History of Science, Psychology and Religion: An Essay on Quality of Life

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Abstract: This essay seeks to interconnect three areas of knowledge, namely the History of Science, Psychology and Religion in order to propose a vision for the quality of life. From the area of the History of Science, I will mention the Cartesian Paradigm of separation of mind (domain of philosophy and religion) and body (domain of science and medicine). In contrast, there are various scientific experiments and theories which suggest that mind and body are interconnected, and the evolution of life is linked both to the development of mind and the biological evolution. From the area of Psychology, I will refer the concepts of "Archetyp" existing in the human mind which is constituted by the "Unconscious" (collective and personal) and by the "Ego" and has as its main objective the connection with the "Self" (Soul). This process of "Individuation" is described in the myths and symbols of the several Religions. From the area of Religion, I will mention some metaphors present in Sacred texts, namely the Bible and the Bhagavad-Gita, and which are a self-representation of the unconscious psychic processes that might help the reader find meaning for life, and therefore a higher quality of life.

Keywords: History of Science, Jungian Terminology, Sacred Texts, Quality of life

1. Introduction

There is a point of view of the History of Science that argues that the relationship between Science and Religion corresponds to the complementary needs of the human being [1]. Science deals with the facts of the outer world of Nature, while Religion deals with faith and with the subjective inner world of the human being.

In historical terms [2], during the Medieval Ages, there was no clear distinction between the domains of Science and Religion, having prevailed the Aristotelian philosophy of the Universe. With the Renaissance, the Copernican Heliocentric model emerged which was perfected by the calculations of Kepler (Brahe's disciple) and Galileo's observations. Hence, a distinction was made between the areas of Science and Religion: Science studied Nature through mathematical language and physical laws (which were formulated by Newton), while Religion dealt with the Sacred through metaphorical texts. Thus, in the seventeenth century, Descartes' philosophical Rationalism proposed the separation and independence of the two areas of the human being: The soul and mind ("res cogitans") were the exclusive domain of Religion and philosophy, while the body ("res extensa") was the exclusive domain of Science and medicine. Yet, this mechanistic conception of Nature included Divine activity. For Descartes, as well as for Newton, the organization of the Universe resulted from the mediation of an Intelligent entity.

However, in the eighteenth century, there was a reverence for the power of reason and Science and a devaluation of faith and Religion. In Philosophical terms, it emerged the Empiricism, although Kant sought to reconcile rationalism with empiricism. It was by this time that several scientific theories took place and have defied theological perspectives on human history on Earth. In fact, in the nineteenth century, the scientific community proposed a deterministic conception of the material world, having as one of its exponents the natural selection of evolution of the species by Charles Darwin, quite different from the Religious text named by Genesis. In philosophical terms, it emerged the Positivism that argued that only Science was the true source of knowledge.

However, in the twentieth century, the emergence of Psychology and Quantum Physics led to the reassessment of the assumptions that were at the roots of the “separation” of Science and Religion [3]. In fact, the deeper realities experienced by the human being, concerned with their inner life, were only match by Religion. Furthermore, the questions posed by Quantum Physics to scientific reductionism led to a rethinking of the relation of human values and Science. Each of these topics, between Science, Psychology and Spirituality/Religion will be analyzed in the following chapters.

2. Some facts on the History of Science: A Global Vision

In the area of the History of Science, in the seventeenth century, Descartes proposed the separation of mind (exclusive domain of philosophy and religion) and body (exclusive domain of science and medicine). The body should be treated as a "machine." This is the "Paradigm of Conventional Medicine" [4].However, since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several experiments were carried out in the brain areas, first with Luigi Galvani, Golgi, Ramón y Cajal, van Waldeyer who discovered electrical conduction between neurons, and then with John Jackson, Pierre Broca, Carl Wernicke who have verified that motor areas are specific to certain areas of the brain. In the twentieth century, David Hubel and Torsten Wiesel suggested that the body and mind are interconnected through studies of certain functions such as memory, perception, etc[5]. These studies have been the basis for the investigation of other scientists who have argued that emotion and feeling are an important link between reason...
and the physical body, as opposed to the Cartesian dualism and mechanicism [6].

