using science to explain the world, she explores “how the “enkinaesthetic field of experience can be used to explain science and situate the grounds of our moral discourse” (2015) (p.19). Her work sensitizes us to “the richness of somato-sensory engagement of feeling bodies, pre-linguistically and interactively grounding the development of sense making” (p.19). She finds out how language use is rooted in child development in the full-bodied responses of infants to their surroundings and stimulations (p.19). She sensitizes the reader to a “natural language”. Her own language is poetic is stretching the imagination to its limits as opposed to the one-dimensional and one-directional (causal) reasoning which goes beyond “individual bodies, including agents and objects, the actual and the anticipated, the cell and organ” (p.19).

Developing Peircean semiosis further, Terrence Deacon shows “how signs are not “simple”, but function on intertwined levels of embodied and symbolic systems” (p.20). Meaning is a complex and multi-leveled interpretive response for him. He warns the reader with the problems of understanding an antecedent generative process within a model applicable to Artificial systems in which parts and components are combined according to certain rules. He brings in the role of whole body as well as the encompassing social context in the emergence of one sentence. They are to be conceived as “products of spontaneous bottom-up self organizing interactions” regulated by arousal moods that involve different brain areas linked with whole-body regulation.

Instead of using distancing involved in the scientific method, Donata Schoeller coins a new term, *close talking* to refer to a “mode of talking that does not detach from the specific way the situation is felt at that moment” (p.112). She regards articulation as “a subtle kind of intrapersonal interaction” (p.112) that clarifies “aspects of a background that functions in the meaning of what is said” (p.112). She demonstrates how cultural and biographical contexts become more articulate in a thoughtful process of articulation that enhances intra-cultural and trans-cultural understanding. Further, such a process cannot be conceived in terms of identifiable intentions. She proposes a view of language on the lines of “an experiential interaction” (p.113) rather than symbolic representation. There is a connection between “individual bodies, contexts, cultures and meaning” which can also be transformed on the basis of practice. In order to understand this, she emphasizes the need of philosophical models that break away from “skeptical interest in meaning that is focused mainly on truth conditions of finished propositions and their classifications” (p.113).

The second claim of the book is to provide evidence for the role of cognition and thinking processes that are often taken for granted in psychotherapy. This is the subject matter of the second section of the book that reflects on the therapeutic effects of radical-reflective techniques in treatment. The last four essays in the volume discuss new methods to focus the patient’s interest in her/his own psychic moves in order to allow obsessive parts of the personality to become more fluid and flexible. The healing effects of being aware in the moment are grounded in the inter-subjective encounters of the therapeutic practice. Colapietro discusses self beyond the abstract level with regard to therapeutic situation. Steven Hayes puts forth a new relational and mindfulness based form of Behavioral Therapy. He brings the individual’s experiential background into picture for scientific understanding of language. Further, he proposes that the individual experiences are always socially and linguistically immersed. Instead of following the usual routes of re-training the client’s behavior, Hayes opens up behavioral therapy to new practices by using methods from Buddhist

meditation practices. He shows that training an enhanced awareness of the present moment of what it is like to be here and now, allows the reframing of what otherwise seems necessarily and unchangeably connected. He views his core analytic unit as an “ongoing act in context” (p.24) which cannot be understood in parts and components involved. Rather, it needs to be considered according to its situatedness and purposiveness. He points the reader to the flexible dimension of meaning and the limitations of understanding the first person as an internal subjective process. Each individual needs to be considered as a social being, extending across ‘the cognitive relations of time, place and person’ (p.24). Patrizia Giampieri-Deutsch refers to new directions that lead across this split between mind and body e.g. in the case of Transference. According to her, the mutual interconnectedness of persons sharing meanings goes beyond language which becomes apparent in the relational empathy: “what patients cannot tell us, they will show us. This experience offered by patients in the analytic session may even be an instantiation in vivo of their early pre-verbal past experience” (p.24). She emphasizes that it is experience that allows us to reestablish “contact and continuity between the own mind and the own body” (p.24). Thinking thus can be conceived not only as one (mental) side of a dualistic framework, but as the very means to reaffirm the continuous relationship between what is called mind and what is called body. Vera Saller dwells on Peircean idea of “abduction” and psychoanalysis. It is related to emotions and is not logical. The practice of *abduction* as a creative technique goes beyond the traditional divide thinking and feeling as mutually exclusive. It is contradictory to the image of a strictly logical thinker.

The book succeeds in delivering what it promises. It is a pleasure for the reader to go through the well articulated essays written with great care and lucidity. The neologisms introduced by the authors act as a starting point for exploring new questions. They do not offer a final solution to the hard problems of meaning and consciousness rather they open up new questions inviting more engagement with states of experience, feelings, emotions, *abductive* aspects of thinking that go beyond deduction and induction. These are not just neologisms in the sense of being only theoretical perspectives to close the mind-body gap but they also exist as methods that are affective in practicing mindfulness, therapy and treatment. The

book makes a good case for practicing radical-reflective approaches. It is a creative criticism of traditional binaries between mind/body, thought/action, public/private, feeling/thinking etc. By sensitizing us to our bodily and lived experiences of meaning, these approaches enrich our scientific, philosophical and every day understanding of human beings.

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