

## Scholarship, Understanding and the Vistas of Knowledge

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Although there have been many advances in various fields of academia and science, in some ways there have also been a number of significant regressions, which I believe may be attributed to the stubborn clinging to the academic tradition of compartmentalizing “knowledge” into separate blocks of rigorously bounded disciplines.

Though working within the broadly defined fields of cognitive psychology and neuroscience, the academic spectrum that informs my work crosses disciplinary boundaries and falls squarely within the domain of interdisciplinary studies. My orientation towards an interdisciplinary path of study began in my undergraduate days where my interests in both anthropology and psychology led me to recognize that these two disciplines were really two sides of the single concern of understanding human behavior – on one side is the nomothetic viewpoint of culture and society as the barometer of a “community” of behavior and on the other side is the idiographic perspective of the nature of the human mind in structuring a distinct self-identity governing individual behavior within the defining milieu of a particular community of behavior.

In my graduate studies I endeavored to marry anthropology with psychology in defining the individual as a unique biological potential cast and framed as a product of, and the resistance to, the molding and melding processes of, and interplay between, the tensions of culture, society-at-large, group, family and the individual’s inner core of being.

In this direction of study, I incorporated a wide range of academic spheres, such as history/historiography, archaeology/archaeological theory and method, cognitive archaeology, philology, paleoanthropology and human evolution, cultural theory, physical/medical anthropology, linguistic anthropology, discursive psychology, social psychology, clinical psychology, physiological psychology, evolutionary psychology, literature and literary critique, semantics, semiotics, philosophy of science, hermeneutics, philosophical phenomenology and phenomenological psychology, because I realized that in attempting to understand the human condition I need to understand where we are now at the present moment in time, and, to understand that, I need to know where we have been and the process of the journey from then to now. That knowledge can only be acquired through the exploration of the different facets that constitute the human being, including the products of the human mind and the record of human interaction through the ages, by way of studies in anthropology, archaeology, cultural artefacts, evolutionary biology, folklore and legends, historical accounts, literature (from poems, short stories and novels to the scientific corpus), psychological investigation and philosophical perspectives on the nature of being.

Wilhelm Dilthey, in introducing a systematic methodology for the study of the human condition, argued towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that individual consciousness, a phenomenon uniquely experienced by each individual, lies beyond vocabulary or verbal malleability to definitively relate in all its subtleties and paradoxes of feelings and impressions, and can never be truly known outside a single, closed, individual perspective. From the fuller understanding today of the neurophysiology

of the human brain, it can be seen how even the individual perspective is severely limited, as the driving forces of conscious orientation, both multitudinous and instantaneously transformed in the ever-changing complex of assemblages of cognitive constructs in the autonomic machinery of cognitive processing, are imperceptible to the slower, highly-filtered, more summary-based conscious processing apparatus. Dilthey stated that neither consciousness nor the subliminal experiences or constructs of perception that underlie consciousness, closed to intersubjective examination, could be a valid realm of study; however, essential clues to individual human experience and universal manifestations of the mind could be extracted from the *products* (or “texts”) of human consciousness in all forms of expression such as folk tales, myths, legends, superstitions, religions, history, philosophy, scientific theories and explanations, literature and the arts, etc. – which could be studied directly, concretely, intersubjectively, and analyzed in critical, constructive, objective, systematic ways. In answering the criticism that a large component of such a variety of works are creative and often fanciful and do not reflect real life; they are, however, unequivocally products of the mind – the depository of all that we experience – and therefore representative of our hopes, dreams, fears, longings, visions, imaginings, in short, the true essence of being human.

Influenced by the Diltheian perspective, my doctoral dissertation was a study in understanding the past through a psychosocial discursive analysis of Neo-Assyrian cuneiform texts ca. first millennium BC, applying Diltheian hermeneutics, phenomenology, semiotics, literary criticism and historiography in a comprehensive, systematic approach to understanding social discourse through textual exegesis in a tight sociohistorical context, revealing deeper levels of meaning of social conflict and a sharper historical perspective of a little-known, long-vanished society. The object was to establish a solid framework for a breakthrough in psychosocial research in the present by demonstrating a methodology that, able to achieve a new understanding of the far reaches of the historical past, could surely achieve a critically more poignant psychosocial understanding of the individual in the greater familiarity of our own time, culture, society and language through such an intense analysis of the “texts” of human experience.

