

Richard Jung and the Cybernetic Phenomenology of the Self: Review of *Experience and Action: Selected Items in Systems Theory* by Richard Jung, Edition Echoraum, Vienna, 2007. ISBN 978-3-901941-13-9

Cybernetics, as a discipline, is well known for having attracted the interest of many gifted polymaths. Indeed, the founders of the discipline (Norbert Wiener, Warren McCullough, Ross Ashby, Gregory Bateson and Heinz von Foerster, to name just some) were just such polymaths. The author of the work under review, Richard Jung, also belongs to the category of polymaths. His areas of special interest include philosophy, individual psychology, social psychology and sociology.

As social scientists and cyberneticians, Jung and I have many interests in common: human development from conception to the grave, the relationship between thought and language, the relationship between self and its world, formal foundations for cybernetics (first and second order) and systems theory, the development of satisfactory conceptual frameworks to aid understanding of the inter-penetration of the biological, psychological and sociological. Coming to Jung's corpus in this accessible form late in my academic life has presented a challenge of assimilation and accommodation for me and I have been enriched by it.

Many authors of works on cybernetics take a philosophic perspective, addressing issues of ethics and epistemology. Amongst those I would place Richard Jung as one of the foremost. The depth and breadth of his scholarship are quite breathtaking. His thinking is subtle, deep and complex. At the same time, he communicates his ideas with elegance and great clarity. In his scholarship, Jung draws on the continental philosophic tradition (Husserl, Heidegger) and the western, English speaking traditions of linguistic analysis (Wittgenstein) and pragmatism (Peirce). His particular interest in the social sciences draws on Piaget, Freud, Weber, Durkheim, Mead, Parsons and others.

I find it extraordinary that Jung's work is not more widely known. Perhaps this is because the interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and metadisciplinary nature of his work does not have a readily found home in the world of academic publishing. It is also the case that the work has undergone a continuous evolution. Indeed, what we have in this published volume is a collection of the author's work, spanning several decades, which is still very much a work in progress. The author has constructed a comprehensive framework (shown in an appendix) setting out the implications of his thought for all branches of the behavioural and social sciences. In many ways, the papers in this book can be viewed as introductions to the scope of his thought, with indications of how the framework is to be populated. My view is that rather than seeing the incompleteness of a work in progress, there is enough contained in the finely argued chapters to allow the comprehending reader to flesh out the framework for herself. The construction of the framework is itself a major intellectual achievement. With the exception of chapter 2, which seems to be a fragment from a larger work, each chapter stands alone as an intellectual tour de force.

As examples of Jung's thought, I will briefly mention just two of his conceptual and philosophical innovations.

The first innovation is in his use of the Sanskrit word 'sive'. According to Jung this word, for two terms A and B, signifies any of the following: A and B, A or B, A and/or B. He takes his usage of the word from Spinoza. It pertains to foundational philosophic distinctions that may be considered as duals, complementary or, in general, inseparable.

The force of this usage is found for example in his consideration of the distinctions 'time and eternity' and 'free will and determinism'. He particularly wishes to convey to the reader that these distinctions should not be understood as either/or in either a clear-cut or fuzzy manner. Paul Ricoeur, in similar spirit, talks about philosophical aporias, distinctions that cannot be fully explicated. (Aporias is taken from the Greek 'a poria', meaning not porous.) In my own writings, I have also distinguished these classic philosophic distinctions and have argued that, by Occam's Razor, there is really just one such distinction 'that cannot be cut', this is '*the philosophic distinction*', which one encounters in a variety of forms within different narratives and contexts.

Jung's understanding of the Indo-European traditions of thought, allows him to demonstrate the roots of Western philosophy. He provides an abstract discussion of the emergence of form from 'indefiniteness'. Later, he uses this distinction to present his model of the 'system of intention', the system by which organisms bring forth form from indefiniteness.

The second philosophical innovation concerns his distinction between *ens movens*, *ens volens*. Whereas Descartes makes an ontological dualistic distinction between *res extensa* and *res intensa*, Jung makes an ontologically monistic but epistemologically dualistic distinction between *ens movens* and *ens volens*. As Jung puts it, "Neither of them is a Ding an sich, an ontological entity. They are names for epistemological entities existent only within thought and imagination."

