

Understanding: Convergence between Knowing and Being

AUTHOR

Roberto CREMA

Psychologist and anthropologist, Master in Human and Social Sciences from the University of Paris, trained in various humanistic and transpersonal approaches, creator of the transactional synthesis approach – the fifth force in therapy. He was the general coordinator of the 1st International Holistic Congress (1987), which led to the creation of the International University of Peace – UNIPAZ and implemented the Holistic Basic Training – FHB – in Brazil, based on the transdisciplinary approach (1989). Honorary member of the Luso-Brazilian Transpersonal Association – ALUBRAT, Fellow of the Findhorn Foundation – Scotland, former coordinator of the International College of Therapists – CIT-Brazil and Rector of UNIPAZ.

robertocrema@gmail.com

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Abstract: *This is a challenging and paradoxical aspect of the contemporary crisis: the existence of the hypertrophy of information and knowledge, with broad, unrestricted and immediate access, while at the same time suffering from the atrophy of the process of discernment and understanding. As Heidegger rightly denounces, we have never been so alienated from the human question.*

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No era has accumulated as much and as diverse knowledge about the human being as ours. No era has managed to present its knowledge of the human being in such a ready and easily accessible form. But no era has known less about what the human being is.

Martin Heidegger

1. Introduction

On the subject of understanding reality, Basarab Nicolescu¹ begins his book, *Qu'est-ce que la réalité ?*, in a blunt manner: 'The word "reality" is one of the most prostituted in all the languages of the world. Everyone believes they know what reality is, but when we ask ourselves, we discover that there are as many conceptions of this word as there are inhabitants of the earth. So it's not surprising that countless conflicts are constantly raging between individuals and peoples: reality versus reality. Under these conditions, it is by some kind of miracle that humanity still exists (...). However, the triple revolution that swept through the 20th century – the quantum revolution, the biological revolution and the computer revolution – should profoundly change our view of reality.'

We therefore need to reflect on what prevents us from updating our references and what can open us up to the possible universe of an intrapersonal and interpersonal, subjective and intersubjective understanding, within the framework of a Trinitarian ecology: individual, social and planetary.

Among the external obstacles to intellectual understanding, Edgar Morin² points to the existence of 'noise', the lack of understanding caused by the polysemy of concepts, ignorance of other people's rights, habits, values and ethical imperatives, incompatible worldviews and unequal mental structures. As for internal difficulties, Morin points to egocentrism, ethnocentrism and sociocentrism. Perhaps we can expand on these lucid considerations by affirming the existence of a mega-factor that impedes understanding, which consists of what Pierre Weil, Jean-Yves Leloup and this author³ call *normosis, a pathology of normality*.

2. The Obstacle of Normosis

Pierre Weil⁴ conceptualises normosis as anomalies of normality made up of norms, concepts, values, stereotypes, habits of thinking and acting, which are

¹ Nicolescu, Basarab. *Qu'est-ce que la réalité ?* Montréal : Liber, 2009.

² Morin, Edgar. *The Seven Knowledges necessary for the Education of the Future*. São Paulo: Cor- tez; Brasília: UNESCO, 2002.

³ Weil, Pierre; Leloup, J.-Y.; Crema, R. *Normose, the pathology of normality*. Campinas: Verus, 2003.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

approved by consensus or by the majority in a given society and which cause suffering, illness and death.

To put it into context, I'll reflect on the existence of three foundations of normosis. The first is *systemic*: this pathology of mediocrity arises when the system in which we live is dominantly unbalanced, morbid and corrupted; when what predominates are contradictions or symptoms such as a lack of listening, respect, care and fraternity, as well as alarming and growing violence against the individual, society and nature. In this context, a 'normal' person, or rather a normotic person, is one who fits into the sick system and contributes to maintaining the *status quo*. We know from the founding charter of the World Health Organisation (1946) that health is not the absence of symptoms, but the presence of a state of full somatic, psychological and social well-being. The environmental and spiritual factors were later added. This means that when a system is largely in a pathological state, the healthy person is the one who manifests a state of conscious maladjustment, lucid indignation and even sober despair.

