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## VOLTAIRE WITH NIETZSCHE: THE PROBLEM OF THE OBJECT IN PSYCHOLOGY

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One question, for some a candid question, is positioned in the atmosphere of academic psychology, in fact, I dare say, all the programs in psychology, at least, they ought to be: what does psychology study? Immediate responses can come from many sectors, some with a pompous title of "more scientific", other than, with some suspicion scratch, for some, discredited in the categories of "pseudoscience" or, in a less dramatic way, "ideologies."

The student seems to fail in this sea of proposals that seem attractive dichotomous, but contradict each other. And then some subsequent questions could be asked: Is psychology a science? Is it a discipline? Is it an attractive speech? Then an intellectual and ideological dispute installs: we must choose a school, an approach, some kind of guidance, whatever, but one must take a place in the contest, an old contest, which, as in the Colombian armed conflict, we hardly remember it's beginning.

It could be argued that this dispute has been settled in recent by the proximity between psychology and science. Some, indeed, speak of "scientific psychology". By default, there would also be an "unscientific" psychology (Colom, 2000, p. 1). Let's bring a little more fire to this dispute, and begin by

recalling the requirements that are generally accepted in order to call a theory, with all the prestige that it implies, as science!

A scientific theory is not false or true, but probable or improbable. It must satisfy four characteristics: 1) be replicable, 2) be parsimonious, 3) should allow measurements and 4) should stimulate further research (Colom, p. 1). Be replicated or not, has to do with the chances that a theory could be valid not only in a specific context, parsimony implies that if some theory explains better than other a phenomenon, this theory must be replaced; the third indicates that there the theory must show possibilities to be contrasted with conventional measuring instruments; and the last of these refers to the dynamics of science and its progress. From this perspective, it is possible to say that not all psychological theories could be classified within the good family of science:

"There are psychological theories that are really visions of the world with aspects of theories. Some examples are, according to Professor E. B. Hunt (1997), the theory of the development of Jean Piaget and psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud. These visions of world with aspect of theories feed the "myth" that, indeed, psychology is not a science" (Colom, p.1)

Fortunately, for many, some noble champions of science has avoided that psychology to fall forever into that dizzying, metaphysical, and Comte would say, primitive territory of ideology: "There are good scientific theories in psychology. For example, in developing of scientific theories about intelligence often variables and operational definitions are distinguished." (Colom, p.2)

Indeed, if anything has served the development of psychology is to learn about basic psychological processes. For some scholars, the basic or general psychology is limited to the study of such processes. Accorded to a Colombian university web page: "(psychology) studies, using scientific methods, the nature and operation of the basic psychological processes (conditioning, memory, cognition, attention, language...) of normal an mature man".

We call basic processes to this select list of psychological concepts that allows the conceptual formulation of theories that do not neglect the four criteria mentioned above and, of course, are a fundamental aspect for research in psychology. But, you may call me metaphysical, ideological, and better yet,

mythological; but: does not exist some processes that are not part of this generic group and yet they do happen in that virtual place called psyche? I mean, in the mind, which, although not covering the whole psychic is a bit more conceptually accepted.

I don't need go very far, I will go to a dictionary, even if it's not a very specialized source, it is a fairly reliable starting point. The mind to the DRAE (Diccionario de la Real Academia Española) is defined as follows: "all conscious and unconscious psychological processes, especially cognitive ones."

Let me question, then, about the desire, the identity, the ego, the self. Let me questioning, also about the existence of phenomena that happen when, psychologically, a man choose a pair of red high heels, better than the genetically, morally and socially predetermined object to his sexual satisfaction. Not everything in psychological processes, at least not yet, may be formulated in terms of discrete process that could be able to be measured or parsimonious.

Some can answer that these are aspects that are not part of basic psychology and, in the last example, the topic is psychopathology. I reply that I do not care, identity and desire must be considered within the fundamental aspects of psychic functioning; they are an essential part of the primary functional features of our soul life.

