

Adam Skibiński

How to Think after Bateson or Metalogy in Action

Rocznik Naukowy Kujawsko-Pomorskiej Szkoły Wyższej w Bydgoszczy.
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Adam Skibiński

UNIVERSITY OF SZCZECIN

HOW TO THINK AFTER BATESON OR METALOGY IN ACTION

Gregory Bateson in his epistemological modus of thinking in terms of “a patterns which connects” made an attempt to formulate a meta-science for possible cognition of the living and deeply ecological understanding of evolution as a mental process. He showed steps toward a “recursive vision”, cybernetic and constructivist explanation of roots, paths and projections of non-dualist relation between mind and nature. To reconstruct basics of Bateson’s ecology of ideas we start from a meta-dualist distinction between *pleroma* and *creatura* borrowed from Carl G. Jung, *pleroma* as a name for non-living world described by physics and *creatura* as a name for “that world of explanation in which the very phenomena to be described are among themselves governed and determined by difference, distinction, and information” (Bateson & Bateson 2005: 18).

The distinction of *pleroma* and *creatura* resides not on opposition, like *mind* versus *body*, but on inclusion, both-and, where all of *creatura* exists within and through *pleroma*, but any knowledge of *pleroma* exists only in *creatura*. The term *creatura* assumes the presence in *pleroma* of some organizational and communicational (semiotic, symbolic) characteristics which are themselves not material. Epistemology of the living needs “creatural science”, for information-creating creatures, humans included. Any explanation of mental processes always imply characteristics of the interface between *pleroma* and *creatura*, as any living creature is both material *and* semiotic, meaning-making entity. Autonomous meaning-making activity is common feature of all the living and this was meant by Bateson when he used “mental processes formulation.”

Gregory Bateson considered a given mind a component or subsystem in some larger and more complex mind and the realm of mental processes, the *creatura*, as a self-organizing system of systems in which information generates further information. All these systems communicate on different interfaces where the interface between *pleroma* and *creatura* seems the most fundamental one. His main task was and now our task is to build understanding

and describe such interfaces which underlies all epistemology, science and religion. And as for humans what “is” is identical with what can be known, this task is to build a correct epistemology as a science of human knowing as living knowing in necessary unity of mind and nature.

Bateson’s criteria for mental process set a story-making of life in a way analogous to the explanation of meaning-making processes in modern biosemiotics, inspired by his work. He used strategy of redefinition for a new perspective of “mind” or mental processes as comparable to processes of evolution. For any mental process we need some organization of parts (not mental themselves) in interaction triggered by differences drawn from events. These processes require collateral energy and form circular/recursive chains and result in coded versions, the description and classification of which disclose orders of logical typing immanent in the phenomena. The explanation of an inclusive-distinctive relation between logical types leads to a model for the uni-substantial pattern binding nature and mind.

Nature “thinks” in analogies and levels, literally and metaphorically. Bateson indicated the role of abduction and metaphor as modes of creatural grammar. Metaphor itself is probably the most important mode of knowing for the living. Bateson used syllogism of metaphor, which he called abduction, as a way of insight through analogy, when he introduced the idea that process of evolution is analogous to the process of thought. And these both realms, evolution and mind, require a proper understanding of their recursiveness, the key characteristic of both evolutionary and mental processes.

This recursiveness of mind as an activity of ecosystem connects the model of “structure-process” interaction with a negative feedback loop as the fundamental unit of any mental process. We may link the explanation of the recursive characteristics of mental processes with a notion of heterarchy and the role of an interface between distinctive levels/orders of complexity, embodied in an ecosystem of a person/body with the environment. Radical recursiveness of mind means we as autonomous living beings organize our own world reorganizing ourselves. The recursive processes inside an organism and, through structural coupling, outside it or heterarchy of inner feedback (recursive, circular) cycles together serve as machinery for the images construction. And image construction processes stay hidden to our consciousness, as if not hidden, they cannot be trusted, and acted upon.

Interpreted in radically constructivist fashion, mind is a recursive, cognitive function through which a living organism enacts its adaptation in en-

tirely self-reflexive activity. In this model, cognitive processes would not have any internal or external sides. The cognition of a living system is one-sided, uni-substantial activity, the one and the same. Therefore, the cognition of a living system is not referential, but only self-referential, circular and recursive. Thinking about relations between “interior” and “exterior”, comprehended as the difference established by a cognizing subject, can be explained with the use of topological model in the Möbius strip form. Whatever is locally distinct, different, or even opposite, on another level forms the unity as a whole, like *pleroma* and *creatura*, different yet one.

Bateson’s invention of metalogue as a literary form serves as a metaphor for the relation between man and nature. Metalogue as a form of re-thinking its own subject provides a metaphor for a new discipline of anthroposemiotics which I called *MetaLogy*, *per* analogy. *MetaLogy* sets a platform for a topological reversion of metaphysics, a step beyond logic, thinking and words into “meta”-*logos*. But we can do it only with words and meanings, therefore we can come back with recursive re-description and double description, re-framing and changing our own perspective. Walking in steps of Bateson, thinking “Batesonish”, reveals an intellectual heritage of his “heretical” position. We are our own central metaphors, namely embodied metaphors of our device and our own ecosystems, active and re-creating ourselves, meaningful patterns that “perpetuate themselves”.

And how to think after Bateson? Thinking after Bateson means “meta-“, beyond, transcending to join – taking steps on recursive orders of complexity. Thinking after Bateson means also looking for “syntax of consciousness”, the creatural grammar of differences – thresholds, ideas and patterns. Ideas and patterns are transforms of events in a code, and any code patterns its own reality. Coding is inescapable in the living, as means of operating on interfaces and means of communication and the way we invent (semiotic) worlds we live in. Thus, the way we code, the way we understand is of our great responsibility, all environments included, semiotic and non-semiotic ones. And this evokes deep ecology of ideas and unity of nature and culture, but that is another story.

Thinking after Bateson means combining rigor and imagination – the rigor in honest account of our experience and the imagination to transcend limits of inherited patterns of thinking and acting in the world. Ecology of ideas, which Bateson called for, needs both imagination of seeing frames and relations where others could not see, but also rigor to build their clear understanding and explanation. This is what we may think of after Bateson.

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