

HERMENEUTIC ARC OF PROJECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

Sunnie D. Kidd
James W. Kidd

As with a Zen painting the first stroke, which is the most difficult, sets the ground for the rest of the picture. From a Heideggerian view, “The beginning already contains the end latent within itself.”¹ To look at any particular perspective of psychology utilizing an existential phenomenological approach, one begins with the nature of the human being. We begin with philosophy.

The nature of the human being is self-transcendence. Being human always means to be directed to something other than oneself. One is directed outside of oneself. In the phenomenological approach this is intentionality. To be directed toward something other than oneself is to intend toward something, just as experience is always experience of something. This means that the human being is open to meaning from the outside. The person is always in search of meaning.

This is an ongoing theme in human existence. As the horizon always recedes into the background new things open. As one possibility becomes an actuality other possibilities emerge. For Martin Buber:

Education worthy of the name is essentially education of character. For the genuine educator does not merely consider individual functions of his pupil, as one intending to teach him only to know or be capable of certain definite things; but his concern is always the person as a whole, both in actuality in which he lives before you now and in his possibilities, what he can become.²

The human being is always-already on the way toward something. Martin Heidegger would say, *Dasein*, *Da*, meaning There and *Sein*, meaning Being, is always projected into a there beyond its here.³ There-being finds itself being-in-the-world-with-others.⁴ This is primordial in that we find ourselves being-in-the-world-with-others as with intersubjective experience⁵ the other is a field of meaning⁶ for me. For example, we find ourselves speaking a language before it is known. Language is given through the other. As the power of reflection⁷ comes into play we find ourselves in the world speaking a language.

For Maurice Merleau-Ponty projective consciousness is the condition for the possibility of being-in-the-world:

The life of consciousness...is subtended by an ‘intentional arc’ which projects round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation, or rather which results in our being situated in all these respects.⁸

If projective consciousness is viewed as the capacity to leap outside of oneself and “get inside” the other then we could not have dialogue without it. Without the ability to project back in time we could not have dialogue with the past. Inversely we could not reflect on the future in relation to the past and plan for a reasonable outcome.

The following example, presents the above idea yet goes beyond it. An umbrella, as an *image/scheme dialectic*, displays a “handle” which can be utilized in chalkboard presentation. Figure Ia, displays the hermeneutic arc as an umbrella. Projective consciousness throws itself into a possibility which becomes an actuality when carried out. For Heidegger:

When one understands oneself projectively in an existential possibility, the future underlies this understanding, and it does so as a coming-towards-oneself out of that current possibility as which one’s Dasein exists. The future makes ontologically possible an entity which is in such a way that it exists understandingly in its potential-for-Being. Projection is basically futural; it does not primarily grasp the projected possibility thematically just by having it in view, but it throws itself into it as a possibility.⁹

There is a primary existential understanding that is constitutive for being-in-the-world. It forms the basis for understanding as methodology. Understanding as it points toward a projected possibility calls for realization of this possibility. This is explication. One projects oneself in an act of understanding toward self-realization, an unfolding of this understanding. Disclosure resides at the heart of primordial understanding. Interpretation originates in understanding and is derived from it.

Within the hermeneutic arc of consciousness the part, cognition, is understood within the whole, intuition, from which it originated. The whole is understood from the part in which it finds expression. General and particular are dependent upon each other. In Figure Ib, the reflexive is the immediate reflexive consciousness of self.¹⁰ It is an amplifying reflexion; attention intensified without loss of continuity. The reflexive is a centripetal dynamism. This is a way of obtaining knowledge; which is immediately or intuitively. This is what William James calls knowledge of acquaintance. In terms of epistemological assumptions; it is direct. The other integral aspect of consciousness is the reflective. The reflective is a centrifugal dynamism. This is a way of obtaining knowledge; which is conceptually or

representatively. This is what James calls knowledge about. In terms of epistemological assumptions; it is indirect. The reflexive/reflective is a centripetal/centrifugal dynamism.