I think one problem is at the basis of this dilemma, if it is a dilemma, is: the West is a culture that could be described as fascinated with dissection: to understand the reality divides anything every time smaller sections. It seems that this way of understanding provides a sense of security when we realized that nature is enormous, much more than us, and that human nature is beyond the limits of our modern senses.

But it is rather difficult to split, in order to make parsimonious the concept, the feel of sameness that accompanies each awakening in the morning. I'm awake and I am myself I, with a name that could change, conditions that could change, a country that is made of paper; but I am myself, with all that that implies, and with my memory and my attention. It would be

strange to wake up and being anybody else, as Gregory Samsa, who one morning "he woke up and found himself transformed into a monstrous insect". However, he did not have anything else to ask but: - "What has happen to me?" (Kafka, *Metamorphosis*).

This issue lies beyond the old dispute over the existence or inexistence of soul. I do not if soul is essential, eternal and ethereal, but the possibility of the existence of perception and sensation as a living unity is undeniable, and forms part of our mental life. Curiously, most investigations are not of psychology, but other "occult" sciences like psychoanalysis, some scientifically less noble psychologies and, indeed, literature.

Voltaire (1983, p. 101) says: how dare we say what the soul is? We know with certainty that we exist, we feel and think. We want to go further and fall into an abyss of darkness". Yes, this hypercritical philosopher of illustration allows us to move beyond the metaphysical dispute of psyche, and puts us in front of an object of study for psychology which is composed of three aspects: the certainty of existence, the feeling and the thought. The philosopher says: "... although if you know the operation of thought, you won't know the bulk of your essence, ignoring what the nature of this substance is, which the act of thinking is one of the operations" (Voltaire, p. 105).

We assume that the modern psychology, once managed to reconcile with the old Comte, through the efforts of a desperate Wundt eager to know scientifically, as mandated by the holy mother science, the psyche of man, had no choice but to choose the two seconds paths traced by Voltaire: to discover the nature of thought and perception. The rest is metaphysical, outside the closed universe of modern science. But Voltaire warned that thought is a process of a more abstract, less measurable, more ethereal process, but not less human.

We reject, of course, any attempt of mystification of this process, we're not at the level of the invention of "a queer being that is within us, makes us work and lives after we die" (Voltaire, p.-117). We know that this abstract process has no other medium that the organs of the body and has its

foundation in the flesh, but we understand it as an undeniable emergency from that organic reality, which is also a physical, chemical and social reality.

The question returns, unresolved: what then is the object of study of psychology? Let's consider an aspect, often neglected: the object of study in any science is a real object, it is worth to say, all knowledge must proceed from concepts used to nominate phenomena. The objects of study of science are concepts, creations of the same science. There is no other way to appoint the world but through language.

For Nietzsche this situation occurs as a delusion. He thought that everything that man can know about the world and the truth is an ongoing metaphorical fiction. "First, a nerve impulse is extrapolated as an image! First metaphor. The image is transformed into a sound! Second metaphor. (Nietzsche, 1886, pag-122)

Yes, we know of thought, memory and yes, it must be said, of the conduct, but those words, as nominations are now an arbitrary abstraction of reality, a reliable creation, only because we are the self-proclaimed kings of the evolution and we love to be praised by nature, just like happens to the funny King Julian in *Madagascar* the movie.

In short, the concept is formed by matching a nomination to a natural fact. Thus, we call the object of study of psychology to a human drama and we raise it, with the same joy with which a magician pulls a rabbit from the hat, the status of discovery and cast arbitrarily away from all individual behaviors. This primitive origin is conveniently forgotten and we believe that in nature some time some separated primary behavior was knitted, a sort of primitive phenomenon, from which all behaviors are defined, but none of them, after this scientific process, is the "conduct". And so, we dare to point fingers at the most fantastic way and separate the pseudo-scientific notions from other "probable", to return to the millenary and charming costume of dividing the world in dichotomy sections, in the same way that Bible separates the men in