The second foundation is the *evolutionary* one, which starts from the principle of the unfinished nature of the human being, as Paulo Freire said⁵. This is what we can translate by saying that we are not born a human; we become human through a systematic investment in the potential for self-development, maturity and possible fulfilment. To put it another way, the human being has introduced another order of complexity into the evolutionary quality of the planet, which translates into conscious and intentional evolution. In addition to chance and necessity, random genetic mutations and battles between the fittest, Darwinian natural selection, human evolution consists of the development of consciousness, which requires working on oneself along evolutionary paths of individuation. As Teilhard de Chardin⁶ said, things don't just appear in the Universe: they are born, gestation and evolving, with certain favoured evolutionary directions leading to novelty, the qualitative leap of the event. For this pioneer in the study of complexity, the two great universal events consisted of the passage from pre-life to life and from life to thought. Finally, from the fantastic increase in complexity arises the Human Being and his reflex consciousness, though. This new quality of conscious and intentional evolution, characteristic of the human being, is supported by contemporary cartography of the integral approach to consciousness, such as the research of Maslow⁷, Rogers⁸, Jung⁹, Grof¹⁰ and Wilber¹¹, to

⁵ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1975.

⁶ Teilhard De Chardin, P. *The Human Phenomenon*. São Paulo: Herder, 1970.

⁷ Maslow, A. *Introduction to the Psychology of Being*. Rio de Janeiro: Eldorado, n.d.

⁸ Rogers, C. *A Way of Being*. São Paulo: E.P.U., 1983.

⁹ Jung, C. G. *Studies in Analytical Psychology, Complete Works, Vol. VII*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1981; Jung, C.G. *Foundations of Analytical Psychology*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1983.

¹⁰ Grof, S. *Psychology of the Future*. Niterói: Heresis, 2000; GROF, S. *The holotropic mind*. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1994.

¹¹ Wilber, K. *The spectrum of consciousness*. São Paulo: Cultrix, 1990; Wilber, K. *The integral vision*. São Paulo: Cultrix, 2009.

name but a few representatives of the humanistic and transpersonal movement of cutting-edge psychic science.

Morin¹², who postulates a meta-natural aspect of the human, states that hominisation has led us to a new beginning: the hominid is humanised and thus the concept of the human acquires a double principle, biophysical and psychosociocultural, dialectically linked. In his words: '*We develop beyond the physical and living world. It is in this "beyond" that the fullness of humanity takes place.*' In this sense, normosis is characterised by a lack of investment in psychic, ethical and noetic potential, representing a state of stagnation in conscious, properly human evolution.

The third foundation is *paradigmatic*, speaking in the broader sense that Thomas Kuhn¹³ gave to this concept. In this case, normosis arises when a paradigm, although already exhausted in its creative potential and to some degree sclerotic, still prevails over another emerging paradigm postulated by a minority group. As Max Planck said, according to Kuhn¹⁴ '*A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but because its opponents finally die and a new generation grows up familiar with it.*' Fortunately, there are examples of scientists, philosophers and great thinkers – Edgar Morin is an icon of this possibility, with his vast body of work that dares to re-configure knowledge – who are capable of a fearless openness to the new, with the lucid prudence of preserving the positive in the old. This is the nobility indicated by Henry Thoreau's paradoxical and happy expression¹⁵, the *majority of one!* ...

On the other hand, the concept of normosis resonates with some of Morin's¹⁶ reflections on the seven knowledges, especially when, when analysing the blind spots of knowledge, he talks about the normalising force of dogma and the prohibitive force of taboo, as well as the determinism of convictions and beliefs and cognitive and intellectual conformism, which we can call a *cognitive normosis of normalisation*. In the same way, Morin refers to cultural *imprinting* as a *matrix mark*, which establishes a type of unquestionable conformism, which we can consider as the normosis of cultural *imprinting*.

On the occasion of the *International Holistic Encounter* in Mendoza¹⁷, I came into contact with Manfred Max-Neef, an alternative Nobel Prize winner in economics. In his talk, this famous scientist said that, from an early age, he wondered what the unique characteristic of the human species was. Culture, in-

¹² Morin, Edgar. *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 87.

¹³ Kuhn, T. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1987.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 53.

