

HOW TO GROW A CHILD: Where to Begin?

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Where to begin? The disorientation of the social sciences at this time in history makes this question more than adequate in the beginning of this essay. The maze of ‘positions’¹ that have emerged over the past century in the social sciences, more pointedly human psychology, have only served to highlight the lack of a foundational beginning in the study of humanity. This disorientation serves only to highlight a problem. It is a beginning only in as much as we have tried.² It cannot serve as a beginning in that its continuance can only take our searchings further from understanding ourselves, or a child. That said, an authentic searching would begin, at the beginning. And where is this ‘beginning’? A brief explanation of why current social science is no place for a foundational ‘beginning’ is required.

The problem with, or within, social science-human psychology, is one of methodology. Just what is the data of being human? *Let us now return to such sciences as psychology and sociology. Two cases arise. These sciences may be modeled on the procedures of the natural sciences. In so far as this approach is carried out rigorously, the meaning in human speech and action is ignored, and the science regards only the unconscious side of human process.*³ Well, let’s look at a human being. Or, let’s look at a tree. What differentiates the human from the tree? Is it what we see or is it our understanding of what we see? That distinction is a refinement of awareness that can be quite difficult to grasp. So difficult in fact, that the past century of psychology has failed to notice the difference between looking and understanding.⁴ It is interesting perhaps to

¹ See Philip McShane: *A Brief History of Tongue: From Big Bang to Coloured Wholes*, Axial Press, Halifax, 1998. p. 143 on ‘positional’.

² This calls for a respect for history. See P. McShane: *Lonergan’s Challenge to the University and the Economy*, University Press of America, 1980, ch. 6, “An Improbable Christian Vision and the Economic Rhythms of the Second Million Years”. We have tried, are trying, what is missing is our reflection on the foundations of our ‘trying’.

³ Bernard Lonergan: *Method in Theology*, London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973, p. 180.

⁴ A perusal of texts on method in psychology will manifest this lack of distinction.

think of how you come to any self-awareness. You can look in a mirror and ‘see’ yourself. What you see is an image of yourself. Not the ‘seen’ self. You cannot step outside of yourself and look at yourself. On this basis you can only know others since you cannot ‘see’ yourself. So, how do you develop any self-awareness of yourself? You direct your attention, your awareness to your self, to your own ‘inner’ feelings, thoughts, motivations, dreams, aspirations, hopes, fears, desires..... If this is the only way, or manner, that you and I can grasp some insight into ourselves, why would the process be any different in knowing others?⁵ And, furthermore, is the seen self the real self? This question raises the methodological problem and initiates the ‘beginning’. So, how do we know the seen tree from the seen person? By understanding what you see? Could understanding be a central component in knowing reality, and more pointedly for our discussion, could understanding be a central component in the understanding, or knowing, of a child? Questions, questions, questions.⁶ What purpose could they possibly serve in this ‘beginning’⁷ and yet they continue to occur and if we push our attention a bit we might notice they initiate a beginning. The methodological twist is, can we push or direct our attention in such a manner that we begin to slowly appreciate a distinction, a refinement, between seeing something and understanding something? I suppose we might think, why understand anything, it is difficult? Would it not be nice just to look and know? But if looking satisfies all that we are, we are no more than cameras, mirrors of a seen world. And any effort to move beyond looking becomes an inhuman activity. Are we merely lookers? Another question! Why do they continue to pop-up? And just where are they popping up from?

We can see a written question and hear a spoken question, but from whence do they come? I hesitate to answer these questions as it may only shortcut your own awareness. Is the seen child the understood child? And if the seen child is the understood child, why are we so involved in developing methods of education and parenting? The implication of course is that the real child is the seen child. Take a moment perhaps and think of all that you are in terms of secrets and hidden fears etc. and then think of how

⁵ Bernard Lonergan: *Insight: A Study in Human Understanding*, CWL 3, University of Toronto Press, 1992, Ch. 11, sections 5, 7 & 9 on self-affirmation of knowing.

