

The Processes Involved in Achieving Consciousness

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Abstract

On the level of organisation of both internally and externally acquired data, in order to establish equilibrium between oneself and one's perception, the individual autonomy arises not from a conscious decision. However, when the children act, they feel pleasure as well as encounter obstacles, which are occasionally overcome repeating the action. Therefore, when, at a certain point, we wittingly decide to face difficulty, we experience a feeling of anguish-desire, of desiring-anguish, because, for the first time, we persist not automatically, but deliberately. The same state of mind may ensue from social relationships. Indeed, social relationships will cause in children new problems. These problems are basically linked to the need of to compare different frameworks, explanations, targets. A great importance assumes also the relationship between faculties. With the reference to this topic, Nietzsche claimed that “thinking is only a reciprocal relationships of instincts”. Eventually, intelligence becomes independent of impulses, somewhat in the way that the processes of the intentionality are explored by Sartre. In my opinion, children have a tendency to explore which is not intentional, but spontaneous. Nonetheless, it can be stated, as Sartre says, that this exploration produces purposes and new faculties and determines the autonomy of the individual.

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1. Consciousness, World, Society

On the level of the organisation of both internally and externally acquired data, in order to establish equilibrium between oneself and one's perceptions (St. Thomas of Aquinas' *adaequatio rei et intellectus*), or in the sense of an interior search for equilibrium in motor skills, individual autonomy arises not from a conscious decision, but from an automatic inner need to set things into motion and to interrelate with the world. On this level, not only does the individual not make a conscious decision, but he even lacks an awareness of the type of organisation that has been established. For example, perception or movement take on their own frameworks. This implies that perception structures observations logically on the basis of a time-space principle, while motion frameworks temporalise our energies in relationship to the surrounding space. However, this logic introduces itself into our life without our knowledge, starting from its most basic manifestations. We are dominated by need in this phase, because our activation and the resulting self-relationship relationship-with the world are necessary. The logical patterns that we create are necessary, given that, without them we would be able to recognise neither ourselves nor objects, nor could we achieve equilibrium between ourselves and the world. This specific type of typically human pattern is necessary because our perceptive organs, or those used to grip objects, are already configured in a certain way, and so, although they can be perfected, they nonetheless predetermine our way of referring to the world and being in it.

Nevertheless, this sum of partially interior and partially external needs gives rise to an equilibrium that is distinctive, ours, human.

The principle of ease that thought and every other faculty adopts is part of this human character. We find this principle, like the other patterns, to be congenial, but, together with the other patterns, it has settled into us, we did not create it, but co-produced it through and together with the collaboration of environmental activities and relationships. Later, this sum of patterns will attempt to superimpose itself on reality, so as to interpret it, and it will succeed exactly because it was created through interaction with reality and with the help of reality. The being is created from this original contiguity between man and the world.

With regards to the aforementioned, it is known that a child carries out both actions that are an end in themselves and actions for specific purposes, and that in the course of both types of actions he experiences delight, but also encounters obstacles which he occasionally overcomes thanks to his tendency to become obsessed by the action for a time, repeating it. However, the conscious undertaking of a difficult action comes into play later, when the child has acquired a series of perceptive, motor and logical tools and when he has developed a combination of faculties. This patrimony of tools and faculties is initially dispersed, but the child will access it when will confront with a difficult action. Therefore, desire has always been related to pleasure and difficulty, but, at a certain point, the desire to pit oneself against the difficulties develops. So, as Plato and Kant guessed, desire, or, better, pleasure, does not suddenly emerge in man, he always possesses it, because he encounters it in the proprioceptive sensibility of his own body, and then he rediscovers it in various actions and situations.

