PRINCIPLES FOR THE STUDY OF SUBJECTIVITY*

William Stephenson
University of Missouri

SUBJECTIVITY IN ESSE

A distinction is drawn between two dictionary definitions of "subjectivity." One is the condition of viewing things exclusively through the medium of one's own mind (which we accept as our fundamental concern) and the other, consciousness of our own perceived states (which we reject).

Consciousness is rejected because what is involved is little more than a conversational matter (Stephenson, 1968). The human being, for us, is most profoundly a communicable creature, and communicability, not consciousness, is what mediates in his process through life. Consciousness, we shall learn, is merely a categorical term, subsuming talk (for the main part) in relation to functional-interactional situations.

These situations take two forms, objective and sub-

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jective. The objective form is in relation to "outside," as when we pay allegiance to a king. The subjective is "within" us, as when we say our soul is our own.

Science, we shall maintain, is applicable to both kinds of situation. We begin, indeed, with what Popper (1959) described in the Preface to the English Edition of his *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* as the central problem, common to everyone, namely--

> ...*the problem of understanding the world--including ourselves, and our knowledge, as part of the world* (p. 15).

It is our problem too. But by way of a very simple, if ingenious formulation of *concourses*, we can now venture to understand ourselves, and all knowledge, besides the "outside" part of the world, on scientific grounds.

The objective mode is in terms of "statements" of fact and predictability, that is, instructions informing us what has to be done, or has already been done, to bring about change "outside" (Stephenson, 1972). Characteristically these "statements" are singular, like a mathematical equation, or as when we say "the boiling point of water is 100°C at sea level." The real world, a famous psychologist reminded us, is one of accomplishment (Koffka, 1935). The practical arts, and all sciences up to now, are based on making change "outside" as the only way to be sure of reality. The most far-reaching theoretical physics has to return at some point to an experiment. Einstein's prediction that light would bend as it passed the sun is the exemplary case; but his equations for the "outside" cosmos, which started at zero time with a mass of infinite density and infinitesimal size and became, in one mighty bang the expanding universe, is surely the very apotheosis of change!

The subjective form of communicability is our primary concern and involves no such change. It is within ourselves, involving our thoughts, wishes, emotions, opinions, fantasies, dreams, beliefs--in a word our "mind." We can conjure nothing of this into

"outside" reality--no one has materialized any of it into objects in the world outside. This form of communicability is characteristically diffuse; its statements have "excess meaning" (as in synthetic propositions); it is subject to expansion as *understanding* and not to prediction; its explication is in terms of concourses, and of structure, configuration, and synthesis, all of which we shall explain in the sequel.

Communicability, moreover, is not merely acceptance of a linguistic philosophy, or any process of language analysis. The notion that there are no genuine philosophical problems, or if there are, that they are problems of language usage, is replaced in our approach by a profound empiricism, that whatever the philosopher has said that is subjective is subject to concourses and their scientific explication.

In this connection, therefore, we do not accept the position of philosophers who hold that reality is known only to the senses (positivism), or with those who place reality with values in the soul (historicism). We are satisfied with the premise of communicability *per se*. This, of course, will be elaborated upon in the sequel: its immediate advantage is that it makes science possible for subjectivity, the mode of communicability that members of the Vienna Circle and Wittgenstein (1922) ignored. It makes possible the empirical study of all modes of thought, and of all philosophy in particular, from that of a Plato to that of a modern-day Popper.

THE FUNCTIONAL-INTERACTIONAL POSITION

The scientific approach to subjectivity depends upon two profound principles, one that the concern is with functional-interactions, and the other that subjectivity can have statistical foundations.

The functional-interaction postulate is common to all science, objective as well as subjective. The latter has been plagued (and still is) by categorical attributions. We say that sugar is sweet, but functionally it sweetens. We call a crow black, but functionally it is a concatenation in time of flop-

ping wings, sombre greys, bright sheens and noisy cawings, in innumerable formations. We call a handshake a greeting; but a hundred gestures, remarks, and acts of recognition mark the incident (Douglas, 1975). Similarly, we say that thinking goes on in one's mind; instead, in functional-interactions, statements of opinion and fact are being spoken (Stephenson, 1968).

If, then, we replace thing-attribute terms or "object" terms by functional language, there is at once a proliferation of communicable possibilities--they were there all the time, buried like treasure under the dead weight of categorizations. Categories are, for us, merely tentative designations; our concern in subjectivity is with concrete situations (Stephenson, 1953) which always require functional-interactional representations.

THEORY OF CONCOURSES

The second principle generalizes what have hitherto been postulated as statistical universes or populations of "statements" in Q methodology, to a broader concept of *concourses*, in relation to concrete situations and functional-interactional conditions in subjectivity.