⁶ *Ibid.*: pp. 33 & 34 on the question as the genesis of all knowing.

⁷ McShane, *Brief History of Tongue*, for a reflection on E. Voegelin’s statement: “Where does the beginning begin?” E. Voegelin, *In Search of Order*, vol. 5, Louisiana State University Press, 1987, 13ff.

much others know of this and that when they look at you, they see none of this. Is the seen you the real you? Now these inner experiences can be named without understanding them in any explanatory manner. To say one is sad is to ‘recognize’ an experience but not necessarily to be able to explain what sadness is. I am trying to raise some doubt in your mind about any correspondence between the seen child and the understood child. There are relations between these two experiences, but not a correspondence. *Yet the thesis of extreme realism is so simply stated as a claim that knowledge is by identity,*⁸ Correspondence intimates a similarity. A relation intimates a connection, not of similarity, but of development, going beyond the experience of the seen child. Understanding a child ‘looks’ nothing like the seen child. Furthermore, the experience of understanding is nothing like the experience of seeing. The ‘real’ child is the correctly understood child. When the seen child takes on the role of being the real child in science, as in psychology, a naïve realism dominates research and statistical science then takes on a front line and foundational character.⁹ Observation of the seen child and their observed activity become the data of all accepted research. The inner dynamics of the child are considered ‘unempirical’. The dynamics of the researcher are, in the same manner, not considered data in understanding the human person.

Why would the data of the researcher researching be relevant to a developing understanding of a child? Perhaps the first issue as researcher might be one’s motivation for researching. And there could be many. One might want to do some good for the community. A moral motivation. One might have got into a line of work by happenstance and stuck with it for the paycheque. Or one might have a curiosity about children, or about the essence of what it is to be human. They may have begun with the question: ‘What is a child?’ If, in fact, this was there beginning, is that question, that curiosity, not relevant to the research? Is that question not a datum in the researcher? Does not that drive, that question, bring about the researcher’s ‘activity’, both inner and outer? And do we not often question the motivation of people? We recognize a motivation by the activity, but the activity is not the motivation itself. The motivation is an inner conscious drive, or perhaps unacknowledged experience, within the person’s mind. If this

⁸ *Brief History of Tongue*, p. 144.

⁹ *Method in Theology*, p. 180.

experience is unacknowledged, or considered ‘unempirical’, the inner workings of the child will suffer the same unintentional neglect. And the inner dynamics that constitute the human element, the data of the social sciences, is missed. The seen child has mistakenly become the ‘real’ child and the naïve realism that dominates research continues to develop theories of what it is to be a child on this mistaken notion and the child is at the mercy of this mistake and its practical oriented theories.¹⁰

In order for the researcher to develop an appreciation for the inner dynamics of the child it would be necessary to first of all develop an appreciation for one’s own. So, a researcher might reach for an awareness of his or her own motivation(s) in doing research and seek out the relationship between the motivation and their research. Or they might find the motivation has a history quite existential to their childhood. In the process of developing some appreciation for their own inner activity, might they not develop some appreciation for a child’s inner activity?

But this would be only a beginning. The issues of subjectivity and objectivity¹¹ would rear their puzzling head almost immediately for the contemporarily trained researcher. The modern social scientist is trained, in some way, before he or she even enters the university.¹² Living and growing has well implanted the notion that what is real is the ‘already out there now’. Looking and knowing have taken on a fixed psychological poise in one’s mind. The position of this stance is not based on reason. It is a gradual process grounded in pointing and naming experiences from one’s earliest years.¹³ There is a nice little dialogue that Piaget records among his lengthy works between himself and a child. Piaget asks a boy, 7 or 8 years of age, how the boy knows things. The boy answers, “Because you ask me questions.” Without any depth of understanding, the child is pointing to the correct data of research, of knowing. Piaget missed the pointing and

¹⁰ *Loneragan Workshop*, Vol. 1, ed. By Fred Lawrence, Scholars Press, 1978. See Lawrence’s “Political Theology and The Longer Cycle of Decline”, p. 240 *Isn’t it a shock to discover that the trajectory of political thought....is rooted in the Machiavellian option to... develop realist views in which theory is adjusted to practice and practice means whatever happens to be done.*(Loneragan, Collection)

¹¹ See *Insight* on objectivity within various contexts.