In this sense, a "union" between the Humanities (such as philosophy and religion) and the Sciences (such as medicine and physics) has been proposed through a transdisciplinary approach [7], where the "Third Included" logic is used, which might allow the study of the body with themind or Science with Religion [8]. For example, there is a theory - called Holographic Theory of Mind [9] - which holds that the brain is the physical structure through which the mind and the Psyche manifest. In this regard, I want to mention the dialogue between the psychologist Jung and the physicist Pauli which contributed to the understanding of the relationshipbetween mind and matter which led to the formulation of the "Synchronicity" concept. This is a term to describe a "phenomena that have a significant connection between two entities (for example, two minds), but for which there is no causal explanation that might justify such occurrence (thetwo physical bodies of these minds)". Jung and Pauli also discussed the "intricacy" between psychological/mental time and physical time [10]. An example of "Synchronicity" is the experience of Alain Aspect and his contributors [11], where an "instantaneous communication", between two quantum particles "correlated by polarization", was verified after measurement, but for which there is no causal explanation in space-time. Moreover, there are physicists who argue that the mind is constituted by "subjective patterns" or "Jungian Archetypes" (thoughts, feelings) that could be described as "quantum waves of possibility" in "potentia" that manifest in the objective empirical world, when the subject or observer makes a "Choice", among the various possibilities. Thus, the "Choice" for a given problem depends on the Creativity or "Insight" of the "Observer's field of Consciousness"[12]. There is also another theory - called Mind-Brain Theory [13] - which holds that the brain has structures that are responsible for changing the "patterns" of the mind (located in tubulins), and there are other structures that are responsible for the day-to-day behavioral functions (located in the dendritic membranes).

Thus, there are researchers who claim that the evolution of life is linked to both the evolution of the mind (whose goal is to become self-conscious) and the biological evolution of species [14]. So, although the physical structure of the human brain is identical for all mankind, human beings have different behaviors in the same situation (divorce, unemployment, illness, etc.). In this regard, I have to describe the processes that the mind and Psyche might evidence in order to realize these differences. This is the theme of the next chapter.

3. Some Terminology of Jungian Psychology: An Overview

The area of Analytical Psychology, which was created by Carl Jung, was the result of the intersection of his psychiatric experience with the study of alchemy, mythology and the comparative study of the History of Religions. Jung [15] argued that the "Psyche" represents the totality of all Conscious and Unconscious psychological processes. The "Unconscious" side can be Personal and Collective. The "Collective Unconscious" is the deeper level of the Psyche and consists of the patterns or "Archetypes" common to all human beings, which are described in the various myths and religious metaphors of the several cultures. The "Personal Unconscious" is the most superficial level of the mind and consists of experiences that are suppressed and/or "forgotten" because of the incompatibility with the social context or the great suffering they have provoked in the Subject/patient. On the contrary, the "Conscious" side represents the "Ego" ("personal side") or the subject of consciousness (the experiencer). The aim of human beings is their "Individuation" or "union" of the "Unconscious" side ("lunar or shadow side") with the "Conscious" side ("solar or personal side") in order to lead to the perception of the "Self" ("soul or total Archetype"). This process of "Individuation" could be realized through "dreams" or "projections" in relationships. For example, we have the so-called "premonitory dreams" in which the subject foresees a subjective event that is about to occur objectively in the empirical world. On the other hand, through "projections" in relationships, it is possible to become aware of the "shadow side" (as in a "mirror") of the character of the person: Man projects the "Animal" (the subjective Unconscious Female presence within himself) in relationships with women, while the woman projects the "Animus" (the subjective Masculine Unconscious presence within herself) in relationships with men.

Jung also pointed out that Religions, like Psychology, are a way to link the Sacred/Divine with the human/profane or the Self with the Ego because the Archetypal contents of the human soul are in the collective primordial representations described in the various symbols of Religions. In this sense, Religions might have a psychotherapeutic effect on the devotee because they might contribute to cure the suffering of the Psyche of this person, through the application of a theoretical code (the Theology) and practical rituals (the Mass) in order to harmonize the relation soul-body. This is the theme of the next chapter.

4. Some Interpretations of Sacred Texts: A Perspective

One of the main purposes of Religion (from Latin "Re"(again) and "Ligare" (connection)) is that the subject becomesself-aware of his "shadow side" (a psychological concept interconnected with the notion of "sin" in Christianity and "karma" in Hinduism), integrating it (in a positive way) into his Personality [16]. This could be achieved through the "intuition" of Religious myths and symbolisms presented into the various Sacred books that are self-representations of the subjective unconscious psychic process of the human beingand manifested as objective events of the "Collective archetypes".

