

Some Comments on the Bryan Magee Chapter “What Can Be Shown but Not Said”

By Maury Seldin

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Emergence came to mind when Magee, in referring to Langer’s “presentational form” in contrast to her “discursive form,” wrote “Because it is – indeed it must be, and can only be - perceived as a unity and apprehended as a whole...” [Page 108.] He writes that this *presentational form* has a variety of properties “...in a different way the discursive structure can be said to have the same properties.” The idea is that the whole takes on something other than the parts, “...a *Gestalt* – an organic whole...”

It also brings to mind my comments on emergence when we discussed Dennett’s *Sweet Dreams*, Chapter 1, (two years ago). Here is an excerpt: “The human brain is an incredibly complex organ of the human body. As such it is useful to consider the idea of harnessing complexity in order to understand the operation of the organ. Consider the following quote: ‘Complexity often results in features, called **emergent** properties, which are properties of the system that the separate parts do not have. For example, no single neuron has consciousness, but the human brain does have consciousness as an emergent property.’ [See Axelrod, Robert and Cohen, Michael D. *Harnessing Complexity: Organizational Implications of a Scientific Frontier*, New York: The Free Press, 1999. Page 15.] ¶ I found the Axelrod book to be a hard read, but it is useful because it relates to the interactions that I have been dealing with in the Seminar on Strategic Decisions (the last session of which will be at 11 AM on the same day we will discuss the chapter, April 10). Page 62 of the Axelrod book discusses that “...events of interest within the system arise from the interactions of its agents with each other and with artifacts.” ¶ An easier read is the Johnson book, *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software* [Johnson, Steven. *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software*. New York: Touchstone, 2004.]. On page 103, Johnson writes, “The body learns without consciousness, and so do cities, because learning is not just about being *aware* of information; it’s also about storing information and knowing where to find it. It’s about being able to recognize and respond to changing patterns...” Earlier on the same page he provides an example of the body’s immune system learning responses to invading viruses. The later discussion of ants (page 115) provides an analogy to the brain...”

The relevance of this to the Magee chapter is that Magee says that “The presentational form of a philosophical argument is something exhibited by the argument as a whole and not something stated in any, or for that matter, all, of its sentences.” [Page 109.] A practical application of this relates to a better understanding of our current Great Recession, especially how the inadequacy of public policy let it happen.

Here is an excerpt from a colleague of mine relating to my web based seminar which is part of *Maury*

Maury Seldin
on
Strategy Matters

Seldin on Strategy Matters [http://www.hoyt.org/decision_making.phtml], a variation of the ASPEC seminar to be continued this season] : “I was reading an article in a doctor’s office about a conversation between Larry Summers and Joseph Stiglitz both on the Princeton faculty, concerning Paul Volcker who was up for tenure. Stiglitz asked Summers ‘Larry, is this guy really smart?’. Summers started to recap Volcker ’s research, etc.; Stiglitz said, “I mean is he smart like us?’ Meaning can he

theorize and think in the abstract on a higher plane. I believe that melding of the disciplines will require abstraction on a higher level. Some of us will never get it.”

Magee writes in the sentence following the one just quoted, “There is little I can do to tell you what it is, except to repeat it [‘The presentational form of a philosophical argument is something exhibited by the argument as a whole and not something stated in any, or for that matter, all, of its sentences.’]. You have to “see” it for yourself, and if you do not see it there is not much I can do to point it out to you.”

Although Langer is referring to art, we can extend the concept to science, being a devotee of Wilson’s *consilience*. It is this extension that we will be talking about when my seminar at ASPEC resumes. In the meantime, the Magee discussion of *Tractatus* and logical positivism makes the point that languages and other symbols have their limitations. The important issues go to the roots of values. The discussion continues with the limitations of science. As Wittgenstein is quoted, “... the problems of life remain completely untouched.

What is missing is that the forecasts of outcomes can be improved by better science, but we can discuss that when we get to Popper.