A FEELING FOR THE ORGANISM: UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY

Steven R. Brown
Kent State University

ABSTRACT: The role of understanding and interpretation in the study of political subjectivity is considered, and the position is advanced that it is unnecessary to insist on a division between the human and natural sciences. An example is provided in terms of value clarification in decision making, with Q technique and factor analysis providing instrumental foundations for two single-case studies. The conclusion is reached that there are two self psychologies, psychoanalytic and generalized, and that the latter must take precedence over the former if the self is ever to be conceived as independent or as other than a function of more basic factors.

Author's address: Department of Political Science Kent State University, Kent, OH 44242-0001.

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The main title of this paper is borrowed from Keller's (1983) biography of Nobel laureate Barbara McClintock, whose advances in maize genetics were said to be due to the fact that she was acquainted with every plant in the field and had the uncanny ability to look through a microscope and see what none of her colleagues could. She was more interested in discrepancies than in uniformities, and sought to render understandable each kernel that was in some way different. But more important, perhaps, was her receptivity: Over and over, her biographer relates,

> ...she tells us one must have the time to look, the patience to "hear what the material has to say to you," the openness to "let it come to you." Above all, one must have "a feeling for the organism." (Keller, 1983: 198)

It is salutary for social scientists to hear this from a natural scientist inasmuch as the current fashion away from "science" and toward understanding and interpretation in social theory can easily be overstated, thus depriving us of what is central to all sciences--namely, the need to have a feeling for the organism, whether individual patient, ear of corn, or the cosmos.

The source point for most contemporary interpretive endeavors is the *verstende Psychologie* and hermeneutics of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), who emphasized the need in the human sciences to take into account intentions, and to grasp action from the actor's point of view. However, the key for Dilthey was not *inner experience* viewed introspectively, but *lived experience* (Dilthey, 1894/1977: 53), i.e., experience which is immediately and unreflectively present and which cannot, as in the natural sciences, be reduced to constituent elements. Understanding a text or another person is a skill or art, and hermeneutics is its method (p. 135), but understanding is not wholly divorced from the natural sciences:

> The process of understanding...is then to be itself regarded as inductive. And this induction does not belong to the class in which a general law is deduced from an incomplete series of instances, but rather to that in which

> a structure, a system of order, is derived from the instances, and which serves to unify them as parts of a whole. Inductions of this sort are common to both the natural sciences and the human studies. Through such an induction, Kepler discovered the elliptical path of the planet Mars. (Dilthey, 1894/1977: 138)

Inductions of this kind are what, since Peirce, have been referred to as abductory, i.e., reasoning from observed effects to plausible causes. But unlike what Dilthey regarded as the determinate elements of the natural sciences, the parts of human discourse are "indeterminately determinate," i.e., fixed within limits: The dictionary establishes the range of a word's meaning, for example, but its actual meaning in a concrete situation is determined by context.

It is one thing to accept, with Dilthey, the need to understand and interpret human behavior, and another to assume that it is necessary to bifurcate science into natural and human compartments. It is obvious that a falling stone lacks the intent to fall, and acceptable *pro tem* to assume that the person who throws the stone does have intent. What is fundamental, however, is not intentionality *per se*, but self referentiality, its absence in the former situation (the stone has no point of view) and its omnipresence in the latter--e.g, "I wanted to see how high I could throw it," "I was trying to knock my frizbee out of the tree," etc., all from the frame of reference of the person.

To insist upon a distinction between the natural and human sciences is to erect yet another dichotomy of questionable necessity, and leads, as in Dilthey's aftermath, to a separation between understanding and explanation, thereby, as Schrag (1986) says, concealing "their common origin in the play of communicative praxis" (p. 73) and preventing their combination "in a joint endeavor of making sense together" (p. 82).[1] The consequence more often than

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[1]According to Rickman (1979: 78), the view that understanding is not unique to human studies because it is used outside them is only of historical interest, the real debate being whether understand-

not is an exaggeration and stereotyping of differences between science and the humanities. Steele (1979), for example, in advocating a hermeneutic approach to psychoanalysis, seeks to distinguish it from the scientific: Following the hermeneutic approach, he says, "One must try to minimize one's presuppositions and remain open to experience" (p. 403); as for science, once it accepts its historicity and fallibility, according to Steele, "it will be closer to hermeneutics for it will have incorporated into its method...an acceptance that time creates changes in understanding" (p. 407); and finally, "The practice of the interpretative disciplines requires a tolerance for ambiguity, an ability to live with partial understandings, and to accept a case formulated on circumstantial evidence" (p. 409).

