



EDITORIAL

Relevance of the history of concepts for psychopathology and the other sciences of mind: introspection as a case in point

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Sometimes it happens that the same (or a very similar) concept is discussed independently but, at the same time, in different disciplinary fields.

The recent dominance of neuroscientific research has reintroduced into the experimental realm the importance of the experimental subject's self-evaluation (rated in different ways) to be correlated to detectable changes into brain activity. For example, the experimental subjects are instructed to press a button or move a finger when they perceive or feel something, or they fill questionnaires supposed to measure their experience; all these "data" are then statistically correlated to measures of brain functioning.

The epistemology of psychiatry has radically challenged the idea that mental symptoms are mere data, objects directly observed and described. Rather, it is suggested that they are the output of a complex process also involving the patient's interpretation and communication of his own experience (e.g. Marková and Berrios, 2012; Berrios, *in press*).

Phenomenology has returned on the meaning of the concept of the experience "in first person", and this has been considered by some thinkers as an epistemologically non reducible way of knowledge that deserves a method of inquiry radically different from the "third person" objective science (examples of critical reviews can be found in: Baker, 2003 a,b; Thomasson, 2005).

The celebration of the Centennial of Karl Jaspers' *General Psychopathology* has been the occasion to discuss (once again) one of the most important concepts of psychopathology,

i.e. *Understanding (Verstehen)*. In doing so, some stressed the problems related to Jaspers' adoption of a concept indicating an immediate, self-evident *intuition* of the psychopathologist's experience in resonance with the patient's one (Aragona, 2013).

Finally, in cognitive sciences and philosophy of mind the concept of introspection is again a key topic, raising a discussion between the sustainers of a cognitive process of direct "inner sense" and those who reject it. In this last case it is suggested that introspection is based on the same interpretative process occurring in the "mindreading" activity (at work when interpreting other's actions). As such, the main difference would be that in self-interpretation the mindreading process has been secondarily redirected to the subject himself (Carruthers, 2013).

All these debates have something in common and psychopathology would benefit in considering these contributions and their possible relevance for its practical and research activity. However, there is also a problem. In dealing with the issue of introspection many authors sometimes fail to consider what has been already discussed about it. In other words, in many instances (particularly in Anglo-Saxon literature) it seems that the authors suffer from a strange cultural disease called "presentism" that prevents them from citing reflections taken from the history of concepts. This would not be particularly problematic if the sciences of mind were an example of, to use Kuhn's terms, intraparadigmatic "normal science" progression. However, this is not the

case, because in psychiatry and psychology what drives research, teaching and clinical activities is sociocultural change. In this case, the history of concepts is fundamental because it has a theoretical and epistemological value for the present discussion:

“... although it is possible to act as a general practitioner and to prescribe antibiotics without knowing who discovered them and how he did it, this does not apply to psychopathology. Psychopathology deals with concepts (like “symptoms” and diagnoses) that are not simply “given”. They are the product of a conceptual elaboration which in turn as its own history that deserves to be known if we want to avoid useless enthusiasms for the last novelty (unaware that it has the same methodological limits that in the past let a similar proposal to fail)” (Aragona, 2009, p.53).

For these reasons, the Association Crossing Dialogues has decided to implement a new session of its official journal *Dialogues in Philosophy, Mental and Neuro Sciences* which will be dedicated to the “*History of Mental Concepts*”. Old but still important writings will be republished, and we hope that this will be considered a good service for (we trust) a new generation of historically-aware researchers.

We start with two scripts about introspection written by the two “columns” of modern psychology, Franz Brentano and Wilhelm Wundt.

The “history of the effects” shows that two largely independent and quite opposite psychological stances originated from their work. However, it is noteworthy that at the beginning there were also many points of contact. Here the reader will have the opportunity to have a first-hand reading of their classical writings as they appear in two important, often mentioned but rarely directly studied texts: Brentano’s “Psychology from an empirical standpoint” (1874) and Wundt’s “An introduction to psychology” (1911).

In Brentano’s contribution (1874/2013) the author draws a relevant conceptual distinction which is almost completely neglected in present days debates, namely the one between *innere Beobachtung* (introspection as “internal observation”) and *innere Wahrnehmung* (“internal perception”). Brentano concedes to the critics of introspection that direct internal observation is impossible. However, introspection can be used if studied as internal perception, and in doing

this he establishes the basis for his famous concept of intentionality.

Wundt uses a very similar distinction, between *Selbstbeobachtung* (introspection as “self-observation”) and *innere Wahrnehmung* (“internal perception”). Danziger (1980, p.260) suggests that:

“[a]lthough he does not acknowledge any indebtedness, Wundt refers to Brentano in an early discussion of the point and it is not unlikely that he decided to adopt the terminology which Brentano had introduced” (Danziger, 1980, p.260).

In commenting Wundt’s position in a paper specifically dedicated to this issue (Wundt, 1888), Schwitzgebel stresses that a main difference is that for Brentano inner perception should be undisturbed by attention, the mental phenomena being grasped “incidentally” while one’s attention is dedicated to something else. On the contrary, in Wundt:

“the science of psychology must depend upon the attentive observation of mental processes as they occur. He argues that those who think attention necessarily distorts the target mental process are too pessimistic” (Schwitzgebel, 2009).

In any case, the “real” Wundt is not the naïve introspectionist psychologist that the behaviourists depicted in order to have “a clear and stable contrasting background against which to exhibit their novel features” (Boring, 1953, p.172). The fact that the first English translators chose to translate both self-observation and internal perception as “introspection” further contributed to such a misunderstanding (Danziger, 1980). The text presented in this issue makes justice of this misconstruction, because in it Wundt (1911/2013) clearly criticizes the utilization, in psychology, of the method of naïve, direct introspection (intended as self-observation). By confronting this text with Brentano’s one, the methodological differences between the two should also arise.

Finally, it just deserves to be stressed that the two authors returned on introspection in other writings, so the reader should be aware that those presented here are only two classical examples of their way of considering the matter and not their definitive position about it.

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