¹² Common sense knowing invades our first experience in the world of immediacy as children. Most of us never leave this world, not even the scientist. We speak of theory, but it is a sub-sophistication of common sense talk cloaked in elaborate terminology. It creates an uncomfortable tension in ‘hallway’ chat and humor becomes the most profitable means of survival unless one has been naively convinced of one’s pretense.

¹³ Robert Henman, *The Child as Quest*, University Press of America, 1984. ch. 2. See also *Insight* on the problem of nominalism, pp. 35-37.

went on to other questions. Now how could an established thinker, like Piaget, miss that ‘pointing’? Because Piaget had never stopped to attempt to notice how he knew anything.¹⁴ The child, in that case, was advertent to his own experience. That is rare in our culture. Piaget was not alone in his non-advertence to himself. This non-advertence is systemic in our culture and in our researching. The boy’s response was an objectification of an experience. The boy understood, in some manner, that Piaget’s questions cajoled him into thinking and knowing. What is first a subjective experience becomes objectified in the boy’s judgment. In judgment we acknowledge that we understand something. In the one act of judgment we objectify both our knowing structure and its content. In judgment we attain knowledge. In judgment we know reality. Looking, or hearing, are single components of knowing, of reality. The addition of questions, of understanding, of judging, complete the process and only then do we know. The incessant activity of children’s questions is an objectification of their curiosity, an inner dynamic that is natural and as Aristotle stated, the beginning of science.

The neglect of this activity both in the child and the researcher leaves the human element in social science out of the picture. Within this milieu behaviourism and experimentalism continue to deepen the mistaken objectification of naïve realism-‘The seen child is the real child.’ If we observe long enough, someday we will understand children. Unfortunately, what will be achieved is only a refinement of observation that proliferates views of parenting and education focussed on being practical while the inner dynamic of the child continually fights to adapt to truncated processes of living. This process of adaptation disorientates the inner natural processes and neurosis becomes a more than common feature of society enabling terms such as dysfunctional to become the buzzwords of common speech.

This brief introduction into the methodological problems of research sets the stage for some discussion of the child’s natural growth. Just what is going on inside the child, or more pointedly, inside you and I? For it is only within our own inner experience that we can, in fact, come to some understanding of what is going on within the child. To neglect ourselves is to resort solely to observation of the child and that merely serves to highlight the short-sightedness of what we have outlined above. So, does the researcher

¹⁴ Piaget focussed on the development and integration of skills of the child for most of his life work.

have something in common with a child that has the possibility of reorienting research towards understanding a child?

Let us return briefly to the researcher. Does the researcher have questions? One would hope so, otherwise the motivations for doing research are those mentioned above. One does have to live and eat. Those are not neurotic motivations but other drives can be in play such as prestige.¹⁵ Such motivations can inhibit the natural dynamic of curiosity. You might recall as a child that reward often became the motivation for achieving a high mark in early schooling. Understanding the topic can then take a back seat to learning. Understanding becomes an appendage to one's education. If you, the researcher, have questions, and even if the motivation is off, you still have some question that you are seeking an answer. But why a question, why begin with a question?