The dissertation, commencing 2001/2002, anticipated the formal emergence of the new field of cognitive criticism (also referred to as cognitive literary criticism, cognitive poetics, cognitive literary analysis, cognitive cultural studies, cognitive analysis of art and literature, or cognitive literary studies) that, incorporating the principles and newest findings in the cognitive sciences and neuroscience in literary criticism to understand the human mind through stories, is today one of the fastest growing areas of research in literature and literary studies.

In my work in neuroscience, founding the new field of applied social neuroscience (ASN) and originating the modality of Cognitive Neuroeducation (CNE) for prevention of and recovery from cognitive and behavioral disorder, following on from my dissertation I have applied Diltheian hermeneutics, philosophical phenomenology and phenomenological psychology to social psychology, physiological psychology/neuropsychology, evolutionary psychology, paleoanthropology and psychological anthropology to understand the biological predispositions in the formation of the realms of culture, language and society through

which meaning is uniquely individually constructed. In particular, in my emphasis on 1) textual analysis, 2) texts as products of the mind and 3) stories as gateways to understanding the mind, I will unabashedly admit that I have developed more insight on the essence of being human and understanding the human condition from exploring novels and stories with my students and with participants in the CNE programs than from all the textbooks and research papers that I have studied over the years.

In joint dialog in conceptualizations, reactions to situations, beliefs, modes of social interaction and interpersonal relationships, emotive contours, flights of imagination, aesthetic visions, creative artistry and nuance, duty, purpose, sense of destiny, character profiles, etc. in the stories of a wide variety of places and times, cultures and traditions real and imagined that we read together, has enabled my students and participants in the CNE programs to profoundly grasp the constructs of the mind and behavior, to empathize with the situations and feelings of others, to discover themselves in learning about others, to become more socially integrated and responsive, to be awed at the variety, beauty and promise of endless adventure and mystery awaiting around the next bend in the road, and to be instilled with motivation, critical thinking and analytical skills to find their place in the wide world that beckons them.

I am the founder of the field of applied social neuroscience (ASN) and the originator of the modality Cognitive Neuroeducation (CNE) that focusses on optimizing learning outcomes to stimulate and expand cognitive acuity in cognitive rehabilitation and in prevention of and recovery from cognitive and behavioral disorder. Currently I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Center for Applied Social Neuroscience (CASN), an organization dedicated to pioneering cognitive development and rehabilitation programs, and am serving on the scientific board of the peer-reviewed start-up publication *International Journal of Psychology and Neuroscience* (ISSN 2183-5829). My papers published online at Academia (academia.edu) are consistently ranked in the top 2% or higher among the more than 43 million academics on Academia. It might well be asked, at this juncture in my career, why I do not hold, nor have not held, a formal faculty position in an academic institution for the last several years.

The problem is the current orientation of tightly defined discipline-bounded pedagogy in academia that addresses questions in such a superficial manner as to omit the deep and profound implications, critiques and nuances of a broad spectrum of ideational constructs that lie at the core of exciting intellectual engagement constituting the real “meat” of scholarship. This, I believe, does a great disservice, not only to the integrity of scholarship, but an even more damning disservice to the intellectual and professional growth of the student. Consequently, I have shied away from taking any faculty position in academia for a number of years, since in teaching within the framework of such a constrained pedagogy I would become a part of the very disservice that I condemn.

Knowledge is a curious phenomenon — where in science, philosophy, and other intellectual pursuits of understanding, while we seek to discover the absolute truths of life and of the universe, knowledge itself is paradoxically composed of relative truths, as all things may be understood from many different positions, starting points, frames of reference and personal perspectives. Being relative does not make these “truths” any less real to the frames of

reference in which they reside. While this relativity may seem daunting, making any understanding impossibly complex, it is, in fact, empowering, allowing any critically thinking individual with sufficient academic training to develop a newer understanding of a particular direction of study or reflection through a creative, innovative perspective. The full recognition of this relativity leads to the undeniable, stirring realization that there are so many more, endless things to discover, so many more, endless ways by which to view all phenomena, so many more, endless ways to think about life and all its mysteries and so many more, endless contributions to knowledge waiting for eager, imaginative, curious, probing, questioning minds to reveal.

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