Utilizing the umbrella again in Figure Ib, for example teaching one to read, it is said, “read for meaning” and the “little one” just looks up in confusion and remains stuck on single words. For teaching one to read this “handle” displays the monothetic which is the sentence and the polythetic the words in the sentence. Just when the “little one” thought the umbrella was only to be utilized for rain it is found to display new aspects of itself. It is a good possibility that the “little one” has seen or experienced the use of an umbrella so when something is connected with the self, self-experience, it is of interest.¹¹ For Henri Bergson:

The words of a sentence have not an absolute meaning. Each of them borrows a special import from what precedes it and from what follows it. Nor are all the words of a sentence capable of evoking an independent image or idea. Many of them express relations, and express them only by their place in the whole and by their connexion with the other words of the sentence. Had the mind constantly to go from the word to the idea, it would be always perplexed and, so to say, wandering. Intellection can only be straight and sure if we set out from the supposed meaning, constructed by us hypothetically, then descend from the meaning to the fragments of words really perceived, and then make use of these as simple stakes to peg out in all its sinuosities the special curve of the road which the mind is to follow.¹²

The hermeneutic arc is concerned with illuminating the conditions for the possibility of understanding and its modes of interpretation. It relies on creative imagination to produce a guiding vision uniting the particular into the general wholeness. Figure Ic, displays imagination; first imagine the possibility then come back and fill in the steps, the actuality, to get there. The implications of therapy are: imagination allows the possibility to see a way out of the current situation. Imagination itself does not transform the outer world though as one has to fill in the steps to get there. Bergson says with imagination:

...we present to our mind a certain effect as already obtained, and then we seek to discover by what composition of elements we can obtain it. We pass at a bound to the complete result, to the end we want to realize, and the whole effort of invention is then an attempt to fill up the gap over which we have leapt, and to reach anew that same end by following, this time, the continuous thread of the means which will realize it.¹³