¹⁵ Thoreau, H. D. *Walden or Life in the Woods*. São Paulo: Global, 1985.

¹⁶ Morin, Edgar. *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 89.

¹⁷ Max-Neef, M. *Conference at the Encuentro Holístico Internacional, El Fundamento Humano y Ecológico de la Empresa y la Economía*. Mendoza, November 1989.

telligence, language? No, because other species also develop them. Was it humouring? When he met another scientist, Nobel laureate in ethology Konrad Lorenz, he learnt that it wasn't there are other humorous species. So, he continued with this enquiry until an unexpected moment when his father, a man for whom he had great respect, asked him: – *My son, isn't it stupidity?*

Max-Neef said that at that moment a light went on and he became the first *stupidologist*! Stupidology is a science that needs to be studied with rigour and urgency. It is important to clarify that it differs from harmless imbecility in that it has a logical rationality and is exercised mainly through technical language. The suicidal devastation of the planetary ecosystem, for example, can be justified or rationalised stupidly through developmental logic. Here's an image that could be a metaphor for this trendy attitude: a man sawing off a tree branch – with an elegant, statistically well-founded speech about progress – right where he's sitting! Another notable Nobel Prize winner, Albert Einstein, used to say that, for him, only two things were infinite: the universe and human stupidity. And as far as the universe was concerned, he ironically concluded, he wasn't entirely sure yet! ...

Edgar Morin¹⁸ refers to this same reality when he talks about the existence of two *cretinisms*. The first is from *below*, from a banal mass culture and an alienated media, which the university world, according to the author, is very keen to denounce. However, according to Morin, there is also cretinism *from above*, for which he feels a particular repugnance, proper to an official and intellectual subculture, a certain rationalised obscurantism, characterised by ignorance and *a priori* judgements, with stereotypes, conformisms and arrogant conventional ideas, what we can call the *normosis of scientism*.

I consider stupidity, as well as passive aggression, translated as indifference on the part of those who don't care about the common good or the human cause – which Mahatma Gandhi considered to be worse and more destructive than active violence – to be two of the most important characteristics of this insidious and tragic disease we call normosis.

As Basarab Nicolescu¹⁹ states, *three* and *trans* have the same etymological root, with three meaning the transgression of two, just as transdisciplinarity is the transgression of binary duality, towards a complex plurality and an open unity, two faces of the same reality. Adopting our concept, Nicolescu said at a conference in Strasbourg²⁰ that we need to go beyond the *normalisation of the binary*.

Finally, in order to achieve what Morin calls the *ethics of understanding* – centred on intellectual and moral solidarity at the service of the human race – we

¹⁸ Morin, E. *My demons*. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 1997.

¹⁹ Nicolescu, Basarab, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 47.

²⁰ Welter, R. (ed.) *Transdisciplinarité — Um chemin vers la paix*. Éditions F.B.V. pour le C.N.R.S., 2005.

need to transgress the normosis that lies at the root of the contemporary civilisational crisis.

3. Psychic Functions

According to the vast research of psychiatrists Carl Gustav Jung²¹, there are four psychic functions inherent to human beings: *thought, feeling, sensation and intuition*. It's not hard to see that the dialogue between thought (rationalism) and sensation (empiricism) gave rise to contemporary *science*. Just as the alliance between sensation and intuition gave rise to *art*; from thought and intuition, *philosophy*; and from feeling and intuition, *mysticism, from the Wisdom Tradition*. So, as far as the individual foundation is concerned, the four well-known classical epistemological fragments arise from the creative dynamics of our psychic functions.

In general, individuals only develop one or two of these functions, while the others remain atrophied and undifferentiated. The development of the deficient functions and their integration and harmonisation with the others leads, according to Jung, to a fifth function, which he called the *Self*, the intelligence of the psychic totality. The pioneering Jungian approach postulates, beyond mere healing, a process of *individuation* that can lead the individual, through an inner path and a movement of circumvolution, from the periphery of the ego to the centrality of the Self, which is the psychic instance from which real understanding emanates.

