

INTRODUCTORY: FROM CULTURE TO MIND AND BACKWARDS

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The issues of culture and the mind have recently become central in the humanities. Scores of papers, articles and lengthier pieces have appeared in the past decades aiming to explain the phenomena of culture and the mind, and in many ways many of them have successfully accomplished this. We all know that the only two ontological spheres in which our human life takes place are culture along with nature; moreover, the interplay between them has become so complex that it has now become almost impossible to draw a strict line separating them. In the past, philosophers from the time of Plato and Aristotle speculated as to the relationship between nature and the mind, rather than that between culture and the mind, and sought to identify “the place of mind in nature” as two opposites of ontologically different nature. The mind has been considered a substitute for, or the best expression of the nature of culture whose spiritual/intellectual essence was in no doubt. Thus, considering the relationship between culture and the mind is still an issue that has not been satisfactorily analyzed in all its aspects, this is precisely what the current issue of our journal has undertaken to do. Although to some extent it has done so separately in publishing the two symposia: 1. Metaphysics/Ontology of Culture, and 2. Neuropragmatism.

To understand culture at its deepest level means, according to philosophy, going into metaphysics or ontology (without differing in detail between the two). In his lead paper to the first symposium *Joseph Margolis* provides a sort of summary of his philosophy as his search for the answer to the question “what does it mean to be a human person?” And this he finds in the “cultural dimension of the human world” but his is a “post-Darwinian” answer, or a pragmatist one, which he dubs “artifactualist”, in place of the Kantian one that has greatly dominated the philosophy of culture so far. This “artifactualist” conception is based on “a very strong analogy between the creation of an artwork and the *Bildung* of a person” and “artifactuality” is what is unique to human culture. He draws on the Darwinian model of evolution as further defended by authors such as M. Grene, A. Portman, G. H. Mead, L. Wittgenstein, in its application to understanding the human person. Linguageness, normativity, intentionality, morality (*Sittlichkeit*) and historicity are the key features on which we have to focus in our metaphysics of culture.

Not so far from Margolis's conception is the "evolutionary ontology of culture" developed by *Josef Šmajš*. He quite agrees with the creative ("artifactual") nature of culture; however, he stresses the ontological and ecological ("onto-eco-logical") consequences of this very human essence. Evolutionary ontology emphasizes that culture is not to be perceived as either human behavior or a human-created structure that is ontically homogeneous (compatible) with nature. The spontaneous ontical activity of the Universe has created both the nature of the Earth and humans but it has not created culture; it does not actively support it. Culture, the evolutionary-ontological status of which has not yet been developed, is a rather special ontical structure. It is certainly not just information (spiritual culture); it is a "physical" system for which the spiritual culture is a "mere" informational subsystem—a built-in and dispersed "enome", a structural constitutive memory. This memory does not consist of phylogenetically originated genetic information, though, which integrates the biosphere at the subtle genotype level (at the implicate molecular level). It consists of purposefully colored human neuronal information, which comes from the cultural system and which is encoded by human ethnic language. This is the information that conceptually integrates culture at the coarse phenotype (explicit) level.

Šmajš' conception of evolutionary ontology, originally published in his works in Czech (see Šmajš, Krob 2003) and later developed in English (Šmajš 2008) has provoked discussion and criticism but also inspired some authors to follow him further. The contributions that follow in the symposium provide various reflections on Šmajš' ideas. *Zuzana Škorpičková* considers environmental crisis from the standpoint of evolutionary ontology. While accepting the idea of an ontological conflict between nature and culture, she sees the final extinction of the human race, rather than the chances of a biophilic transformation of culture, as the more probable outcome of this global crisis. *Bohuslav Binka* looks at the doctrine of evolutionary ontology from a sociological point of view and argues for its "socialization" in terms of adopting its potential to change current cultural attitudes toward nature. However, to achieve this, evolutionary ontology should adopt a more collaborative attitude, not only a critical one, to social science generally. *Marek Timko* considers the idea of the biophilic transformation of culture from a psychological viewpoint. He joins the current critical trends in cognitive psychology and Gestalt Theory showing the limits of their anti-naturalism, and thus inadvertently stepping in line with the naturalism of Šmajš' evolutionary ontology. *Vratislav Moudr* applies evolutionary ontology to understanding human physical activity. He tries to identify the balance between the anti-nature and biophilic aspects of sports and other physical activity. *Inéz Melichová* and *Róbert Burgan* on the other hand try to suggest arguments held by critics of evolutionary ontology who see it as one of the extreme versions of the contemporary "naturalistic turn" in philosophy.

Thus the issue of naturalism may appear to connect the two symposia in the background. Understanding the human mind is no easier a task than understanding human culture, but viewing the mind as part of culture, or as a cultural phenomenon rather than a purely biological one, is still not a prevailing paradigm. Notwithstanding, the conceptual opposition between culture and nature in explaining the human mind does not seem to work very well or, in other words, naturalism, which conceives of the mind in terms of neuroscience (mind as brain), should not be reductive, yet it should not lead to anti-naturalism ("culturalism"). The dualism between naturalistic and culturalistic conceptions of the human mind should have

ended as, for instance, John Dewey showed in his conception of “cultural naturalism” (see Dewey 2012), followed by other pragmatists, notably Mark Johnson, who laid the foundations of “pragmatist neuroscience” in his works (1987, 2007).

The papers in our second symposium titled “Neuropragmatism” further develop just such an approach to the human mind. In his article, *John Shook*, one of the initiators of a research program on this subject discusses how neuropragmatism re-conceptualizes traditional philosophical concepts such as knowledge, experience, consciousness and reason. He recommends the specific kind of naturalism, a pluralistic and perspectival naturalism (“pragmatic naturalism”). The term “neuropragmatism” itself was coined by *Tibor Solymosi* (see Solymosi 2011), who writes “against representation”—another traditional cognitive concept to be naturalized in a new way through the metaphorical concept of “cultural affordances”. *Mark Tschaepe* reconsiders philosophical questions and neuroscientific answers concerning human cognition. He advocates combining Dewey and Peirce in order to establish a specifically neuropragmatic methodology of inquiry. *Jay Schulkin* provides an account of an ontology and ontogeny of the exploration of visual objects from a pragmatist perspective within neuroscience. He shows how embodied cephalic systems are tied to self-corrective inquiry. *W. Teed Rockwell* also attempts to rethink the fundamental assumptions of cognitive science from the standpoint of neuropragmatism. His target is very precisely reductionist materialism and his analysis shows that there is no incompatibility between neurophilosophy and the humanities. *Roman Madzia*, in a similar vein, proposes the reconciliation of another more or less traditional dualism between epistemological realism and anti-realism (constructionism). He also draws on pragmatism, mostly on G. H. Mead whom he presents as the predecessor of current pragmatist neurophilosophy. By arguing that our cognitive processes are not only “in the head”, but include also interactions in the outer world, the epistemological conception of “constructive realism” may be suggested.

In sum a total of twelve papers, forming the contents of both symposia, bring some non-traditional insights into a traditional topic of the humanities and philosophy. Hopefully, they will be of interest to our readers.

References

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