The conversational possibilities for any subjective notion, idea, concept, wish, dream, etc., are defined by concourses. Thus, "holy" has thousands of communicative possibilities: dictionaries hint at only a few of them, for example "saintly," "sinless," "godly," "sanctified." Empirically, all such meanings are spoken or written, in conversations or communication with people, or as musings within oneself, or in other modes of communication (acting, artistic, symbolic, etc.). The statements are usually declarative, of the kind "I am sure saints are holy," or "I feel humble when I sip holy water"...and so on in an infinitude of interactions.

Every notion, idea, concept, etc. of subjective functioning can be represented by a large number of such "statements," all of which have self-referent possibilities: the representation, an empirical mat-

ter, is called a *concourse*, the theory for which has been developed (Stephenson, 1978).

Statements of a concourse are not always at first sight verbal. The concourse for *chair* as a concept can be implied by a collection of photographs of all the chairs we can find, down the ages and across cultures: as such they represent objects, but in Q the concern would be with how the chairs enter into communication, for example what a person likes about them, or feels about them. The concourse for olfaction would be all possible liquids in 1/2 oz. bottles: our concern would not be with so-called attributes of olfaction, but with what people could be communicative about with respect to them, for example in Q sorting them under many different conditions of instruction ("floral" to "woodsy" and the like).

The concourses we shall use will always be verbal, if possible, because that is where subjectivity is *in esse*.

Concourses have ecological roots: they are taken from persons in communication in a community or commonality of some kind, much as is described in sociolinguistics (Hymes, 1974). A concourse about religious feelings for rural American women in Texas would be different from one for scholarly theologians, and different from one for poets. Concourses can be gathered from face-to-face conversations, or from the writings of philosophers, theologians, or others expressing views about (say) religion. Tillich's (1956) *Dynamics of Faith*, or Cassirer's (1951) *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* or any other such work is a source of a concourse or concourses within which philosophers and theologians can be expected to be communicational.

The number of concourses is infinite: every concept, every aspect of subjectivity, is a veritable swarm of self-referable statements, like bees about a queen.

Any concourse constitutes a universe or population in a purely statistical sense (the statements can be counted), with the assumptions for communication theory purposes that all statements of a concourse are equally probable *a priori*, and equipotential *a priori*.

COMMUNICATION

The scientific study of subjectivity is at its beginning and the last thing one wants to become involved in is any discussion of the relativity of language and thought. Our concern is not with language as such, nor thought as such, but with communication, that is, with the *use* of language and other symbolizations. For us, language is *used*, and the differences it entails across cultures merely reflect cultural differences. That language can deceive us is taken for granted--words can "charm men into notions far from the truth of things" (Locke)--but only in its use. The animadversions of Sapir, Whorf, Korzybski, Chomsky and other semanticists are of little direct concern to us, except to say that because we are only at the beginning, it is sufficient to hold that subjectivity and language are intrinsically conjoined. The Whorfian position, that the language one speaks determines not only one's world view (culture), but also the way one thinks, is basically a position about language *use* (Penn, 1972).

In communication theory, however, as described in our paper (Stephenson, 1969), attributive language is distinguished from functional. To say that "God is Holy" is attributive, an abstraction from innumerable ways in which God, presumably, functions in this manner. A thousand statements vis-a-vis His "holiness" can be collected at any time by simply asking twenty persons to comment on "holiness," or, better, by making conversations with them about reproductions of works of art, for example, from Giotto's *Life of Christ* or Michelangelo's *Madonna and Child*.

Quite ordinary people say of Giotto's *The Nativity* (if we put aside factual statements about it) that "it's religious," "it's quiet," "it's calm," "it doesn't ask for adoration, just love," "it's peaceful"...and so on. In each case the statement is self-referent: it is *I* who feels it is peaceful. Michelangelo's *Madonna and Child* is just as holy, but now the statuesque Madonna is spoken of as "aloof," "she has to be worshipped," "she's godlike," "it's for us to adore," "majestic," "sad, as though all the cares

of the world are upon her," "but proud"...and so on with scarcely any end.

A study of the concept "holy" will therefore involve a concourse of all such statements.