This conception of psychic functions has guided us in the fundamental theory of the International University of Peace, UNIPAZ, since its founding event, the First International Holistic Congress – I CHI, which we held in Brasilia (1987), and is also at the heart of our well-established transdisciplinary project, Holistic Basic Training – FHB, which has been in fruitful practice for over twenty years.

As Morin himself points out, we don't need to preach peace, since everyone knows its importance as the only way to avoid the horrors of war. What we really need is a pedagogy of human understanding. Ultimately, educating for peace means educating for understanding. How? Here we come up against the need for an integral education that reconciles the dimension of knowledge with that of being.

In other words, understanding is a natural expression of the convergence of knowing and being. We don't understand only with knowledge and not only with being. This is a lost alliance that we need to recover. As Ubiratan D'Ambrosio says, it's a question of evolving from the arrogance of knowing to the humility of seeking. Authentic searching requires the elegance of the *ignorance of not knowing*. To know not to know, that is the question! Transdisciplinary art consists

²¹ Jung, C. G. *Psychological Types, Complete Works, Vol. VI*. Petrópolis, Vozes, 1981.

of balancing knowing with not knowing, learning with unlearning, acquiring knowledge with emptying oneself of the known, thinking with not thinking, reflection with contemplation, words with silence...

The Cartesian paradigm of scientific rationalism, which is characterised, according to Morin, by disjunction, reduction and abstraction, centred exclusively on knowledge, has been very competent in developing a sophisticated technoscience that is, unfortunately, disconnected from the hemisphere of being, from where the values of an essential ethic emanate. And we know very well the consequences of a powerful and disorientated technology, of science without conscience, of effectiveness without affectivity. This is the immense value of a basic document from UNESCO itself (1992) which proposes, based on the research and report of Jacques Delors²², the four pillars of a new transdisciplinary education: educating to *know*, educating to *do*, educating to *live together* and educating to *be*. With conventional pedagogical models, in a fragmented way, we have only been educated to know and to do. The immense and stimulating challenge, which has to do directly with the question of understanding, is to educate and to live together – to live with oneself, with the other, with others, with nature – and, above all, to educate to be.

4. Holology and Holopraxis

The famous *Venice Declaration* (1986), a redefining document that resulted from a colloquium organised by UNESCO²³, centred on the theme, *Science facing the ends of knowledge: the prologue to our cultural past*, in its second article states: ‘*Scientific knowledge, by its own internal movement, has reached the ends where dialogue with other forms of knowledge can begin. In this sense, recognising the fundamental differences between science and Tradition, we see not their opposition, but their complementarity. The unexpected and enriching encounter between science and the different Traditions of the world allows us to think about the emergence of a new vision of humanity, even a new rationalism, which could lead to a new metaphysical perspective.*’

Pointing in the same direction, Morin²⁴ postulates a self-critical and open rationality, capable of integrating aspects of what other non-European cultures have developed and which have been atrophied in the West, in order to repair activism, pragmatism, ‘quantitativism’ and consumerism. But also, to safeguard, regenerate and disseminate the best of Western culture: democracy, individual protection and human rights.

²² Delors, J. *Educação: Um Tesouro a Descobrir*. São Paulo: UNESCO, MEC, Cortez, 1999.

²³ Declaration Of Venice, Venice Colloquium, *Science facing the confines of knowledge: the prologue of our cultural journey*. Final Report, UNESCO, 1986.

²⁴ Morin, Edgar. *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 37.

In order to respond to this lucid call, Pierre Weil²⁵ developed two complementary concepts that are fundamental to this urgent task of integrating the hemisphere of knowledge with that of being: *holology* and *holopraxis*. Holology refers to the rational path of study, critical reflection and experimentation of the holistic paradigm, aimed at the dimension of knowledge, while *holopraxis* consists of the experiential path of awakening to the holistic vision, through practices from the wisdom traditions of East and West, aimed at the dimension of being.

We presented the integration of these two complementary paths at the aforementioned I, CHI. Holology, through conferences, symposia and free-theme sessions. Holopraxis, through experiential spaces facilitated by representatives of different Western and Eastern traditions. In the same way, these two methods are present at the FHB and in all UNIPAZ programmes and projects, because it is their combined exercise that paves the way for human understanding which, in turn, is the direct route to peace.