I hesitate to answer that question. The empirical work needs to be carried out by you, the researcher, if it is to become part of your own self-understanding. So, you might begin with: "What is your question?" and "Why that question?" and "Why a question?" Notice how my questions consecutively back you into yourself in my effort to assist you in noticing an inner dynamic of yourself. As a negative context, you might think about what you would be doing if you had no question. How would you do research? Would you even do research if you had no question? If you have acknowledged that you do have a question, what is your question seeking? Again, I hesitate to answer, but I suggest that you are seeking understanding of something that will assimilate your question and perhaps dissolve it completely. Is that what you are seeking? Are you noticing that these questions are concomitant with self-understanding and your methodology of doing research? If you suspect that this is difficult stuff, I agree. And that, in itself, is an insight into self-understanding and the field of social science methodology.

Let us reflect on the child's world briefly. When children first begin to speak they begin with questions. They do not begin with answers. And furthermore they do not have to be taught to ask questions or how to ask questions. It would seem to be a natural dynamic. Again, when you are confronted with an unknown, what is your first experience? Do you wonder? Do you formulate your wonder into a question? The child quickly formulates their wonder into questions. 'What's that?' and "Why?" can frustrate

¹⁵ A brief survey of one's own motivations will surely bring an awareness of a few 'others'!

a parent or teacher to the point that they often will formulate quick one-word answers or simply put the child off.¹⁶ Our responses emerge out of the context of our discussion above concerning a lack of self-understanding and how that predisposes us to ‘dysfunctional’ dialogue and mistaken theories on education and parenting. If the child is a natural spontaneous questing how does a culture grow such a being?¹⁷ Should we cultivate that questing or attempt to dissolve it? Perhaps, you might ask yourself: ‘Would you ‘like’ your own questing to fade away?’ Where does that line of reflection take you? Would that be a wonderful aspiration? And if it is an aspiration, is not that aspiration like a seeking, a questing of you? Again, my answer would seem unnecessary and add nothing to your reflection. What do you think?

This brief line of questioning would seem to highlight that the task of growing a child has more to do with the expansion or cultivating of the child’s natural dynamic, their questing, than its suppression. This dynamic would seem to be a ‘state of their being.’ And if it is, then growing that ‘state’ would be an expansion, a development, of what the child is, a desire to understand. This reflection merely helps us understand what it is we are growing. Have I responded to the paper’s title: “How to Grow a Child?: Where to Begin?” I have attempted to manifest a basic problem in social science research concerning data and the “real”. I then tried to show that our inner dynamics are the data of this research. I went on to reveal that questions are very relevant in research, and in the study of children. Our questions are our beginning. In as much as our questions are seeking something, they also are extremely revelatory in other ways about what it is to be human-a child. So my preliminary response to the question in our title is that we begin with ourselves-our own questions and questing. If an advertence to our questions and questing is the beginning of any serious effort to understand a child and if you have begun to suspect that these experiences are relevant to your living and self-understanding, then you have initiated your own beginning. If you are still ‘wondering’, or ‘doubting’ I

¹⁶ See my *The Child as Quest*, ch. 2 on the issue of nominalism as an expediency within the emerging anxiousness of contemporary living and parenting.

¹⁷ This question is the underlying and overarching purpose of this website. To challenge a break from the failure of the present tradition, a failure that is as of yet unknown, until one walks him or herself strangely back through the confines of an “out there” that is you and frees up one’s reaching *into* and *outto* all that is you.

offer a small puzzle, that I have scattered throughout my various articles,¹⁸ in order to assist you in your own ‘beginning’.

 A **EF** **HI**
BCD **G**

This puzzle has two purposes; 1) to solve the puzzle, and 2) to become more aware of how we solve a puzzle, in other words, to notice our questing, to heighten our awareness of ourselves. Some letters are on top of the line and some below: why? There is a law of distribution in play here. What is that law? But more importantly for our purposes: how do you go about finding that law? What is your methodology? Your methodology is you in process, but what I mean by that may not yet be your meaning. This is our beginning. In the next article “How to Grow a Child: Before the Beginning” we explore the origins of our curiosity. Enjoy the puzzle. Enjoy your Self-puzzling!

¹⁸ See my “The Evolution of Empiricism: Implications for Educational Theory” on this website for various experiments designed to shake our world of naïve realism.