This is analogous to a theory long known to general psychology (which, oddly enough, was also called subjective psychology) as "apperceptive mass." The problem for early psychologists was to explain how whole concatenations of ideas came to mind together: when we take up a newspaper we may first look at the foreign news, then at sports, then at the comics, and at each shift there is a gross change from one complex set of ideas to another. We are on familiar ground at each switching. What was puzzling is that the concern is not with memory, or with knowledge or information about places, things, dates or other facts that we can recall, or such as we learn and commit to memory. The "mass" is not merely a storehouse of information. Instead, the concern is with subjectivity, discussed often as subconsciousness. No one knows what the morning news will contain: yet the news fits into a ready-for-it context, as though one had known about it beforehand. The news today may lead us to recall a fact in yesterday's news: even so, we read a great deal more without regard to anything so reproducible. We may, on occasion, be incited to write a letter to the editor, or to send a telegram to the President of the United States, but usually what we read is entirely subjective to us. What we read is characterized primarily by self-involvement.

Communication theory, in this respect, gives substance to the old concept of subconsciousness, by defining empirically the statements entering into a concourse.

It should be added that no dictionary definitions can approach, for richness, number of ideas and topicality, the empirical derivation of concourses. Nothing in dictionaries can compare with the volume of such statements on any concept or idea, such as is illustrated above for the concept "holy," provided by ordinary individuals. Obviously such concourses are in relation to the culture of the persons.

It was knowledge of this, one suspects, that led Hamann (1960) to maintain, one hundred and fifty years ago, that the language of everyday speaking, the speech of common folk, expresses the "innermost soul" of a culture. The "genius of a language" is not just its poetry, but its folktalk as well. We do not go as far as Hamann in supposing that this conversation of orindary people is closest to "reality" ("the immediacy of reality"): but we do use common conversational subjectivity as at least a control in our Q studies.

THEORY OF MEANING

We can scarcely hope to go far with a science of subjectivity without reference to meaning. For our purposes, all meaning begins with concourses, about which there is a developmental position to maintain.

In this we follow Schachtel (1959:252) with his concept of "focalizing attention." By the time a child is three years old it begins to reflect or mediate with respect to its own feelings, and develops notions of *himself* (as "me") and what is *his* ("mine"). From then on the child explores the outer world, and his inner experiences, by countless acts of such mediations, called "focalizing attention" by Schachtel. The activity is never-ending, staggering in its dimensions, and all-pervasive in the development and maturation of the child.

Q sorting is a technical way to represent such "focalizing attention." It captures the mind, so to speak, at its everyday activity.

With respect to the outside world the child becomes communicable under restrictions and constraints: he may pick up a book, not a piano. If he is a member of a "positional" family (Bernstein, 1971) he must sit at one place at a dinner table, and eat fish on a Friday, and his communicability is comparably restrained. But within one's mind the constraints are lessened, and one can toss pianos about like peanuts. Nor, in a "personal" family, are the socializing constraints so onerous and forbidding: ideation is freer. When adolescence is reached, concourses

are ubiquitous for everyone; with story book pictures they are already forming at four or five years of age, as our empirical studies testify.

Meaning is developed, we are to suppose, in relation to different configurations of the "statements" of a concourse. As we shall indicate later, changes are brought about in the *a priori* possibilities and *a priori* potentialities of the "statements," in given functional-interactional situations, by way of "focalizing attention."

A Q sample, in this schema, is a sample from a concourse; and we experiment with meanings by Q sorting the "statements" of Q samples.

An early indication of this position was afforded in a paper which the author regards as perhaps the most interesting empirical study he has made, his "Methodology of Trait Analysis" (Stephenson, 1956). In this it was shown that the thousands of words in *Roget's Thesaurus* concerning personality traits could be derived, *as to meaning*, from combinations and permutations of as few as six or seven bi-polar factors. These factors had an empirical origin, in how people thought of one another's overt conduct, i.e., their habituated "mode of regard" of others. As the sequel will show, configurations of factors are the *fons et origo* of meaning.

THEORY OF MEASUREMENT

The difficulty about experimenting with meaning in the past has been that its measurement, for example in MacKay's (1969) theory of meaning in his *Information, Mechanism, and Meaning*, depended upon statistical conceptions in relation to the objective world, that is, in relation to predictability. Thus, with respect to the statement "it is raining," it is a simple objective matter to test whether it is true or not--one puts one's hand outside, to feel the rain. But subjectively, "it is raining" may conjure up a thousand preconceived notions with respect to courses of action, past experience, and the like--one may look for an umbrella, cancel an appointment, dash out to close the car windows, and so on for a host of

possibilities. They constitute a concourse for "it is raining." But how are we to achieve predictability in such a complex? Or is this what we *should* be attempting?