### **Sheep and goats**

Precisely because the human assumes that inside his constitution there is a power, able to carry him, with the same security with which a blind walks stick of his guide dog, on the path of certainty. That power is called the intellect, and we assume it as the culmination of evolution, the Everest of capacities. For Nietzsche, the intellect is a consequence of the ways in which life appears, no more worthy than any another expression of that life, in fact, a skill that is only grim and rance, and only it's owner attach it as high esteem: "... only its possessor and creator takes so pathetically as if it was the hinge of the world. But if we could communicate with the fly, we would know that she sails through the air held by the same pathos, and feels the flying center of this world. (Nietzscht, 1886, p. 17)

Indeed, the positivist science meant that he worked primarily with observations. It orders and ranks them, but goes never beyond. The change in contemporary science part of an undeniable fact: the world contains a lot more than observations. "There are bodies, fields, continents, elementary particles, murder, devils, and so on". (Feyerabend, 1982, p. 78). According to some scientific illusion science discoveries are made without altering the objects, their properties and relations are discovered. But it is impossible for the observer or a subject not to interact with it and, ultimately, to cause some changes in it. "We admit that our epistemic activities can exert a decisive influence on even the most robust cosmological apparatus that can make the gods disappear and replaced by piles of atoms in a vacuum" (Feyerabend, p. 179)

If so, the supposedly objective science can only be questioned in its very foundations, and therefore the rigged definitions of psychology, our definitions, are no more than a satisfying position in this world, a satisfying done by ourselves just as irreconcilable extremes.

So, leave some phenomena of psychic life as the latest in a long line, headed by those worthy of being subjected by the magnifying glass of this discipline, is nothing but a gimmick, useful to avoid the disassemble our weak conceptual scaffolding that tries to us so many safety. So, when George Canguilhem was asked: what psychology is? Only was able to answer:

"If we cannot define psychology an idea of man, I mean, to place psychology in a philosophy, we do not, of course, have the power to prohibit anyone who is known as psychologist and to call psychology what he does. But, nobody can, either, forbid philosophy to question about the status of psychological ill-defined, ill-defined both in the sciences, and the techniques."(Canguilhem, 1966, p. 9)

What interests us is the man in his perception of sameness. Antithetical nomination procedures, classification and organization of a science are nothing but shy attempts, timid because it acts with the same intention as an illegitimate child would have fought to become a noble family part, at all costs. But man, what interests us may not divided, not multiply or subtract. Is more complex and more simple, not wholly in keeping with law, not be measured, is an ego without ego, is virtual ego "understandable only from the inside as life experience." (Munné, 2000).

The purpose of psychology is nothing other than the psyche, full, undivided in their processes. These divisions are useful conceptual aid, but cannot replace the dignity that is driven by life from the antipodes of the same nature. Nothing should be no shame in a psychologist who decides to continue with a full subject of study, even if you must think in some process to understand him, nothing unworthy of thinking in terms of the soul, looked in a systematic way.

We were forced to resign an old knowledge because it's considered unlikely, but such knowledge does not cease to claim their place in science. We are asked to investigate anything, but to be a psychologist to investigate novel, because you have to be new in modernity and be read, at all costs, in prestigious sites and be quoted from all the regions in order to be able to belong to the wonderful world of scientific news. We think that yes, we want to study and investigate and publish why not? But our interest does not die at the point which brings an almost infinite number of scientific reports required goods in such basic psychological processes, which are basic is so popular.

Our object of study will consist of psychic processes expressing also, more diffuse, the very life of man. The wrong man, who suffers, who is vague, that loves who he should not love, that is where it should not be, who is looking for what has not been lost, which is a rebel to social conventions. We

leave the study of universal laws to those who know them, because: "Where men cannot see or touch anything, there's nothing to find" what it's really a very different from that Plato's, but adaptable to a hard and industrious race of future mechanical engineers only having to do a superlative coarse work." (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 32).