5. Analytical and Synthetic Method

In order to elucidate the process of understanding, I believe it is essential to delve deeper into the methodological reflection involved. This brings me back to research I've been carrying out for over two decades, in the clinical and educational context, on the synergy of two ways of grasping reality: *analysis* and *synthesis*²⁶.

We Westerners have all been conditioned to analyse, since the analytical method lies at the heart of the paradigm of modernity, which represented a necessary, compensatory and Enlightenment rescue of critical reason, whose great contribution in the 17th century was to have highlighted the dual consciousness of differentiation.

To briefly summarise, the *analytical method* is an important fruit of scientific rationalism, which arose as a healthy and necessary response to the decadent moment of an undifferentiated medieval obscurantism, which created a perverse symbiosis between religion and science, under the tyranny of the Inquisition. It focuses on the part, looking for the constitutive units, acting as an efficient scalpel that shreds totalities. It relates to the Greek concept of *diabolos*, that which divides. It generated the disciplinary approach from which the specialist is modelled, characterised by a reductionist tendency and unilateral vision and action. Its basis is somatic, substantialist. It is based on the psychic functions of thought and sensation. Based on mechanical physics, it leaned towards a mechanistic approach and its classical realism, which emphasises continuity, simplicity, local causality and objectivity. It is characterised by its quantitative aspect, pursuing

²⁵ Weil, P. *New holistic language*. Rio de Janeiro: Espaço e Tempo, 1987.

²⁶ Crema, R. *Saúde e Plenitude – Um Caminho para o Ser*. São Paulo: Summus, 1995; Crema, R. *Old and New Therapists – A transdisciplinary approach to therapy*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2002.

the ideal of mathematical codification. It forms the basis of egos, personal identity. It starts from the linear logic of local causality, prescribing the existence of necessary and general laws that engender determinism, with a pretence of control and predictability. It wears the sophisticated garb of accuracy. It is progressive and accumulative. It starts from an extroverted basic attitude, asserting itself as an excellent tool for studying and exploring outer space. It's ideal goal is objectivity and value exemption, excluding the subject from the field of science. Its vocation is experimental: its typical product is generated in sophisticated laboratories with impeccable manipulation of variables. Its metaphorical neurophysiological substrate – taking into account brain interconnection – is the dominant hemisphere, usually the left, of rationality, prediction and also of human anguish. It characterises the typical Western mentality. It postulates an explanatory function: it aims to actively explain the universe. We call the agent of this classical method an *analyst*.

After the great advance of the Enlightenment in the 18th century, this method began to show signs of exhaustion and insufficiency, becoming a source of increasingly visible contradictions. As Ken Wilber²⁷ said, what was an awareness of differentiation and a scientific spirit in the 17th century degenerated into dissociation and scientism in the 19th century. This path, followed exclusively, has led us to what I call a *syndrome of analyticism*, characterised by symptoms such as fragmentation, dissociation, disconnection, loss of fundamental values and the atrophy of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, in short, of interiority itself. As G.K. Chesterton said, *the worst madman is the one who has lost everything except reason*.

It was the genius of the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey²⁸, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, who demonstrated the need for a method other than the analytical one. Denouncing the contradictions of the reductionist scientific-natural path, in his theory of expressive understanding, Dilthey founded the *sciences of the spirit*, later called the *human sciences*, affirming the human being as a unity, far beyond a conglomeration of atoms. Transcending positivism, in his historical-biographical proposal, Dilthey prescribes two paths: that of *describing life* and that of *understanding life* for itself. ‘*Nature can be explained, the soul can be understood*’, the philosopher shouted, affirming life as an unfathomable mystery, susceptible to being understood by itself, as an all-and-part rhythm that can be experienced, which unveils meanings – but not explained. According to Christine Delory-Momberger²⁹, by affirming the radical difference that constitutes the human subject, Dilthey developed, against the analytical and generalis-

²⁷ Wilber, K. *The Eye of the Spirit*. São Paulo: Cultrix, 2001.

²⁸ Dilthey, W. *L'édification du monde historique dans les sciences de l'esprit*. Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1988.