Thus, if I'm leaving for the office, it is a preconceived possibility that, if it is raining, I need my raincoat. This will depend, however, upon whether a downpour is expected, or only a shower; and if we want to predict whether I will in fact put on my raincoat or take an umbrella only, probability data will be necessary, to show whether I am apt to ignore a raincoat if all that is expected is a shower. With respect to "it is raining," however, there are innumerable possibilities of this kind, each involving some sort of *a priori* probability statistic, i.e., based on ascertainable behaviors, objectively regarded and counted for statistical populations of events, people, or the like. The task of predicting in such a manner is surely formidable!

Yet what happens when a concrete situation is at issue and someone declares "it is raining," is at once measurable--provided we are not trying to be predictable, but merely trying to *understand* what is happening in the situation. The irate husband, late for work already, may go into a frenzy: "Damn it, I left my umbrella at the office"; "Why in heaven's name did you take my raincoat to the cleaner's yesterday?"; "What fool left the car windows open?"; "Why does it rain everytime I'm late?"; "Get the cat out of my way!"--all of this, and much more, on his wife remarking that "it's raining." Clearly for us, the husband is an organized creature, in a functional situation, whatever may be his frustrations and disarray. His *self*, or something of that order, is at issue.

If one's interest is in predicting the husband's behavior (umbrella when it showers, raincoat and umbrella if it pours), which has been the way of science up to now, one has to go the way of *a priori* probability data. All is in relation to change in the real world. But if we stay within the husband's mind and let him, himself, perform measurements along Q-methodological lines, we have no need for probabil-

ity data, nor indeed for any concern with facts as such as objectively regarded. It means foregoing any immediate predictability; instead, we can determine *why* the husband was communicating as he did. Nor is this to look for causes in the "real" world sense (for example, that the husband had quarrelled with his wife on the previous evening). The concern is with something different, namely, the structure of his subjectivity as such in the concrete situation. This is the *meaning* we give to the situation; and also the meaning the subject may give to it.

Obviously, we would represent the situation by a concourse of statements made by the husband (and others in the situation, such as the wife). A Q sample taken from this is the basis for determining what the incident meant to the husband (and to us as investigator, or to his wife); we merely ask the participants in the situation to represent matters by Q sorts, under specified conditions of instruction; when these are factored, operant factor structure is possible, and this is our basic concern. These structures are *sui generis*, new to science, as we shall see, and these are the nexus for the meaning of the situation so probed and represented.

The measurements are made by the Q sorter himself about his own meanings: it is axiomatic that only the person, himself, can measure his own subjectivity. He does so in standard quantum terms whose *mean* is zero, and its standard deviation 1.00 for any Q sort, any condition of instruction, any factor, any Q sample, any concourse.

THEORY OF SELF

To a theory of concourses, and another of meaning, we also have to add a third, of self, to complete the foundations for a science of subjectivity.

The self has had increasing attention in recent years from several psychologists and scholars in this country, for example from the sociologist Gouldner (1970), and the scientist Stent (1975). The conceptions, however, are invariably categorical, and no widely acceptable theory of self exists. Stent,

indeed, argues that the concept of self is transcendental, and "cannot be given an explicit definition"; he adds:

> ...Instead, the meaning of "self" is intuitively obvious. It is another Kantian transcendental concept...the concept of self can serve the student as long as he does not probe too deeply. (p. 1057)

This is quite mistaken, though Stent can be forgiven because discussion of self by psychologists, who should have been its main illuminators, has been plagued by every kind of obfuscation.

For ourself, we start with James Ward's (1918) position that the self is central to subjectivity. But, pragmatically, the nearest to our position is Koffka's (1935) in his *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*. Koffka adopts a wide behavioristic position, like our own (Stephenson (1953), which is not the narrowly conceived behaviorism of American psychology. His concept is within a perceptual framework, the Ego (for him) being a segregation in the person's psychophysical field. It is not a constant segregation; nor are its boundaries fixed--the sensitive person, Koffka remarks, placed in a vulgar crowd, "will withdraw into his shell." Koffka reserves the term Self for a core within the Ego:

> The Ego has a core, the Self, and enveloping this core, in various communications with it and each other, are other sub-systems. (p. 342)

So regarded, the Self is the more personal part of the Ego-system, such as we write about in an autobiography. As we shall indicate later, Koffka's Ego is our subjectivity, the communicability possibilities of the subject; self, and other sub-systems within Koffka's Ego, are operant factor structures (Stephenson, 1979b). For the first time in history, therefore, self has now an operant, objective basis.