Yet it is hard to imagine how physics and literary interpretation differ in these respects: The serious scientist not only remains open to experience, but even to ideas which transcend experience (e.g., the relativity of time); the scientist is also aware that time brings changes in understanding (in Newton's day, time itself was regarded as absolute), that ambiguities must be tolerated (the irreducible complementarity of waves and particles), and that evidence for unseen phenomena such as quarks and black holes may be indirect and perhaps inseparable from observation itself (uncertainty principle).

To compound difficulties, practitioners of interpretive disciplines are not always consistent, and occasionally display similarities with the sciences which they criticize. Ulman and Zimmermann (1985), for example, recommend that a modified hermeneutic approach, a "hermeneutic science," incorporate features of Kohut's (1959/1978) self psychology; however, Reed (1987) criticizes self psychology for superimposing a theoretical structure onto textual material (much as in the case of Christian allegories),

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ing is even required *in* the human sciences. Our point is different: Understanding is required in the human studies, but that fact makes them no less a part of science. What is being called into question is not the status of *Verstehen*, but the conventional conception of science.

and for treating manifest elements of patients' verbalizations not as starting points for probing latent meanings, but as hidden translations revelatory of the Kohutian theory of the self.[2] But even classical psychoanalysis, whose procedures Reed considers superior to self psychology, inevitably finds in the patient's dreams and associations evidence of those prior structures and processes dear to the analyst's heart. Steele (1979), for example, while ostensibly promoting hermeneutics--which, one would suppose, focuses on the person's actual beliefs--hedges bets by assuming that conscious reflection cannot be fully trusted; ultimately, Steele redirects attention away from the person's "lived experience" and adopts the psychoanalytically more familiar strategy of "getting behind the surface of what is meant" (p. 394).

It was this tendency to translate what is directly communicated through the strainers of the observer's a priori theoretical categories that led Stephenson (1983) to remind us of the two meanings of interpretation: *ars explicandi* (explanation) and *ars intelligentia* (understanding). The latter alone is

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[2]For a brief overview of *psychoanalytic* self psychology, consult Socarides and Stolorow (1986), who conceive of the self as "an organization of experience, referring specifically to the structure of a person's experience of himself or herself" (p. 44n). (This initial statement approximates the Q-methodological standpoint, which is discussed below and which preceded by more than 20 years Kohut's earliest writing on the topic.) In the next sentence, however, the authors refer to the self not simply as a person's experience, but as a "psychological structure" *through which* experience acquires cohesion, continuity, shape, and organization, a conception which is more mentalistic, structural, and behind-the-scenes than the first, hence less tied to direct experience. In the hands of psychoanalytic self psychology, the self tends to be an epiphenomenal consequence of other more fundamental forces (similar to a dependent variable in social psychology), hence remains incompletely liberated from the nineteenth century metaphysics from which it evolved.

compatible with Sontag's (1961) admonition to "*see* more, *hear* more, *feel* more" before prematurely jumping to conclusions suggested by theory, whether Marxian, psychoanalytic, cognitive, or any other. There is a tendency for one's "working hypothesis" to harden into a "ruling theory," and it was the geologist Chamberlin (1897), in a classic paper, who suggested that the scientist fortify impartiality and detachment by distributing his or her affections across "multiple working hypotheses," none of which could then command undivided loyalty. The complaint, as physiologist Bernard (1865/1927) noted even earlier, is that "men who have excessive faith in their theories or ideas are not only ill prepared for making discoveries; they also make very poor observations" (p. 38).

The problem is not restricted to science: The humanities are likewise rife with categories, each school of thought insisting that its conceptual framework deserves a preferred position by virtue of its location at the apex of intellectual evolution, but "what is not examined at any time is the common category of the category, the *categoriality in general* on the basis of which the categories...may be dissociated" (Derrida, 1972/1982: 182). Categoriality is not simply another category, but the ground for all categories, i.e., that which renders categories possible. Cognitive-affective, real-symbolic, objective-subjective, explanation-interpretation--all such establish rigid and often arbitrary boundaries, encourage exaggerated oppositional thinking and sides-taking, and impose intellectual barriers to a more direct experiencing of and feeling for the organism. Each dichotomy therefore requires systematic deconstruction before the dialectic can proceed in the direction of a more fruitful synthesis.