²⁹ Delory-Momberger, C. *Les Histoires de Vie — De l'invention de soi au projet de formation*. Paris: Anthropos, 2004.

ing methods of sociological positivism, an epistemology founded on the recognition of the human by the human, in other words, on lived experience and understanding, whereby the human being and society are in a relationship of reciprocal inclusion and action. Having consolidated the foundations of the current biographical approach, Dilthey considered autobiography to be a paradigm of intelligibility, the highest and most instructive form from which the understanding of life manifests itself for us.

Following Dilthey's singular and striking contribution, other significant voices were raised, clamouring for synthesis. Jan Smuts³⁰, in his evolutionary approach, unveiled the concept of *holism*, defined as a single principle that organises totality and creates sets, in a universe that is synthetic, vital and creative. Carl G. Jung³¹ developed an interpretation of dreams at the level of the subject, calling it *synthetic*. Roberto Assagioli³² developed a *psychosynthesis*. Viktor Frankl³³ created his *Logotherapy* school, based on a synthetic methodology. Karlfried Graf-Durckheim³⁴ founded *initiatory therapy*, prescribing what he called an *exercise* – a meditative practice of a synthetic nature – so that the essence can shine through in existence. Ramon Soler³⁵ founded a *University of Synthesis* in Argentina, where the method of synthesis is also a way of human integration. The Hindu sage J. Krishnamurti³⁶, whose life and work, dedicated absolutely to the essential, was given significant prominence in René Barbier's transversal approach³⁷, can be considered a living symbol of the embodiment of synthesis.

In short, the *synthetic* method emerged at the end of the 19th century as a response to the crisis of fragmentation, dissociation, disconnection and, in short, dehumanisation. It focuses on totality, interconnection, form and context, with a view to the process of linking and unifying. Its tendency is to amplify and integrate. It refers to the Greek concept, opposite to *diabolos*, of *symbolos*, the factor that reconnects and re-establishes wholeness. Valuing an inclusive and global vision, it is at the basis of the generalist ideal. It is a qualitative path, which is indicated more by mythopoetic and archetypal language. It is based on the psychic functions of feeling and intuition. It starts from a space of indeterminism, freedom and responsibility. Its basis is psychic and noetic. It emphasises participation and singularity. It occurs instantaneously, in the abrupt leap, in the *insight*: it is non-

³⁰ Smuts, J. *Holism and evolution*. In: WEIL, P. *Holística - uma nova visão e abordagem do real*. São Paulo: Palas Athena, 1990.

³¹ Jung, C. G. *The practice of psychotherapy*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1981.

³² Assagioli, R. *Psychosynthesis*. São Paulo: Cultrix, n.d.

³³ Frankl, V. *A meaning for life*. Aparecida: Sanctuary, 1989.

³⁴ Graf-Durckheim, K. *L'Homme et sa double origine*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1996; Graf-Durckheim, K. *L'expérience de la transcendance*. Parisk: Albin Michel, 1984.

³⁵ Soler, R. P. M. *Universidad de Síntesis*. Buenos Aires: Depalma, 1984.

³⁶ Krishnamurti, J. *The first and last freedom*. São Paulo: Cultrix, 1981; Krishnamurti, J. *The web of thought*. São Paulo: Cultrix, 1984.

³⁷ Barbier, R. *L'Approche Transversale — L'écoute sensible en sciences humaines*. Paris: Anthropos, 1997.

cumulative. Through the logic of simultaneity, it opens up to the open universe of synchronicity, meaningful coincidences or the principle of a causal connection, of transcausality, according to Jungian research. It has a living, imprecise, flexible fabric, detached from exactitude. It expands on the descriptive and biographical aspects. It is guided by an introspective vision that unveils and investigates the inner space. It opens up to what is beyond the ego, to transpersonal consciousness. It is based on microphysics and quantum realism, characterised by a discontinuity, the principle of superposition, non-separativity, non-locality and indeterminism. It assumes a subjective consciential character, intersubjectivity and values. It focuses on purpose, meaning and sense. Its vocation is experiential: its typical product is the fruit of the vibrant laboratory of human experience. Its metaphorical neurophysiological substrate is the non-dominant cerebral hemisphere, usually the right, of *gestalt*, musicality, poetry and mysticism. It characterises the classical oriental mind. It cannot be distinguished from the subject. It fulfils a comprehensive function of participatory communion. I call the agent of this way of apprehending reality a *synthesiser*.

