PERSPECTIVES ON Q METHODOLOGY:

I. STATEMENTS OF PROBLEMS

William Stephenson
University of Missouri

Without foreknowledge, we subscribe to philosopher Richard McKeon's thesis that there are two kinds of "statements" involved in advancing knowledge, one "statements of fact" (for discussions to establish their truth or falsehood) and the other, "statements of problems" (for discussions "to explore the range of meanings and variety of facts to which they apply") (McKeon, 1967: 26). Positivist science deals with the former. Q is essentially concerned with "statements of problems."

This is what was involved when, in the early 1950s, I read a paper at the Psychological Center, Bethesda, critical of the research articles in the current psychological journals, all in the hypotheticodeductive framework: In every case there were other theories, and therefore the likelihood of other problems to face before common sense was altogether discounted. About any behavioral situation much more is likely to be at issue than meets the eye. Thus, if we wonder why teenagers become drug addicts there could be a different complexion of reasons for every addict: How, indeed, does one begin an inquiry into the matter? Is it cultural, economic, ignorance, psycho-

Operant Subjectivity, 1984(Jul), *7*(4), 110-114.

logical, sociological, genetic? A wide-ranging questionnaire "covering the waterfront" could provide facts galore, but no theoretical basis for a probe into issues. What Q offers is from the standpoint of an individual addict--his or her cogitations, wishes, and ramblings concerning the addiction. Factor structure from even one addict could in principle provide a first look at a range of problems at issue, each a meaning with some facts (now functional) to support the question it raises.

THE PROBLEM OF SUBJECTIVE CONCEPTS

That factor structures are essentially "statements of problems" is illustrated by research with subjective concepts. Psychological literature is replete with concepts such as "stress," "loneliness," "hope," "concern," "time and inner future," "adolescent sexuality," "agorophobia," and a hundred other abstractions; and researches are conducted in their terms, the abstractions changing decade after decade, in never-ending efforts for scientific stature. Ezra Stotland began his investigations on *The Psychology of Hope* (1969) fully aware that "hope" is a subjective concept. He wanted above all to be scientific, and therefore (he argued) objective--to be involved in "hard-nose" research about the "perceived possibility of achieving goals." In defending his central concept, "hope," he thought it was immeasurable, yet for him it remained a viable scientific construct. And everyone argues in this same vein for his or her own subjective construct.

For example, consider "concern." Fuller (1969, 1970) gathered "statements of fact" about psychological counseling, by way of "phenomenological observations" (Fuller's term):

> ... Data have come from individual and group counselling typescripts, records of depth interviews at graduation, from teachers' written statements and from videotapes of classroom teaching. A dependable pattern of concerns arises. (Quoted by Thompson, Frankiewicz & Ward, 1983: 41)

The investigator then wonders what could cause such "dependable patterns of concerns," and constructed a test to "explore concerns-related dynamics."

Seven dimensions of the dynamics were defined *a priori*: Roles of counsellors, theories of counselling, firmness with clients, being liked by clients, being respected by professionals, skill in empathizing, and facilitating the development of clients. A validity study determined how far the test instrument, based on these dimensions, measured them.

An investigation with more than one hundred counselling trainees provided evidence for these postulated dimensions, and also indicated a possible process of development for some of the trainees: But it also found that other trainees didn't fit the presuppositions--instead of being on a process line, they were directly interactive ("impact oriented"). Which happens every time such investigations are pursued: Important effects have usually been overlooked. After years of research on "cognitive dissonance," and hundreds of research publications (e.g., Abelson et al., 1968), Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance (1957) was left wide open, with a conclusion by M. Brewster Smith (1968) that "to be useful in the development of consistency theory, more precise and better specified conceptions in the sphere of self are obviously called for" (p. 372). In short, there is little real theory, but much categorization which limits discovery.

What, then, does Q make of this?

It presents the problem of all such "theories": They are the thoughts of investigators who have failed to examine the "statements of problems" at issue. Each, therefore, demands his or her own particular theory. The counsellor-trainee's "concern" about pupils is likely to require one theory, and that of a physician about dying patients, another. Subjectivity is everywhere assumed, or is protopostulatory, and usually ignored: Or, if accepted, is just another categorization. Each investigation is indeed *sui genesis*, as if undertaken by a Robinson Crusoe on his secluded island, out of touch with knowledge other than that developed for his own concepts.

For Q, it is very different, for now there is a general theory for consciousness; concourse theory is everywhere involved; as is a technique for self reference (Q technique) and factor theory with a standard basis for all measurement (the quantsal unit), all on probabilistic grounds. The discovery of operant factors makes possible the induction of new concepts, by Newton's Fifth Rule, i.e., with empirical, operational, and operant foundations. Thus is nature probed empirically, and essentially non-categorically.

In Q the "phenomenological observations" of Fuller would be the concourse of self-referrable statements made by trainees; any logical structure would be used to form a Fisherian balanced block design; a Q sample would follow, and Q sorts for a few trainees. The conditions of instruction for the Q sorts derive from the existing body of knowledge about *consciring*--namely, such as James' law, Rogers' law, Freud's law and the rest, as well as from the interbehavioral system of J.R. Kantor (1959). Operant factors thereupon replace categorical "dimensions" or other theoretical formulations, such as proliferated about "cognitive dissonance."

Q, therefore, is not just one more method, comparable to any other: It is perfectly general about all subjective communicability. It provides "statements of problems" (factors) for discussion as to the range of meanings at issue, as well as the variety of facts (factor arrays) to which they apply. Each concept, say of "concern," "hope," "loneliness" or the like, or "cognitive dissonance," becomes a set of self-referent operants, subject to complementariness.

William Stephenson, 2111 Rock Quarry Road, Columbia, MO 65201

REFERENCES

Abelson, R.P. et al. (Eds.). (1968) *Theories of cognitive consistency: A sourcebook.* Chicago: Rand McNally.

Festinger, L. (1957) *A theory of cognitive dissonance.* Evanston IL: Row, Peterson.

Fuller, F.F. (1969) Concerns of teachers: A developmental conceptualization. *American Educational Research Journal*, *6*, 207-226.

Fuller, F.F. (1970) *Personalized education for teachers.* Austin TX: The Research and Development Center for Teacher Education.

Kantor, J.R. (1959) *Interbehavioral psychology: A sample of scientific system construction.* Bloomington IN: Principia Press.

McKeon, R. (1967) Scientific and philosophic revolutions. In F.J. Crosson (Ed.), *Science and contemporary society.* London: University of Notre Dame Press.

Smith, M.B. (1968) The self and cognitive consistency. In R.P. Abelson et al. (Eds.), *Theories of cognitive consistency: A sourcebook.* Chicago: Rand McNally.

Stotland, E. (1969) *The psychology of hope.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Thompson, B., R.G. Frankiewicz & G.R. Ward (1983) Cross-technique validation of attitude measures. *Operant Subjectivity*, *6*, 37-50.

Stephenson expands on the theme of "statements of problems" in a forthcoming article in the *Psychological Record* (see "News, Notes & Comment").

In the next issue: "Perspectives in Q Methodology: II. Monistic Protopostulate of Communicability."

With the development of electronic computers the present time is especially favorable for developing exact mathematical solutions, and these will become increasingly available so the popularity of objective methods of factor rotation is thus assured, but care is needed to ensure that judgmental methods are not forgotten and that their potential use in new applications is also recognized. (John W. Thompson)