However, while we have continued to desire, we have not fossilised on the pleasure of immediately successful activities. We have encountered obstacles and overcome them, even if only by chance, and, therefore, we have continued to explore the world and to differentiate our ends, continuing to encounter immediate pleasures, pleasures which have been abandoned or overcome by chance, displeasures and defeats. We have continued because we have encountered a variety of situations in the world, and this variety has helped us to live, we have become accustomed to coping with it. Consequently, when at a certain point we consciously decide to face a difficulty, we experience a feeling of anguish-desire, of desiring-anguish. Of anguish because for the first time something resists resolution for a long time and because for the first time we persist, not automatically, but deliberately. So, in this clash between two positions, the difficulty, obvious up to this point, takes on the characteristic of resistance and our automatic repetitiveness becomes persistence. For the first time, something refers not to a mechanical response on our part, but to a decision, because that is what our insistence becomes. Therefore, we encounter a difficulty and we do not know if we will be able to overcome it. The anguish is doubled and it comes from having encountered a blind resistance, a hostile situation which we were not expecting and which we had never previously encountered, as well as comes from the uncertainty of the result of the encounter. And yet we persist, which indicates that we wish to test ourselves, to win, to win over ourselves and to defeat our anguish as well, not only the exterior difficulty. This force and tenacity tap into the entire patrimony of tools and faculties, dispersed though they may be, that we have accumulated up to this point and, above all, this force and tenacity make use of a capacity to desire, of a memory of pleasure, of the self-satisfaction which follows the pleasure and success, which we have already experienced.

The other factor which plays a role is constancy. Up to this point, although in an inertial way, constancy consisted in a perseverance in attention and a postponement of ends, but it is now used consciously to sustain our capacity to desire.

Only in these conditions and with these features can we avoid letting anguish dishearten us and render us inert or helpless when faced with an obstacle, but become a desiring anguish.

This state of mind may be provoked either: from a relationship with ourselves, when within ourselves we try to overcome the contradictions which arise in our lifestyle coherence; from a relationship with the exterior reality; from social relationships.

Let us now consider this last point.

Let's start by saying that the child considers his frameworks and rules to be universal, when, on the contrary, they are strictly personal and the result of his experiences. Therefore, the social extension of his behaviours is, for him, a fact and not a choice. Nonetheless, social relationships will soon cause

new problems for him. Basically, these problems can be traced to the need for a comparison with frameworks, justifications and aims which are different from his own, but which are equally aspiring to be universal.

In his relationships with others, the child sometimes imitates, but he appropriates the behaviours of other people only when his own behaviours is inadequate, otherwise he imitates the behaviours of others to update, perhaps partially, his own behaviours, without, however, recognising his debt to these others.

In any case, comparison with others both from a discursive and “theoretical” point of view, as well as from a practical point of view, implemented in the heart of the action, whether recognised or not, can lead to a revision of a child's mental and/or motor frameworks, which, in fact, is a verification of his own way of being. A wider context and collegial action extend environmental relationships notably, leading to an inevitable revisiting of one's own ideal and operative patrimony. Children now realise that they will have to prove and explain what they know, while, on the other hand, they are ready to correct themselves and others.

With reference to their own actions, it should be mentioned that children act first and then may possibly evaluate the results of their actions. That is, they foreshadow their goals, but do not always anticipate the dynamic of the action, nor its possible consequences; they lack, so to speak, the thought of thought. This condition, instead, can be found when children reflect on the actions of others. In this case, at sufficiently advanced stages, they, from a certain point of view, try to put themselves in the other person's shoes to better understand the other person's intentions and activities. On the other hand, precisely because they lose themselves in the other, in the sense that they take an interest in another person, they detach from themselves, or try to do so, and “objectively” judge the circumstances of the action.

It is possible to understand, in this way, the disinterest that Kant, Hegel and Husserl touched on at times. Nonetheless, it is a short-lived and incomplete disenchantment (although it is the most complete type possible), so the child transfers his reflections onto other people's reactions to his experiences, relating the two. Therefore, although he will not admit it, this comparison will, at the same time, change both the meaning of the actions of others and of his own actions, in a process of reflection similar to the one delineated by Hegel on self-awareness, but, in this case, not with this express goal.