The diagram below summarises the basic characteristics of the analytical method and the synthetic method:

Analytical Method

*Reaction to medieval dogmatism
and obscurantism*

Emphasis on the part

Text

In the service of decomposition: *diabolos*

Psychic functions: thought and sensation

Specialist

Quantitative

Causality: determinism

Linear logic of succession

Somatic, substantialist basis

Personal

Mathematical coding

General, regular

Progressivity, accumulation

Outer space: object

Control

Experimental

Macrophysics

Classical realism

Left hemisphere metaphor

Western mind

Explanatory function

Two of duality

Hology

Analyst

Synthetic Method

*Reaction to modern positivism and
analysis*

Emphasis on the whole

Context

At the service of the reconnection: *symbolos*

Psychic functions: feeling and intuition

Generalist

Qualitative

Transcausality: synchronicity

Global logic of simultaneity

Psychic and noetic basis

Transpersonal

Archetypal mythopoetic coding

Singular, biographical

Instantaneity, non-accumulation

Inner space: subject

Participation

Experiential

Microphysics

Quantum realism

Right hemisphere metaphor

Eastern mind

Comprehensive function

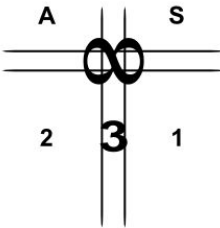
One of unity

Holopraxis

Synthesiser

6. The art of integration: the three

It is essential to emphasise that the analytical and synthetic methods are not in a relationship of antagonism, but of *complementarity*. The concept of complementarity comes from quantum science and was proposed by Niels Bohr to solve the *particle-wave* paradox in microphysics. The same can be applied to the methodological paradox of analysis and synthesis. A one-sided emphasis on analysis leads to reductionism, while synthesis leads to totalitarianism, both mistaken extremes that we need to avoid. I like to represent the inestimable value of this heuristic methodological synergy with the symbol of infinity, combining the analytical and synthetic methods in a dynamic of constant and paradoxical interactions:



Arthur Koestler³⁸, maintaining that part and whole do not exist in the realm of life, reconciled atomism with holism through his concept of the *holon* – where *holos* refers to the whole and *on to* the part – referring to an open, self-regulating system that has properties that are both autonomous of a whole and dependent *on a* part. In his approach, the organism is considered to be a multi-levelled hierarchy of subparts, endowed with relative autonomy.

The Koestlerian symbol for the colon is a deity from Roman mythology, *Janus*, who had two faces, facing in the opposite direction: one forward, representing the future, and the other looking backwards, symbolising the past. In the same way, each sub-mode, inserted in an ascending order of complexity, has one face of the ‘whole’ facing the subordinate levels, while the other face, facing the apex, is that of a dependent ‘part’.

‘No man is an island: every human being is a Holon. A two-sided entity like Janus who, looking inwards, sees himself as a unique and complete whole and, looking outwards, sees himself as a dependent part. Its self-affirming tendency is the dynamic manifestation of its condition as a unique whole, of its autonomy and independence as a Holon. The antagonistic tendency, also universal, which is integrative, expresses its dependence on the greater whole that integrates its condition as a part,’ says Koestler³⁹.

To put it another way, there are two basic tendencies in living nature: one

³⁸ Koestler, A. *The ghost of the machine*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1969.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 76.

of *differentiation* and the other of *fusion*. Differentiation is self-affirming, a centrifugal force that pushes towards difference, singularity. Fusion is integrative, a centripetal force that drives towards belonging, towards interconnection. The task of health is to maintain a synergetic balance between these two dynamics, since an excess of differentiation leads to the pathology of exclusionary individualism and isolation. While an excess of fusion leads to the alienation of symbiosis and absolutism.

