

The Scientific Approach : 28th September 2022 (LRO 356) : Dominique Rudaz (Lausanne, Switzerland)

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## The Scientific Approach

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Some critics of psychoanalysis, in particular the supporters of cognitive-behavioral therapies, argue for having a scientific approach, as we could read in a recent brochure concerning the therapeutic care of autistic people<sup>[1]</sup>.

Even if the question of whether psychoanalysis is a science or not remains open, it nevertheless seems important to me to point out that these pseudo-scientific approaches which claim to be *evidence based*, to have *observable* and *factual data*, have nothing to do with modern science.

Indeed if we consider, like Alexandre Koyré, that it is with Galileo's step that modern science entered the world, it is precisely not with the *observable*, the *factual data* that this step could have been crossed. Galileo, in his experimental method, "knows that it is not enough to observe what is, what normally and naturally presents itself to the eyes [...] in the sense of what is given to sensitive perception, the experiential foundation of pre-Galilean science"<sup>[2]</sup>. "With Galileo, and after Galileo, we have a fracture between the world given to the senses and the real world, that of science"<sup>[3]</sup>. How, without breaking away from the sterile empiricism of the Aristotelians, would the writing on the blackboard of uniform rectilinear motion and the exit from the theory of *impetus* have been possible? How could the theory of magnetism have come about? Indeed, Galileo did not hesitate "to use in his mathematical theories concepts of which no example had been or could be observed"<sup>[4]</sup>. The scientific approach according to Koyré requires on the contrary an "effort to explain the real by the impossible"<sup>[5]</sup>. The adequacy of *factual, observable data* with the *real world* (which we imagine) is therefore a regression, even an obstacle from a scientific point of view. Jacques

Lacan's phrase "There are formulas one does not imagine. At least for a time, they make an assembly with the real"<sup>[6]</sup> comes here to echo Koyré : "We must therefore choose between thinking and imagining. Think with Galileo or imagine with common sense. For it is thought [...] and not the experience and perception of the senses, which is the basis of Galileo Galilei's "new science"<sup>[7]</sup>. It is indeed an *effort* to tighten this real, *at least for a time*.

The question arises for us: if these detractors of psychoanalysis are not doing science, what are they doing?

The answer could be given to us by Georges Canguilhem, and in particular in the blackguardism which he unmasks in the rising psychology of the 19th and 20th centuries and which he calls "a biology of human behavior"<sup>[8]</sup>, which finds one of its conditions of possibility in "technical and economic reasons, namely the development of an industrial regime directing attention to the industrious character of the human species"<sup>[9]</sup>. In this committee of experts, advisers, evaluators, selectors, the implicit idea, never formulated by them because otherwise their project could not be implemented, is that of "instrumentalism, involving the idea of the utility of man, the idea of man as a means of utility"<sup>[10]</sup>. Lacan's statement: "There is no other meta-language than every form of blackguardism [...] All blackguardism comes from wanting to be the Other – I mean the big Other – for someone"<sup>[11]</sup>, is well pointed out by Canguilhem: "To select a selector, it is normally necessary to transcend the plan of the technical processes of selection. In the immanence of scientific psychology the question remains: who has, not the competence, but the mission to be a psychologist? Psychology is always based on a duality, [...] it is that of a mass of "subjects" and a corporate elite of specialists investing themselves in their own mission"<sup>[12]</sup>.

To conclude, let us give an example of a modern scientific approach worthy of the name, and in particular with the explanation of the conservation of energy given by Richard Feynman<sup>[13]</sup>.

Feynman, to explain what energy is, takes as an example *Dennis the Menace*: his mother gives him 28 identical and indestructible blocks. Once the mother returns to his room, there are only 23 left. However, a box in the room, which we are not going to open of course, has increased in weight (Dennis has hidden some blocks in it); also, the level of dirty water in the bathtub, so dirty that you can't see what's in it, has raised (Dennis threw blocks in the bathtub), etc. Feynman explains to us that with calculations (comparison of the weight of the box before and after, calculation of the change in volume of the water, etc.), we can and must find exactly the same number of blocks from the start, i.e. a *constant*.

THE PSEUDO-SCIENTIST: So the blocks are the energy! It's observable and factual data!

FEYNMAN: "The most remarkable aspect that must be abstracted from this picture is that there are no blocks"<sup>[14]</sup>

THE PSEUDO-SCIENTIST: So what the fuck is energy then?!

FEYNMAN: "[...] in physics today, we have no knowledge of what energy *is*"<sup>[15]</sup>.

This is a good lesson in humility worthy of a true scientific approach.

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Psychoanalytic position against dogmatism applied to autism*, Brochure distributed during the NLS Congress 2-3 July 2022 and downloadable here: [https://www.spp.asso.fr/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Brochure-Autisme\\_2022.pdf](https://www.spp.asso.fr/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Brochure-Autisme_2022.pdf)

<sup>[2]</sup> Alexandre Koyré, *Etudes d'histoire de la pensée scientifique*, Gallimard, p.59

<sup>[3]</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60

<sup>[4]</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83

<sup>[5]</sup> *Ibid.*, p.185

<sup>[6]</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Radiophonie*, Autres écrits, Seuil, p.423

See [Radiophonie: 9th April & 5th June 1970: Jacques Lacan](#) or <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=330> Also in [Autres Écrits: 2001 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here](#) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=756> See [www.Freud2Lacan.com](http://www.Freud2Lacan.com) /Lacan

<sup>[7]</sup> Alexandre Koyré, *op.cit.*, p.210

<sup>[8]</sup> Georges Canguilhem, *Qu'est-ce que la psychologie ?*, Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale, 1958 (n1), p.87

<sup>[9]</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>[10]</sup> *Ibid.*, p.88

<sup>[11]</sup> Jacques Lacan, Séminaire XVII, *L'envers de la psychanalyse*, Seuil, lesson of the 21 of January 1979, p.68

See [Seminar XVII: Psychoanalysis upside down/The reverse side of psychoanalysis: 1969-1970 : from 26th November 1969: Jacques Lacan](#) or [here](#) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=241> p61 of Russell Grigg's translation, recommended Seminar XVII, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1979, Cormac Gallagher's translation at [www.LacanianIreland.com](http://www.LacanianIreland.com) /seminars

<sup>[12]</sup> Georges Canguilhem, *op.cit.*, p.91

<sup>[13]</sup> Lacan speaks about this example of Feynman in the lesson just after *Science and Truth*:

Jacques Lacan, Séminaire XIII, *L'objet de la psychanalyse*, lesson of the 8 of December 1965, unpublished

See [Seminar XIII: The Object of Psychoanalysis: 1965-1966 & Science & Truth: December 1st 1965: Jacques Lacan](#) or [here](#) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=284>

& Cormac Gallagher's translation at [www.LacanianIreland.com](http://www.LacanianIreland.com) /seminars

[14] Richard Feynman, *The Feynman lectures on physics*, Volume I, Chapter 4, *The conservation of energy*

[https://www.feynmanlectures.caltech.edu/I\\_04.html](https://www.feynmanlectures.caltech.edu/I_04.html)

[15] *Ibid.*

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