Moreover, the identifying oneself in the actions of others leads to comparisons and the grouping of different experiences, and promotes the translation of particular concepts into general principles. In the same way, extending concepts related to a particular action to a whole of experiences means transforming these concepts into general principles. This type of conceptuality is immediately pragmatic, given that it infers a notion from an actual observation.

Therefore, in every aspect, social pressure pushes the individual to reconsider his personal vision of the world and to abandon whatever equilibrium has been created by simple thought, to achieve a superior equilibrium, connoted by more complex relationships.

Not surprisingly, there are two factors which determine a more detailed description of an object: its use and social communication. These two circumstances lead to the observation of the object from an emotional point of view as well (its weight, softness, etc.), that is to say, the abstraction of certain qualities or quantitative relationships from an object. Likewise, in order to identify them we make reference to qualities that are not immediately functional (such as colour), most of which derive from communicative needs. Quantities and relationships of measure also respond both to increasingly extensive comparisons between similar or different objects, as well as to the degree of evolution of social exchanges. Therefore, abstract and categorical thought receive a strong impetus from a person's projection in the world

By virtue of his social involvement, a child passes from simply establishing his presence to claiming significance for himself in the world in which he lives. At this point the child's manner of socializing changes and reaches the stage of a true comparison with others, not necessarily antagonistic; therefore, he must be able to speak and pronounce more complex sentences. Indeed, language, whether spontaneous or not, always responds to a need: to express oneself, to put forth requests, to present oneself to others and the world. An increasingly stronger portrayal and progressive logic offer children the means to do so.

2. The Relationship between the Faculties

According to Nietzsche, “thinking is only a reciprocal relationship of instincts”¹.

This statement presupposes that there are multiple, differentiated instincts; and that each instinct has an aim. The end inherent to each instinct represents a way of thinking, in the broadest sense of the term, and it is exactly this thinking foundation of each single instinct that justifies Nietzsche’s theory in which thought, in its true meaning, ensues from the relationship established between instincts, namely, from the need to order their purposes and thoughts, organising them harmoniously, even under the predominance of a single instinct.

But if instincts themselves are thinking and if the relationship between them fosters some sort of intelligence, then intelligence comes from instincts (I would say thanks to impulses, such as the kind that come from the multiplicity of clonic tremors and muscular tensions, which are finalised in their reciprocal relationship, through the relationship between their differences). Eventually, intelligence becomes independent of impulses, somewhat in the way the processes of the intentionality are explored by Sartre, who, with regards to action, states that, “if human reality is action”, it does not necessarily explain itself, because “the existence of an action implies its autonomy.” This, in turn, is determined by “intention,” hence if “sexual drive is different from sleeping, for example, it is only possible by resorting to its purpose, which does not exist”².

In my opinion, children have a tendency to explore which is not intentional but spontaneous (and somewhat necessary), that is, without any specific purpose. Nonetheless, even in this case it can be stated, as Sartre says, that this exploration produces purposes and new faculties and determines the autonomy of the individual due to the differentiation of the purposes and the parallel differentiation of faculties. That autonomy, however, will have to wait for a coordination between those faculties and a subsequent coherent link between those purposes in order to attain completeness.

However, while the differentiated stratification of faculties, logical principles and world views is advantageous at the infantile and primordial levels, it is not necessarily unprofitable at higher levels. For example, thought is enriched by a predisposition toward spontaneity and other faculties, because the free play that is created between them strengthens it. Moreover, each faculty relates to certain types of reality, or sees the same reality from a different point of view, so that the interrelationship between faculties creates, at the same time, a greater and more varied relationship with reality. In fact, each faculty selects between observed data and saves only a few, therefore, the reciprocal communication between faculties, if it does not create conflict, is an element of fertility and expansion.