He goes on to say *ens movens* can be visualised as an organism, whose propensities are driven by heat. It can also be visualised as a machine whose dynamics are constrained by dispositions. Both organisms and machines are versions of a thermodynamic system. *Ens volens* can be visualised as a mind, whose propensities are driven by intentions and whose activity we describe as action. It can also be visualised as a template whose dynamics is constrained by conventions and whose activity we describe as conduct. Both minds and templates are versions of a communication system. *Ens volens* "suffer motivation, orient themselves and make decisions."¹

As indicated by the title of the book, Jung's theorising concerns experience and action. His system of intention addresses both experience and action, which he sees as being complementary. Functionally, experience is a form of action and action is a form of experience. Jung's system of intention is that which maintains authenticity between the self and its world. The system of intention has three subsystems: the subsystem of orientation, the subsystem of motivation and the subsystem of decision. Orientation manages uncertainty. Motivation manages tension. Decision manages risk.

¹ Those readers familiar with the conversation theory of Gordon Pask may see parallels here with Pask's analytic distinction between mechanical (m-) individuals and psychological (p-) individuals.

He himself provides a succinct summary of his and approach: “Phenomenology describes action as a system of experienced meanings, while cybernetics accounts for regulatory features observed. Jointly, they permit the employment of a mode of functional analysis, commonplace in physics, but unused in sociology. Instead of a teleological conception, action is seen as governed, not by future goals, but by present constraints on the (extremum) values of the essential variables that represent the fundamental propensities of action.

Three such fundamental constraints are postulated, each giving rise to a special theory of action. These are: the special theory of orientation, governed by the principle of the reduction of the maximum possible amount of uncertainty; the special theory of decision, governed by the principle of the reduction of the maximum possible amount of risk and the special theory of motivation, governed by the principle of the reduction of the maximum possible amount of tension.

“Processes of orientation, decision, and motivation are mutually independent with systemic limits, thus accounting for the vital imbalance that is the distinguishing characteristic of the activity of living systems. The operation of systemic limits, and thus integration of action, is accounted for in the general theory of action by the general principle of action, i.e., the reduction of the maximum possible amount of inauthenticity” (pp. 191-192).

Jung provides an elegant and detailed synthesis with clearly articulated, exhaustive categories. His terms are clearly defined, and, when necessary, he is not afraid of using neologisms. There is a richness in Jung's schemas that goes beyond any other explanatory schemas for the social sciences with which I am familiar (for example, those of Winch and Peters).

In psychology and sociology, there are specialised areas of research and theory building (decision, motivation, institutionalisation, ontogenesis of the self and many more). Jung's theory is a grand synthesis in its breadth and extraordinarily sophisticated in its depth and detail. Jung manages to encompass so much in his exposition because his succinct style is combined with a generous use of figures and tables, where key ideas are captured and explicated with terse commentaries. The theory provides an impressive theoretical framework within which to formulate any number of empirical questions for particular groups of individuals and types of social system. I consider Jung's text to be essential reading for anyone who is interested in applying cybernetics and systems theory to the social sciences, as is sometimes referred to as ‘social cybernetics’ or ‘sociocybernetics’.

Although Jung's main ideas were first formulated in the 1960s, the reflexive turn of second order cybernetics is not ignored. Chapter 7 is entitled ‘Postmodern Systems Theory’. It is an elegant essay on the complementary relations between first and second order cybernetics.

In developing his phenomenological cybernetics of the self, Jung gives us:

1. A treatise on metaphysics in which he provides the founding predications of his theorising, tracing the origins in ancient Indo-European thought.

2. A treatise on the nature of explanation in which he distinguishes four universal explanatory forms: the organism (behaviour in response to inputs), mind (intentions to act), machine (dispositions to perform), template (semantic plexus, rules for conduct).
3. A succinct summary of the main concepts in the cybernetics of complex adaptive systems.
4. A succinct summary of human ontogenesis, from conception to adulthood, in which he presents a unified account that embraces the biological, the psychological and the social.
5. A treatise on the nature of social systems.

The reflexive nature of Jung's theorising makes it a contribution to second-order cybernetics. One finds a wealth of insights and enriching concepts useful for those who would wish to understand what it is to be human and to deploy those understandings for reflection, self-creation and self-governance.

This review of Jung's thought merely scratches the surface. His writing is terse but he communicates with great clarity. He provides regular summaries as he goes along as an aid in engaging the reader's attention. The somewhat dry and expository style is made more interesting by a rich use of metaphor and analogy. The text includes few exemplars or case studies. The reader is expected to reflect on the possible applications of Jung's theory for him or herself. The preferred reader is someone who has a predilection for abstract theorising and who is prepared and, indeed, is seeking, to have his or her intellectual horizons expanded.

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