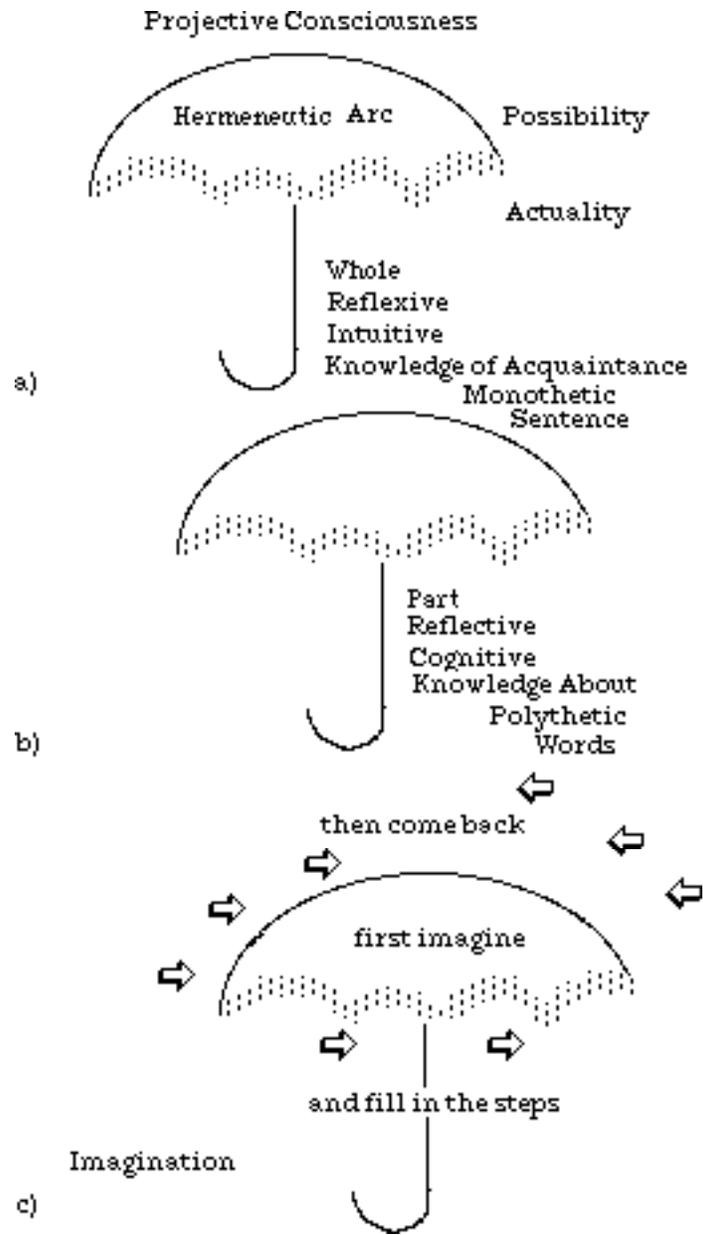


Figure I

James would say, it takes an “intermediary inventive mind”¹⁴ to spontaneously engage interest and attention. Interest and attention are integral aspects of education.¹⁵ The example of an umbrella presents *something to think on*. As James tells us, “The connecting *is* the thinking.”¹⁶

Without this capacity human beings would be mere receivers like computers, labeling, acknowledging information and manipulating data in a heartless manner. If the human being were a mathematical or geometrical abstraction it would be possible with absolute certainty to predict the laws of conduct. Human beings would have no choices which were not programmed, no ability to empathize, no capacity to deal with the novel situations, no capacity to move beyond the matter of fact to tactful possibilities or carry out any action which requires seeing from the other’s perspective.¹⁷

In speaking of human relations Gabriel Marcel places the emphasis on presence. The presence of the other changes your way of being, otherwise you just occupy space. For Marcel:

Presence denotes something rather different and more comprehensive than the fact of just being there; to be quite exact one should not actually say that an object is present. We might say that presence is always dependent on an experience which is at the same time irreducible and vague, the sense of existing, of being in the world.¹⁸

James shows the possibility of presence and its psychological depth in a therapeutic situation:

What the thought sees is only its own object; what the psychologist sees is the thought’s object, plus the thought itself, plus possibly all the rest of the world.¹⁹

Projective consciousness is what opens possibilities of self-transcendence. It is a way to get beyond the self. Without it one could not see the possibility of choice.

One right meaning for a given situation would be, virtually impossible as without reflection one could not see one possibility from another. If one did not accidentally choose the right meaning the first time it may not be found. If it was only partially right the person would not think of trying another.

Without projective consciousness human beings would act blindly with no regard for the feelings of other people. Being human always means

to be directed to something other than oneself, it is projective consciousness which allows for the possibility of self-transcendence. For Heidegger:

“Meaning” signifies the “upon-which” [das Woraufhin] of a primary projection in terms of which something can be conceived in its possibility as that which it is. Projecting discloses possibilities - that is to say, it discloses the sort of thing that makes possible.²⁰

For the teacher to come to the understanding that the other is a field of meaning for me displays an existential shift. This allows for the possibility of self-transcendence in that the other ideally stands on the teacher’s shoulders yet goes beyond the teacher’s self. This can be seen in dialogue as *both of us can go where neither of us alone could go*, beyond the idea of twos. Each learns from the other as each is on the way toward something. Each person is an aspiring being open for the possibility of inspiration.²¹ To view the other as an aspiring being shifts one’s perspective. Openness allows for the possibility to go beyond. Experientially this is being available for the other.

Being Available allows for the other to come toward the other. This is an openness that is co-constituted through the attitude of the teacher. Through experience the teacher is given the possibility to be ahead-of, behind, alongside²² the other person in the classroom. The teacher does not predetermine the situation ahead of time, as this would not allow for openness which beckons the other forward.