In particular, action (in the broadest sense of establishing oneself in the world) is a powerful tool for training, differentiation, improvement and testing of the faculties, as well as being a chance to establish relationships with reality and interconnections among faculties. Operative thought, for example, comes from action (where the formation of perceptual and motor frameworks takes place), is developed in action, especially the more difficult actions (where a retrospective reflection takes place), and is linked to other faculties by virtue of action. Linked to action, thought is desiring, because it desires that action, it mingles with pleasure during the action, it is self-satisfied by the positive results of the action (which by now has undergone a logical process). The act of overcoming a difficulty is carried out to attain this self-satisfaction and is supported by creativity of thought, which, to overcome an obstacle or to address a new situation, updates itself progressively during the action. Partially positive results constitute other moments of pleasure and self-satisfaction, which support thought until the completion of the action.

To summarise, thought and affectivity communicate with each other, but, at the same time, maintain their autonomy. Therefore, it is possible to share Piaget’s articulated opinion on this topic. The Swiss scholar, on the one hand, points out that “there is a constant parallel between affective and intellectual life,” so it would thus be wrong to divide “mental life into two watertight compartments: one of

¹ M. Heidegger, Nietzsche, (1994), Milan: Adelphi, p. 641.

² J. P. Sartre, *L’essere ed il nulla* (Being and Nothingness), (1965), Milan: Il Saggiatore, p. 577.

feelings and one of thoughts,” provided that “all behaviour...implies final motives and values (the value of purposes): namely feelings” (among which he also includes emotions)³.

Nevertheless, he distinguishes between the various possible levels of equilibrium. These range from the genome, to the epigenetic system, to the physiological system, and on to the “nervous system” and its “intelligence structures,” which represent “the most stable forms of equilibrium known to living creatures”⁴. This relationship between thought and the other faculties is biunique. In the same way that thought relates to the other human aptitudes, likewise these undergo a rationalising process, creating a form of stable internal organisation, which constitutes a structure with its own logical principle.

This has been shown for perception and movement, and is also true for emotions and all other aptitudes.

Taking for example emotion, there is no doubt that when it reveals itself it does not manifest any knowledge or logical principle, and yet that does not mean it exposes the original being.

An emotion always relates to the world and this relationship must structure the emotion itself, therefore, when it is repeated in the same or similar circumstances, it refers to predetermined frameworks and symbolisations, which recur, and may possibly be modified, but in a situation that is no longer unprecedented. This flexible structure allows one emotion to arise from or relate to another, establishing a reciprocal comparison, which results in each emotion becoming more precise and distinct. Besides, emotions, like all other aptitudes, when they arise or manifest themselves simultaneously, organise and create a overall structure which includes hierarchical relationships amongst themselves. This is what happens when a single situation stimulates different, or contrasting emotions at the same time.

Additionally, an emotion can be connected to an action, can be prolonged during the course of an action, can support an action, acquiring a longer temporality made of a sequence of smaller interrelated emotions which necessarily follow an order and create a whole. This order and whole, in the broadest sense, make a value judgement regarding the single aspects of reality and action and about the single moments of the unified emotion.

Moreover, an emotion can be communicated to others, which entails the rationalisation of the emotion. For example, when we say that an object is heavy, we first of all connect this sensation to a use and to an object that is used, but we also want to express a subjective impression, since for others that same object may not be heavy or may be less heavy than it is for us. Therefore, the emotion communicated must explain its reasoning and reveal both its objective and subjective sides and, finally, make reference to the situation that has allowed for the relationship between the subjective and objective data, which, in this case, is its use. In this way, we transform a sensation into a judgement, even though this happens without resorting to a demonstration, but by simply making reference to an experience which we transmit through discursive language and thought. This subsequent rationalisation will eventually have an impact on our way of perceiving the same emotion, which will, in part, be a new emotion because we will experience it in a different, though not completely new, way.

There are no faculties which do not receive their structure, organisation and intentionality through relationships. They are only automatic before experiencing any relationship and only during identification between subject and object, but that automaticity is either lost in a consumerist manner or set in an anesthetising way, or it achieves an intentional structure, which is ready to put itself forward with its own frameworks.

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³ J. Piaget, *Lo sviluppo mentale nel bambino (Mental Development in Children)*, (1967), Turin: Einaudi, p. 23.

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