For physics, deconstruction came through measurement, i.e., in the form of *operationism* (Bridgman, 1927), which served to break down the arbitrary dividing lines between concepts, e.g., between simultaneous vs. nonsimultaneous events: When physics incorporated the necessary measurement procedures, the location of the observer had to be taken into account and the absoluteness of simultaneity disappeared. Hermeneutics also recognizes the importance of method, although the recog-

nition is often accompanied by ambivalence: Steele (1979), for example, takes the view that "one simply cannot separate one's methods from one's speculations and findings" (p. 395), and this appears to lead him to skepticism; however, this same inseparability of method and result, which also characterizes the measurement of quantum phenomena, is grasped with optimism by Ackermann (1985) who sees in it the possibility of instrumentally extending the social scientific horizon: "What the human sciences require for more dramatic progress is not simply more data..., but new instrumentation for obtaining data...so that more exhaustive explanatory possibilities can be tried" (p. 169).

An Example: Clarifying Values

> ...values are always present in the initial selection of a problem. (Lynd, 1939: 184)

Some meat of substance can perhaps be added to the bones of contention above by examining the values-clarification phase of a concrete decision-making setting. The question posed to a group of organizational reformers was: Which problem or problems, of the many facing our agency, should be selected to serve as a focal point for promoting organizational change? A universe of possible problems was elaborated through the use of a nominal group technique, a kind of disciplined, group-centered, free-association method which led to the specification of 21 problems, such as "the role and status of the agency newsletter," "the relationship of the agency to the wider community," "programmatic innovations between departments," and so forth, most of which would sound quite esoteric to an outsider.

As a first step in *procedural* value clarification (Lasswell, 1958), each group member was instructed to Q sort the set of 21 problems by rank ordering them according to *personal interest*, i.e., by ranking the problems (each typed on a card) from "those problems which I would be most interested in studying (+3) to those I would be most disinterested in studying (-3)." On successive occasions, the various problems were evaluated vis-a-vis one another by

rank ordering them in terms of eight criteria (conditions of instruction):

Personal: (described above)
Authority: Those problems the examination of which would be most threatening to the authorities (+3)...least threatening (-3).
Tractability: Those problems most capable of being solved (+3)....
Urgency: The most urgent problems in the sense that they might take precedence due to their importance.
Projection: Problems apt to get worse faster if nothing is done to correct them.
Morality: Problems which carry a moral imperative, i.e., which ought to be addressed for moral reasons.
Feelings: Problems which are personally upsetting to me, i.e., which stir emotions of anger, depression, etc.
Human Dignity: Issues which, if successfully confronted, would contribute most to the enhancement of human dignity.

The *authority* condition sought to capture each participant's perception of the opposition that might be faced from the power elite were certain issues addressed, and also to focus on Torgerson's (1986) assertion that policy scientists have a special obligation to raise questions that might be uncomfortable for the status quo. The *tractability* condition sought to obtain participants' assessments of the solvability of each problem compared to the others. The *urgency* condition focused on the relative importance, or criticalness, of the problems. *Projection* represented the future, or anticipatory, aspect of the policy process: What does the future hold if we do nothing? *Morality* and *feelings* invoke propriety and the passions (the superego and id of classical psychoanalytic theory). *Dignity* sought to encompass the Lasswellian generalization of the shaping and sharing of all values. Hence, the conditions of performance provided surrogates of important features of the policy process which enter at least implicitly into the policy-making mind.

Table 1
Decision Structures

Conditions	J's Factors J1	J2	J3	K's Factors K1	K2	K3
1 Personal	X			X		
2 Authority	X	X		X		
3 Tractability	X				X	
4 Urgency		X		X		
5 Projection		X				X
6 Morality			X	X		
7 Feelings		X		X	X	
8 Dignity		X		X		

X = significant factor loadings

The 8 Q sorts produced by each of the policy makers were intercorrelated, and the 8×8 matrix was factor analyzed (centroid method); factor scores (from +3 to -3) were then estimated for each of the 21 problems in each of the resulting factors. The results for two of the policy makers are shown in Table 1.

Consider Mr. K first: His three factors (K1, K2, K3) indicate that his eight performances divided into three classes: The classes are not purely logical or arbitrary, but reflect the fact that K's subjective evaluations were of three different (uncorrelated) kinds. Specifically, K's own personal preferences (Q sort no. 1) are associated with what he would consider discomfiting to the elites (no. 2), as urgent (4), as moral (6), as affectively arousing (7), and as contributory to human dignity (8). Inasmuch as K's own preferences are captured by factor K1, we may say that this factor is *him* rather than simply *his* (James, 1890: 291).[3] By way of contrast, factor

[3]Which demonstrates that even a hermeneutic science can have its laws. In this case, *James's Law* states that of the operant factors which emerge from

K2 contains K's assessment of which problems are tractable (Q sort no. 3): This is simply a perception of K's and is in no way self involving, hence its orthogonality to K1.