In convergence, Martin Buber⁴⁰ states that the double movement of *separation* and *relationship* defines the principle of human life and that an authentic relationship only occurs when the other is placed at the right distance, so that the *I-Thou* is possible. Otherwise, we are condemned to an object-like and reductive relationship, which Buber calls *I-Thou*.

We therefore need synergy between the analytical method – of differentiation – and the synthetic method – of fusion. Not *one*, not *two*, don't mix, don't separate: this is a transdisciplinary principle that calls for *three*.

The richness of three is that it contains within itself the one of fusion and the two of differentiation. Using the metaphor of the neurophysiological substrate, the salutary and wise exercise of integration is supported by the *corpus callosum*, which connects the two cerebral hemispheres, that of analysis and synthesis. This is what the wisdom tradition symbolises as the third vision or the horn of the unicorn. For this reason, Carl Sagan⁴¹ says that the future of education depends on the corpus callosum. We might add the future of understanding too!

7. The Tao of Understanding

Lao Tsé⁴² said that *the high rests in the deep*. Parodying the Taoist sage, we can say that synthesis rests in analysis. The whole rests in the part, the sky rests in the earth, the wings rest in the roots...

In his work, Edgar Morin⁴³ places great emphasis on a thought by Pascal, a true pearl of the holistic vision: '*All things being caused and causing, helped and helping, mediated and immediate and all intertwined with each other, by a natural and insensitive bond that connects the most distant and the most different, I find it impossible to know the parts without knowing the whole; I also find it impossible to know the whole without knowing the parts.*

The wise and inspiring concept of the Tao, from the Chinese tradition⁴⁴, indicates the integration of the masculine *Yang* principle with the feminine Yin, in a symbolic interpenetration of opposites and the harmonious transcendence of opposites. We can consider it a symbol of the path that leads to understanding.

⁴⁰ Buber, M. *I-Thou*. São Paulo: Cortez & Moraes, 1977.

⁴¹ Sagan, C. *The Dragons of Eden*. Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 1987.

⁴² Lao-Tsé. *Tao Te King*. São Paulo: Alvorada, 1979.

⁴³ Morin, E. *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 131.

⁴⁴ Lao-Tsé, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

On the other hand, a pedagogy of understanding imperatively calls for the science and art of *hermeneutics*, above all through the recovery of symbolic intelligence. Intelligence comes from *inteligere*, which means to *read inside* – of letters, of facts, of experiences. It's this symbolic reading that allows us to overcome the normative stupidity of a certain simplistic surface literalism, the source of the fundamentalism and fanaticism that are so prevalent today, not just in religion, but also in ideology, marketing and teaching, among others. It is hermeneutics that make it possible to grasp and understand the plurality of meanings and senses inherent in every phenomenon, every crisis and every experience.

The ability to interpret goes beyond the analytical exercise of explanation, including the synthetic route, which probes the subtle and the interior, capable of extracting the polysemy of meanings implicit in every human experience. It is also an interpretation that elevates us from the condition of the object of facts and circumstances to the status of a subject of our own existence, endowed with the gift of freedom. We are not free in relation to what happens to us; our freedom consists of what we do with what happens to us, which calls for an art of listening that, beyond mere hearing, is also interpretation. A person who is skilled in the exercise of interpretation, in the broad and transdisciplinary sense, is also capable of overcoming the most arduous existential challenges. Because the only destructive crisis that can be fatal is one in which we can't make sense of anything because of our inability to listen and interpret.

8. Conclusions

The great teachers and educators of humanity have always warned us about the danger of judgement, which is the source of so many conflicts and tears. Understanding is an effective antidote to this destructive power struggle, because those who understand do not judge. Judgement is the failure of listening and understanding.

Edgar Morin⁴⁵ lucidly and boldly affirms the spiritual mission of education in the intersubjective task of *teaching understanding* through the combined virtues of openness, sympathy and generosity. It is an art of living with intellectual and moral solidarity and dialogue, capable of understanding incomprehension, without complacency or accusations, at the service of *Homo sapiens demens*, of metamorphosis and of our *community of destiny*.

The Tao of understanding is the Alliance between knowledge and being. A realisable utopia, a path to peace.

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The author declare that they have no conflicts of interest with respect to

⁴⁵ Morin, Edgar, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 67.

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