For example, in the Sacred Book of Christianity, called by Bible [17], we have the reference to the dream of the Pharaoh of Egypt who asked Joseph to decipher it. Joseph associated this dream with the seven years of abundance which would be followed by seven years of starvation in Egypt. I’ll quote: «Then Pharaoh said to Joseph: "In my dream, I was by the river. And out of the river came seven fat and fair cows, which began to graze the grass; Then..."
Moreover, St. Joseph (husband of Virgin Mary and father of Jesus) had also some dreams, where it was revealed to him to marry the Virgin Mary who would give birth to Jesus. Then, they should flee to Egypt in order to avoid the death declared by Herod to all the children. I’ll quote: “The Angel Gabriel said to Virgin Mary: ‘...full of Grace, the Lord is with you ...you will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son to be called Jesus’. Thus, the birth of Jesus Christ was like this; His mother was pregnant by virtue of the Holy Spirit...Then, an Angel of the Lord appeared to St. Joseph in dreams, and said to him: ‘do not be afraid to receive Virgin Mary as your wife because she is pregnant by Holy Spirit action’...Having awakened from the dream, St. Joseph received Mary as his wife and she gave birth to a son, whom, they named Jesus”. Then «After they left, an Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, and said to him: “Get up, take the Child and His Mother, flee to Egypt and stay there until I tell you. Herod will seek the child to kill him,” And St. Joseph arose in the night and took the child and his wife for the purpose of fleeing to Egypt. They remained there until the death of Herod ... “». Many other examples show that these Sacred texts use a subjective or metaphorical/symbolic language so that the human being might contact the deeper levels of the mind (where the myth and the Sacred reside) for the purpose of receiving the “mission” that should be realized in the concrete world.

Also in the sacred book of Hinduism, designated by Bhagavad-Gita [18], which is part of the great Indian epic Mahabharata (written by the sage Vyasa), we have a dialogue between the warrior Arjuna (symbolism of the Ego) and his Master Krishna (symbolism of the Self) who urges his disciple to begin the “process of Individuation”. This corresponds to the “battle of the heart of Arjuna” that he has to face through various “choices” in his life (personal, professional, etc.), but for which the exclusive use of the concrete/linear mind (intellect) and selfish wishes will constitute his true enemy, and hisown “battlefield” in everyday life.

In this case, the union of the Ego with the Self or the human with the Divinemight only beperformed through the “Language of the heart” that is perceived only with a transdisciplinary and non-linear approach to life. In fact, Master Krishna (Vishnu’s Reincarnation or Love aspect) plays a melody - the Voice of the heart [19] or the Song of the Divine Master (the title of Bhagavad-Gita) - hoping that it might be heard by each one of us within our “individual heart”, so that we might receive (such as Arjuna) the “Message” for which we were created - the reason for our existence –with the purpose of harmoniously manifest the soul-mind-body relationship in our daily responsibilities (marriage, job, etc).

5. Conclusions

Through practical examples, this essay aimed to show how the transdisciplinary application of various areas of knowledge, namely History of Science, Jungian Psychology and Spirituality might contribute to the quality of life of human beings. There are several studies on the relationship between Spirituality and quality of life [20]. What I’ve concluded is that the same challenge event (mourning, unemployment, illness) could be viewed differently by two people, depending on the sense given by each one to the event. This depends on the mind of the observer (thoughts, feelings) during the process of “Individuation”. In this regard, Spirituality could help the observer in a positive way, namely to give meaning to life and to have a reason to live. In fact, I have mentioned that the mind has quantum characteristics (they are like “quantum waves of possibility”) similar to “archetypes” that come to fruition only when the observer “chooses” what he wants to his life. There are several variables on the way the quality of life is experienced by the observer, such as economic, social and cultural aspects. Furthermore, there are also consistent studies that show an association between quality of life and Spirituality, encompassing the concept of health [21]. For example, a cancer patient, who strengthens their psychological and mental/emotional side through Spirituality/Religion, is more likely to endure the “toughness” of conventional cancer treatments (surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy) than someone else who does not do it [22]. Sometimes, it is at these difficult times that the patient might have the opportunity to change their values, and acquire a deeper meaning for their existence.

References


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