A hermeneutic treatment, according to Steele (1979: 404), is like solving a puzzle in which the parts find meaning in terms of the whole, with emphasis on "good configuration." Space precludes going into detail, but the following scores indicate the extent to which K's first factor is schematized:

- Conditions affecting the work climate (+3)
- Changes in agency governance (+3)
- Worker apathy--its causes and consequences (0)
- Housing status (near or distant) and its effect on worker activities (-3)
- The role and status of the workers in Department X (K's department) in the larger agency (-3)

Within the framework imposed, K is cosmopolitan rather than parochial inasmuch as he is concerned with activity at the agency level rather than with his department within the agency--or, to be more accurate, his view is that the situation at the periphery is heavily influenced by politics at the center, and that the place to institute changes is at the system level. Hence, to become involved with Department X's personnel or with small matters such as housing location is to lose track of the truly important issues, such as the work atmosphere and agency governance, both of which attract the highest score (+3). Worker apathy is neither here nor there (score 0).

Briefly, factor K2 measures what K perceives to be tractable problems--e.g., subordinate-worker involvement in Department X's decision making (a local matter) and programmatic innovations between departments, both of which receive a score of +3 in K2 (but only +1 in K1). These are solvable problems, but they aren't apt to be earth shaking (hence the authorities will condone activities of this kind) and

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any single case, some will be "me" (with self reference) and others only "mine" (without self reference).

are not apt to impact much on human dignity. K is therefore relatively disinterested in these matters.

Note, before moving on to consider J, that these factors have to be more than simply described (in a purely surface sense): They have to be interpreted. And the basis of the interpretation, as Kohut (1959/1978) indicated, is through the use of empathy, i.e., by putting oneself in K's shoes and endeavoring to grasp the lived experience of his factors from the inside out.

The definition of Ms. J's factors is also shown in Table 1, and whereas K's problem preferences were bolstered by affect and a sense of morality, J's preferences are more expedient and pragmatic, and without emotional involvement. As Table 1 shows, factor J1 carries self involvement (Q sort no. 1), and the only other condition purely defining J1 is tractability; i.e., J prefers to work on those problems which she assesses as solvable--not moral (factor J3) or urgent (J2) or even contributory to human dignity (J2), but solvable. The factor scores indicate that J is most interested in the setting of objectives for agency achievements (+3 on factor J1) and in the status of foreign workers within the agency (+3). Value conflicts and matters of physical and emotional abuse within the agency are judged to be moral and emotional issues (factors J2, J3), and are matters which J does not wish to address.

The interpretive renderings above barely scratch the surface, of course, but they do serve to indicate how Q method reveals the structural surface of the subjectivity at issue, and how interpretation remains close to what the individuals observed were actually thinking, *in their terms*. However, it is also possible to return to the data with a psychologist's eye, and to consider the psychodynamic and cognitive significance of decision making within this particular context.

The most noticeable feature, already alluded to, is the extent to which J has separated her feelings (moral as well as emotional) from her policy preferences and has adopted a pragmatic stance, gravitating to those problems which promise easier

solution.[4] Such a person might be more inclined toward administrative rather than agitational work, i.e., to arranging rather than confronting. But K's factors show interesting features as well: not only is there more confluence between preference and emotion, the latter providing the steam required for perseverance, there is also an extremely high association between K's preferences (Q sort no. 1) and those topics which he believes would be most upsetting to the elites (no. 2)--i.e., of all the problems which the group could address, K prefers those which he believes agency authorities would prefer he not address. This discovery, which is quite marked in the data, is of some considerable theoretical interest inasmuch as K was unaware of this connection until the factors (which he himself produced) were shown to him.

In Conclusion

There are, it seems, two distinct self psychologies with equally distinct theories of subjectivity accompanying them. The one, *psychoanalytic* self psychology, is associated with Heinz Kohut (1959/1978), who conceives of the self as an "experience-near psychoanalytic abstraction" which exists in "a sort of side-by-side state within the mind but not as a traditional agency of the mental apparatus" (Chessick, 1985, p. 117). As with the traditional agencies, however, the Kohutian self is inaccessible save through the empathic capabilities of an external observer, and even then only approximately:

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[4]Alternatively, certain problems (e.g., violence and value conflicts, factors J2 and J3) may create personal conflicts for J, leading her to defend herself by fleeing into pragmatism (tractability, J1). Such would be *Freud's Law*, that individuals defend their factors, and also defend against them, and such would be the kinds of theoretical possibilities that can suggest themselves and provide the basis for further probes.

