

SOMETHING REALLY HAPPENED HERE



PHILIP FRANSES

Starting with a question

Holistic Science begins with a question. How do we arrive at a science of whole form?

Henri said that the twentieth century was the greatest revolution in philosophy, of phenomenology, which no one even knows about. In the same way the twentieth first century is offering to us to take part in a revolution of science that is also happening quietly without any fanfare.

In creating the space for this question to be understood - at Schumacher College, in the Holistic Science Journal and in the series of events Process and Pilgrimage - the reward is to see the convergence of ideas upon a whole new foundation to science and to living. The philosophy and mathematics of wholeness rebuild the nature of our understanding from basic principles.

The true philosopher

Henri was working directly from a philosophical instinct for what is true and then translating this into a language of everyday account that could fill out this intuition in a way people could understand. Thus he was working at a level of insight reserved for a different level of living philosophy (one could think of people as Nietzsche) where his understanding was direct and his work was to give an accessible meaning to what he received. The question was never about the truth of his insight which arrived without the intermediary of thought as it usually engages in metaphysical questions, but how to bring these insights across without sully them with his or any one else's interpretation on the way. My colleague Stephan Harding would say, "It is like having Wittgenstein in the room". The impression was that one was hearing how things were related directly and the only way to understand was to listen neutrally without imposing any interpretation, to let the lesson awaken something real in oneself. This can be misunderstood even in Henri's book, where the words can be mistaken as an argument of a position. Rather he was one of those rare philosophers who are able to breathe at another level in which thought becomes the instrument of receiving truth in direct insight.

The point about genuine philosophy is that it is not trying to argue mankind or the world, from a fixed position. Rather the nature of thought is to tune in to the experiential position of our living in the world. Our response when listening deeply to such a philosopher is to know instinctively what he is saying, to recognise ourselves as directed through the insight. Thought is privy to the underpinning tapestry of existence, without thereby imposing any structure as mediating narrative. The feeling is of a movement, an emotion of becoming more oneself in the understanding, of turning towards something disclosing one's own journey. One is not able to catch this feeling definitively, but must instead give space for it to manifest itself as it will.

The struggle is that the philosopher is continually being asked to state clearly what they mean, to make it simple. But to make it simple is already to give an interpretation. Before it is difficult or simple, something is being brought out, asked of us, demanded of us in order to live. And this is not exactly stated, but is communicated in the recognition of a shared possibility. Henri discovered he could do philosophical work, getting into this direct insight of lived experience; and that he could offer his insights to whoever could tune in to the way of his saying.

In the world

The insight is that truth is always to be found in the in-between: in between *us and the world*; in between the stages of growth of the rose; in between the different ways we have found of expression. Anything we know, philosophically, intellectually, exactly, is not the world at all. All the striving for exactness is to an ever greater degree to un-know the world.

Instead the world tells itself in the dynamic of the everyday to each of us uniquely. The antenna of the world is in the in-between. And so we are all tuned to the wrong station when looking to the masts of exactness as if in this solidity the world is to be found.

The fact that mankind is making for himself a pole of the absolute of understanding as a yardstick of progress is creating this ever widening in-between space, where thinkers like Henri are tuning in to some coherent dynamic resonating to many people's understanding of its movement.

Putting into practice

Goethean process is to let the stages of the process of the plant enter ones own livingness and thereby occasion the appearing of its whole nature. By understanding the movement between the various stages of growth, the living study is seen as the message of its in-between-ness.

In these examples by the student Rachel Solnick, (see figure below) the rose is drawn at various stages of its coming to life in cold January. Putting these examples of budding life into an animating story, Rachel describes the joy of suddenly feeling the whole impulse of unfurling life, as a movement sensed in its own dimension. The rose comes alive as itself. Rachel could then go on to imagine the movement through further stages.

Similarly in life, we become transfixed in the moments we have where life seems to animate us in our purpose. But looking for some fixed understanding in these moments, we miss that the real message is in the in-between. In-between us and other people, in-between the un-knowledge of our presumed place in the world, and the miracle of being, the dynamic is pointing us further. The message life has for us is in the phenomena.

Rachel Solnick writes "There are two lessons I found within my first practice of the Goethean method that for me mirror these two elements in my life. Namely that my recognition of the Rose as a sentient being itself, and how this then reveals the intrinsic value of nature, reflects many of the drivers for my work; and the recognition that I am not in anyway distinct from the Rose reflects my deeper understanding of my wholeness with nature. When I feel myself touched, seen by the Rose I am humbled. I am stripped of my ego. To recognise oneself being seen, both allows me to understand another as equal, but simultaneously to understand that I am also seen by many more things than just this individual"

Mathematically we can take non-numerical formative logic as the basis of physics. Philosophically we can interpret this logical approach as an engagement with meaning. Taken together, the mathematics and the philosophy imply that in the suspension of logical analysis, a dimension of practical engagement arises that carries its own dynamic of meaning. This is the very journey addressed in Process and Pilgrimage. Inside us is our own meaning to give (and receive) form to the world we act in.

Process and Pilgrimage

Henri came to the inaugural meeting of Process and Pilgrimage at "Birkbeck College" (where he had studied with David Bohm) in 2009. At that gathering, Basil Hiley gave an in-depth mathematical talk about Process and mathematically proved the philosophical hunches of David Bohm on the implicate and explicate order.

At "The Window" in London also later in 2009, "Wholeness in Three Panels", Henri gave a talk on the "upstream" experience (see article *Upstream Thinking* below) and then held a discussion about the revolution in philosophy this implied.

In 2010 I mailed him about coming to Italy for the next session of Process and Pilgrimage, a seminar on Paradox. He mailed back that he was reluctant to come, but had put down a few thoughts which we might want to use at the gathering. These thoughts "*The Transformative Potential of Paradox*" became the impetus for starting the Holistic Science Journal. The words and sentiment of the article needed a platform on which to appear that was outside all those other specialist disciplines representing one area of knowledge.

On the strength of his article, I then mailed Henri again about the developing idea for the seminar under the title, "*Seeing through Paradox, Believing through Difference*". Henri was immediately excited by this title and agreed to come. In Bettona, Italy Henri gave two talks along the theme of chapters 1 and 3 of what became his book, *Taking Appearance Seriously*. We also launched the Holistic Science Journal there.

So we see how the question with which we started, how to arrive at a science of whole form, has progressed on two different paths: of philosophy and phenomenology with Henri Bortoft; and mathematics and physics with Basil Hiley. Coming together in the articles of this issue of the Holistic Science Journal, these two approaches address a specific question of our time. Holistic Science is finally turning from an abstract debate into the foundation of a new way of seeing.

As Henri said on our departure from Bettona,

“Something really happened here.”

References

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Original drawing of Rose Unfolding – Rachel Solnick



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