

Laudatio: Edgar Morin (U Vienna, 10th April 2012)

Ladies & Gentlemen, colleagues & friends, dear Edgar Morin,

with some short remarks I would like to oncemore welcome this year's recipient of the Ludwig von Bertalanffy award in complexity thinking. You might have already a strong inkling as to who this may be. You are right: It is Edgar Morin. And we are very happy to have him here in person today.

The Bertalanffy Centre honors with this award his outstanding achievements in the field of complex systems, not only in terms of his technical results, but especially with a view to his extremely relevant input for a sociological interpretation of these results and the perspective of practical and highly political consequences derived from it.

Edgar Morin's biographer, Emmanuel Lemieux<sup>1</sup>, once called Morin "The Undisciplined" (*L'indiscipliné*), and that is I think what he can be actually called, within the range of this words' double connotation. In fact, being "undisciplined" is probably the most important pre-condition in order to eventually succeed in a project which in Morin's case shows up as a new approach to what is classically called "*Scienza nuova*".

This project is best described in a text however that is not really published yet, because it has been part of a former draft for Morin's gigantic work of "The Method" (*La méthode*) of which six volumes have been printed so far. One finds the crucial passage in the originally third part of the work under the provisional title "The Becoming of Becoming" (*Le devenir du devenir*) conceived between 1987 and 1989, but skipped later on: [I quote in my own translation.] "We should arrive now at the point that is called epistemological, which is the point of critically examining the scientific theories under the viewpoint of their value, of their pertinence, of their coherence. This obviously implies that experience is not sufficient in order to valuate a theory, because – as it is not a simple reflexion of something given, but an interpretation that organizes knowledge – it must be examined also under the viewpoint that is evidently superior. Superior, that is to say that epistemology must be a knowledge of knowledge, a theory of theories, a science of sciences." <sup>2</sup> Hence, we can realize immediately the explicitly interdisciplinary scope of this approach which even encompasses what Sigmund Freud once called a "meta-theory": a scientific (indeed: onto-epistemic) theory which is able to outline the various modes of actually developing theories in the first place.

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<sup>1</sup> Edgar Morin. *L'indiscipliné*. Seuil, Paris, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 492. (Quoted according to Lemieux' text.)

This is the reason why Edgar Morin has called this enterprise a “method”. As he clarifies in a talk given in Nice in 1980, “[this] is a method in the strategical sense of this expression that shall extract something absolutely evident, but always forgotten, ever since one speaks of scientific knowledge: the presence of the subject, that is to say of what searches, of what thinks and of what eventually discovers. Heisenberg once said [that] from now on the method cannot be separated from its object; we should complete this formula by saying that also, the method cannot be separated from its subject, that is to say from what it actually practises.”<sup>3</sup> This is the important point that is restated in the now third volume of the series called “The Knowledge of Knowledge” (La connaissance de la connaissance): “Each object must be conceived within its relation to the knowing subject that is rooted itself within a culture, a society, a history.”<sup>4</sup>

In other words, this approach implies something that we can call “a cognitive revolution” which operates on the level of principles and modes of the organization of ideas.<sup>5</sup> Hence, what we can recognize here quite clearly is the explicit relationship to the *ethical* aspects of the sciences on the one hand, and the role that is played by *undisciplined* qualities on the other: The latter is actually what defines the route towards a becoming conception that is still unknown in the first place. Morin often quotes here Antonio Machado’s verse on the wanderer: “Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar.” (Wanderer, there is no way, it makes itself a way by walking.) This is a very important issue for the universities nowadays, especially for those who prefer to classify research according to the profit gained by its applications rather than leaving a space of free play for fundamental ideas that do not promise any clear results in the beginning, if at all.

In fact, unity and diversity are the main concepts from which Morin’s approach is furnished. And this is exactly where rational science meets the aesthetics of life on the one hand, and ethics on the other. Morin himself chooses a somewhat pointed formula for this in his more recent interview with Djénane Kareh Tager: “Ce qui sépare est à la source du mal. Ce qui relie est à la source du bien.” (What separates is at the origin of evil. What joins up is at the origin of the good.)<sup>6</sup> As he explains, this serves the derivation of daily life from its philosophical, scientific as well as artistic foundations, ending up in a poetical shape that represents (and unveils) *love* as its structural principle.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 496.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 501.

<sup>5</sup> Paraphrase of Lemieux, op. cit., 512.

<sup>6</sup> Edgar Morin: Mon chemin. Entretiens avec Djénane Kareh Tager. Fayard, s. l., 2008, 228.

In a sense, we could say that Edgar Morin strives for the *verification of life* by means of an explicitly undisciplined utilization of scientific interdisciplinarity. Hence, strictly speaking, he looks for *truth* altogether, and he looks also for his *own* truth. (Note by the way that this is very much in the sense of the Italian school on what is called “anti-psychiatry” as introduced by Basaglia and Pirella in the sixties. They called this the principle of *verifica*.) And this is how he once answered the question for his becoming of a researcher (*chercheur*): “Je cherchais mes vérités. Je me cherchais. Je ne sais pas: je cherchais. C’est peut-être pourquoi je suis devenu un chercheur?” (I looked for my truths. I looked for myself. I don’t know: I searched. This is perhaps why I have become a searcher/re-searcher?)<sup>7</sup>

While he was doing so, he actually produced many works for which we ourselves cannot be more than thankful: for this rich composition of ideas and conclusions whose avail and benefit is what sets us onto new lines of thinking, both in the sense of rational reflexion as well as in terms of emotional praxis. Thank you very much for that, Edgar Morin.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 81.