> We cannot, by introspection and empathy, penetrate to the self per se; only its introspectively or empathically perceived psychological manifestations are open to us. Demands for an exact definition of the nature of the self disregard the fact that "the self" is not a concept of an abstract science, but a generalization derived from empirical data. (Kohut, 1977: 311)

The self is therefore experience-near, but always somewhat out of reach--something which can be penetrated *toward* but not *to*.

By the same token, the subjectivity associated with this variety of self psychology seems to refer to a special kind of feeling state--introspective, sensitive, private--which can be enhanced and cultivated like a skill. Pletsch (1985), for example, in advocating more subjectivity in psychoanalytic biography, remarks as follows:

> Subjectivity remains a frightening thing. (p. 357)
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> In our culture subjectivity is associated with a whole range of negatively valorized characteristics. (p. 357)
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> People who cultivate subjectivity are likely to be lonely, dependent, morose, morbid, and so on. (p. 358)

On this account, a visitor from another planet might infer that subjectivity is something out of the ordinary, and which, if you happen to have a bad case of it, should be kept confidential.

By way of contrast, *generalized self psychology*, as we will refer to it, and which is associated with William Stephenson (e.g., 1953, chap. 11; 1979; 1987), regards the self not as impenetrable, negatively valorized, or covert (or even experience-near), but as immediately presentable: It is on the surface and more overtly attitudinal, as when a person says "I am generally an easy-going person," or "I sometimes get upset for no good reason," or whatnot. Although not covert, the self at issue may be implicit: "[I believe that] The U.S. should leave the Nicaraguans alone." The only categorical dis-

tinction is that between statements of fact (which are without self reference) and those of opinion (with self reference). Only the latter are at issue in a generalized psychology of the self.

The subjectivity at issue is likewise omnipresent: it is not something cultivated or private; rather it is in all we say or do "from my point of view." Its main characteristic is that it is communicable; i.e., not consciousness, but communicability is at issue (Stephenson, 1968, 1980). Consequently, it is purely empirical: statements are uttered, then collected into a concourse, and a representative sample is returned to the person in the form of a Q sort, the factor analysis of which leads to results such as reported in Table 1. No a priori presumptions are imposed on the data, e.g., that this or that statement *necessarily* means or implies something in particular. It is a *generalized* approach inasmuch as it can be used by cognitive psychologists (e.g., Conover & Feldman, 1984) and social constructionists (Kitzinger, 1986) as well as by psychoanalysts (McKeown, 1984). These are *specialized*, not general applications: Cognitive, constructionist, and psychodynamic theories have the status of *explanations* and are not the same as the data which they explain. The data themselves are unequivocally and unmistakably subjective and self referential.

Which is not to say that there is no theory or laws in generalized self psychology, but the theory which exists and the laws which are employed arise with respect to the subjectivity itself. Mention has been made already of James's Law (that some factors are "me," others "mine") and Freud's Law (factors are defended), to which could be added Rogers's (self and ideal conceptions are congruent under adjusted conditions), Sullivan's (selves take meaning in terms of me-you dynamics), and others. None of these is antithetical to hermeneutics or Dilthey's *Verstehen*; in fact, understanding is at the very center of the Q-sorting operation (Stephenson, 1963).

Of utmost importance is the fact that generalized self psychology incorporates modern scientific principles--not of the mechanical cause-and-effect kind, however, but quantum conceptions (Stephenson, 1988/1989). In addition, sophisticated measuring procedures are at hand for extending the observer's

powers of perception and empathy: narrative truths go some distance and provide valuable leads, but there is always need in science for something more substantial if it is available, as Stephenson has shown with respect to the intersubjectivity of the transference-countertransference (1985), and with children's presumed internalization of violence in movies (1976).

In the final analysis, therefore, and insofar as the self as directly experienced is concerned, generalized self psychology must take precedence over its specialized applications, whether in psychoanalysis, learning theory, cognitive theory, or political theory. For only if the self can be examined *on its own terms*, independently of specialized understandings, will we be able to truly develop a feeling for the organism, and only then will such knowledge be available for particular purposes.

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