We should look briefly, however, at George H. Mead's (1934) concept of self, in his *Mind, Self and*

Society, to note what can go wrong in approaching the problem of self, in this case at the hands of the most famous, perhaps, of all social behaviorists. Mead knew better than anyone that "the language process" is essential for the development of self: he begins his chapter on the Self with these very words (Mead, 1934: 135). He writes that the importance "of what we call communication" lies in the fact that it provides a form of behavior in which the individual may become an object to himself:

> It is the sort of communication which we have been discussing...communication in the sense of significant symbols, communication which is directed not only to others but also to the individual himself. So far as that type of communication is a part of behavior, it at least introduces a self...where he not only hears himself but responds to himself, talks and replies to himself as truly as the other person talks to him. (Mead, 1934:138-139)

However, Mead asks how the individual becomes this object to himself, and finds the answer in social behavior. The self, for Mead, "as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social creature, and it arises in social experience" (p. 139).

It is true that social behavior is crucial in development of self, but Mead swept majestically in the social behavior direction, oblivious of his own initial insight that the individual becomes an *object* to himself, and this is where the self begins. It is also where theorizing should have begun, as Schachtel pursued the matter in terms of "focalizing attention." It is where we begin, by allowing the individual to be an object to himself, in Q sorting. Mead ignored these foundation matters; instead of permitting the individual to be his own object, Mead speculated about remote social controls and linked the self without more ado to social behavior. The consequence is a body of categorical theory, off the scientific course set by Mead's own initial premise. It is axiomatic in science that one's explanations

should be as close as possible to the operations mediating them (Bridgman, 1927): the way to the self is the route we have taken with Q, to engage the individual himself in the form of behavior that is self-indicative--such is the lesson of Schachtel's "focalizing attention" and our Q sorting of concourses in this light.

Our theory of self, therefore, becomes an abstract statistical matter, in the realm of "mathematical philosophy" like that entertained by Newton, in multidimensional space, as the link between "focalizing attention" and meanings as configurations of concourses. The only person who can operate the linkages is the individual himself, as his own object. The "single case" methodology is therefore obligatory (Stephenson, 1974). The theory deals with structures or configurations (as factors) with respect to each and every purely subjective functional-interaction of a person. These are operant, and may be made evident for every such situation, even for so simple a matter as meanings for "it is raining."

But there will be more to say of this. Meanwhile, at long last the self can have its proper place in science, operantly defined, requiring understanding, not objective explanation or predictability.

THEORY OF COMMUNICATION

For George Mead, as we saw, the importance of language lay in the fact that it makes it possible for the individual to become an object to himself. For us, instead, it is all there in subjectivity, consciousness, and mind.

The theory begins, as indicated above, with two general observations, that subjectivity is diffuse (corresponding to the profound principle of functional-interaction) and that meanings arise by way of "focalizing attention" (on an almost minute-by-minute basis in waking life, and at intervals during sleep). Q methodology represents these primary observations, and the marvel is that communicability is *measured*, as operant factor structure, and that this is manipulable experimentally (as is the case for Skinner's

operant behavior variables). Self is indeed introduced into communication.

Why, however, do we need a theory of communication in addition to the parts composing it, the theories of concourses, meaning, and self?

It is the penultimate theory, just one step behind that for subjectivity *in esse*. It will serve its purpose if it can bring some order into what at present are widely disparate speculations in the field of communication theory and research, and should prepare us for accepting subjectivity as the twin brother of objectivity (the latter having ruled supreme up to now in modern science).

What pulls concourses, meanings and self together, of course, is Q and its factor methodology, which provides factor configurations operantly; and our main objective will have failed if we cannot end with some acceptance of such structure as *sui generis*, a new kind of fact for science to reckon with.

Since the concern may seem only remotely concerned with this main purpose, it is helpful to glance through the contributions to the *First International Symposium on Communication: Theory and Research* (Thayer, 1967b) and those of its progenitor, *Communication: Concepts and Perspectives* (Thayer, 1967a), to recognize something of the power and scope of our theory in its more usual context. Current thinking about communication is expertly represented in these two volumes: but it is all approached from the objective standpoint--correctly so, of course, in the few contributions of neurological or informational import (such as Pribram's (1967:191) paper on "How the Brain Controls Its Input"). None, otherwise, squarely faces the subjectivity everywhere entailed....*

The significance of our theory of communication lies in the condition that all subjectivity comes under its suzerainty--for all concourses, in the sciences, humanities, art, politics, mass communication, common conversations, and the rest of human communi-

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*Following this introduction, Stephenson provided brief summaries and critiques of chapters appearing in these volumes. [*Ed.*]

cability. There are new meanings to *find*, empirically, throughout.

This in no way removes from the investigator, however, the communicative nexus: *he* has to clothe the operant structures with the new meanings, and it is this, in the last analysis, that gives our theory its paramount significance, including its application to Newton's Fifth Rule (Stephenson, 1979a).

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

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