Openness allows for the other to stand out, rather than pre-determining the situation which takes away freedom of the other. This speaks to responsibility, taking, giving and standing in responsible action. Thomas Langan tells us:

Only in reaching out for the other in a way that desires the good of the other *in one’s difference* can I possibly extend beyond what I already am.²³

In a dialogue, as I say something, you identify it and place your variation on it and say something to me. The hermeneutic arc is identity and variation in dialogue.²⁴ If you could not take up what the other had to say in your own way you would have nothing to say as in the existential dimension it would be meaningless. For Buber, “The relation in education is one of pure dialogue.”²⁵ Taking to heart the multiplicity of meanings, James rightfully says, “verbal material is the vehicle by which the mind thinks.”²⁶

Notes

- 1) Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 76.
- 2) Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, intro. Maurice Friedman, afterword Martin Buber, trans. Maurice Friedman (New York: Macmillan, 1975), p. 104.
- 3) Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), fn., p. 9.
- 4) Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 153-163.
- 5) William A. Luijpen, *Existential Phenomenology* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1972), pp. 261-262. The intersubjective for Luijpen is, "The presence of others in my *existence* implies that my being-man *is* being through others." (*Ibid.*, p. 262.) "To Exist Is to Co-Exist." (*Ibid.*, p. 261.)
- 6) Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1962), p. 406. For Merleau-Ponty, "the world is the *field* of our experience." (*Ibid.*, p. 406.)
- 7) Jean Piaget, *The Grasp of Consciousness*, trans. Susan Wedgwood (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 1-11. This article, "Walking on All Fours" displays when reflection can be seen to come into play.
- 8) Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, *op. cit.*, p. 136.
- 9) Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, *op. cit.*, pp. 385-386.
- 10) Sunnie D. Kidd, "On Immediate Consciousness", *Philosophy, Psychology and Spirituality*, ed. James W. Kidd (San Francisco: Golden Phoenix Press, 1984), pp. 17-18. The Writing Caruso, "Intuition is the ground for thinking."
- 11) Sunnie D. Kidd, "Music: An Intersubjective *Durée*", *Migrant Echo*, IX, no. 3 (September-December 1980), pp. 130-133.
- 12) Henri Bergson, *Mind-Energy: Lectures and Essays*, trans. H. Wildon Carr (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1920), pp. 170-171.
- 13) *Ibid.*, p. 173.

- 14) William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (New York: Norton, 1958), p. 24.
- 15) To say that something is interesting is another way of saying that it is attention, it is attending, (*tend-ing*) toward something. Interest, shifts and deflects—attention, steers that which appears to consciousness.
- 16) James, *Talks to Teachers*, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
- 17) Buber, *Between Man and Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 100. Buber says specifically, “from the other side.” (*Ibid.*, p. 100.) The situation of educating and being educated is *only* one situation, as the other is at the other end. If we utilize the idea that the other is a field of meaning for me, we can then shift the perspective of the situation to that of participation what Marcel would call being-with, *co-esse*, where both stand at both ends. This would be both educating and being educated, rather than one just sitting there being educated. As Buber would say we are limited by otherness and one and at the same giving and receiving grace by being bound to the other.
- 18) Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 15.
- 19) William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, I (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), p. 197.
- 20) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 371.
- 21) Sunnie D. Kidd and James W. Kidd, *The Dynamic Aspects of Inspiration* (San Francisco: Golden Phoenix Press, 1982), p. 1.
- 22) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, *op. cit.* Although Heidegger does not gather: ahead-of; behind; alongside in one sentence, this displays *one* of the positive modes of solicitude.
- 23) Thomas Langan, “Appropriation and the Irrational: Eros and Benevolentia”, *Philosophy, Psychology and Spirituality*, ed. James W. Kidd (San Francisco: Golden Phoenix Press, 1984), p. 21.
- 24) The Writing Caruso, “Hermeneutic Discourse: If I understand I understand it beyond the given; If I understand I give variations to it; If I understand that which is spoken I can speak it in my own.”
- 25) Buber, *Between Man and Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
- 26) James, *Talks to Teachers*, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

Reprinted from the *International Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Spirituality*, 1, no. 1 (1992).