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On 'psychic' and 'psychological': a comment on Quilley and Loyal

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In recent years, in many Western countries, there has been a sharp decline in the number of sociology students and in the market for sociology books, while in the field of psychology a similar development was absent. In a nutshell: psychology and philosophy gained most of the territory that sociology lost. At this very moment, the sociologists Quilley and Loyal have published a courageous article in which they reclaim that lost territory by outlining a sociological perspective as broad as life-and-the-universe.

However, I counted eight confusions of the terms 'psychic' and 'psychological.' Actually the total count was nine, but I subtracted the time that this very confusion is in a quotation of Norbert Elias. A psychological process is a process in the study of the psyche of individuals, in psychology, not necessarily coinciding with any change in the psyche of individuals (except possibly in the psyche of psychologists). Particularly in such a programmatic article for the social sciences this confusion should be avoided.

Quilley and Loyal write about 'the possible reduction of social and psychological processes to biological determinants' and about 'psychological, social and biological processes' where they actually refer to psychic, social and bio or 'life' processes. This confusion of perspectives is extra disturbing because their whole argument is explicitly aimed at specifying the relationships between the sciences sociology, psychology and biology and their respective objects of study, the social, psychic and bioprocesses that proceed on interrelated levels of integration: 1) on the level of social processes between people and their 'societies' or 'survival units'; 2) on the level of psychic processes in individuals and in the relationship between their impulses and emotions, their conscience and their consciousness; 3) the level of the biosphere or 'life' – both extra-human and human. The processes on these three levels on the one hand, and developments in the sciences that study them – sociology, psychology and biology – on the other, are related, but if psychic processes are conceptualized as 'psychological processes', this confusion of perspectives will block the understanding of these relationships.

In their opening sentence, Quilley and Loyal mention the twin forces of subdisciplinary disintegration on the one hand, and somewhat rarer moments of integration and synthesis on the other. These twin forces are related to the twin processes of the differentiation and integration of social functions (cf. Kilminster 1998). In continued processes of social differentiation and integration, as commercial businesses and administrative organisations expanded, again and again groups of social superiors and social inferiors became interdependent to the extent that prohibited social superiors from expressing their feelings of superiority as openly and as extensively as before. Social 'superiors' could neither afford any longer to avoid their social 'inferiors' so easily nor punish them so effectively for 'not knowing their place'. What was involved was a spiral process towards social integration.

The rise in the twentieth century of new studies such as the study of 'everyday life', of 'mentalities', of 'emotions', of 'the body', and of 'informalisation' would have been inconceivable without the social and psychic changes of the 'Roaring Twenties', the 'Permissive Society' or the 'Expressive Revolution' of the 1960s and 1970s. The latter era in

particular saw an ‘emancipation of emotions’, that is, the (re)entering of emotions into the centre of personality – consciousness – and an increasing sense of physicality, and both processes were theoretically integrated within the social sciences as studies of emotions and studies of ‘the body’. Thus, processes of social integration pressured towards psychic integration, that is, to take emotional and physical processes and functions more into account. Although this pressure is experienced in all walks of life, only gradually do academic establishments open up for reflections and research on these experiences. But they do, and therefore, social and psychic integration also involves further integration of the sciences.

Both the overall emancipation and integration of ‘lower’ social groups in (western) societies and their counterparts, the emancipation and integration of ‘lower’ impulses and emotions in the personality structure, have demanded a more strongly ego-dominated form of self-regulation. Drives, impulses and emotions have tended to become more easily accessible to consciousness while their control has come to be less strongly based upon an authoritative conscience, functioning more or less automatically as a ‘second nature’.

Quilley and Loyal refer to Eliasian conceptualizations of ‘second’ and ‘third’ nature. I have introduced the terms ‘third nature’ and ‘third-nature personality’ as sensitising concepts to illuminate this shift from conscience to consciousness, coinciding with the emancipation and integration of ‘lower’ impulses and emotions in the personality structure (Wouters 1998). The term ‘second nature’ refers to a self-regulating conscience that functions to a great extent automatically. The term ‘third nature’ is indicative of a development from this ‘second-nature’ self-regulation in the direction of a more reflexive and flexible one.

Ideally, for someone operating on the basis of third nature, ego functions have become dominant to the extent that it becomes ‘natural’ to attune oneself to the pulls and pushes of both first and second nature as well as the dangers and chances, short-term and long-term, of any particular situation or relationship. As national, continental, and global integration processes exert pressure towards increasingly differentiated regimes of manners, they also exert pressure towards increasingly reflexive and flexible regimes of self-regulation. The term ‘third nature’ refers to a level of consciousness and calculation in which all types of constraints and possibilities are taken into account. Moreover, it refers to a psychic make-up that can only be understood sociologically as a social habitus.

Kilminster, Richard (1998) *The Sociological Revolution. From the Enlightenment to the global age*. London: Routledge. (paperback 2002) Quilley, S and Loyal, S (2005),

Wouters, Cas (1998) 'How Strange to Ourselves Are our Feelings of Superiority and Inferiority', *Theory, Culture & Society* 15/1: 131-150.

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