Cooperation, Coordination and the Social Bond: On Integration from a Critical Cognitive Social-Theoretical Perspective

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The concept of integration implies cooperation and coordination but, above all, the social bond – the central concern of sociology since its emergence. Peculiarly enough, however, sociologists and more generally social scientists have been confounded by this internal differentiation of the problem of integration. From Durkheim to Parsons and Habermas, to mention but a few, the distinct dimensions of cognitive competences, practices, collectivity, systems and cognitive commonality have been misapprehended and short-circuited in ways that still misdirect thinking today.[i] Although Schiller legitimately sounded a serious problem experienced in early modernity, his complaint serving as Ananta Kumar Giri's epigraph is evidently infected by a related ambiguity. Giri himself indeed insists on: going beyond identity and difference; differences having a dimension of non-difference; the integral dimension of transcendence; communication among differences and its relation to the temporal dimension; the on-going process of unsettling and establishing connections; dynamic harmonisation and unity, and so forth. Yet there remains a degree of lack of transparency in his poser, too, particularly regarding coordination, non-difference and transcendence. Should the coordination mechanism of system not be freed from its widespread misunderstanding – going back to Schiller, among others – by sociologists and social scientists? What is the locus or ontological status of non-difference? And what is transcendence, including the vehicle of such a reaching from within the situation with all its differences towards non-difference?

Integration is intimately interwoven with and therefore dependent on different forms of communication. It begins with social interaction at the micro-level where cooperation, the initial form taken by integration, is generated. Beyond this level, however, more complex forms of society require coordination achievements for their integration. For this, social interaction is no longer sufficient on its own, since the structures and systems that go beyond and have a formative effect on particular situations can only be generated by discourse, in conjunction with more pervasive evolutionary shifts. Now, cooperation and coordination are possible, in turn, only on the basis of the social bond – i.e., the common assumption or presupposition of a deep-seated set of generative-regulative meta-structures or meta-rules, what may be called the cognitive order of society (Strydom 2000, forthcoming) which is constitutive of the social world.[ii] Even if social interaction and discourse are implicated in the emergence and reproduction of the cognitive order, they nevertheless depend on the latter not merely for orientation, but above all for their incorporation in an all-encompassing world. Where such an order is wanting or where different cognitive orders meet, there indifference, lack of understanding, misunderstanding, misattribution of motives and goals, and even irresolvable conflict are not uncommon. This, in fact, is a characteristic contemporary experience.

Today, we find ourselves in a transitional phase facing a nascent global social world which is as yet ill-defined due to the fact that the concurrent cognitive order is likewise caught in a process of construction and emergence. Since the dropping of the atom bomb, the end of World War II, the founding of the United Nations, the promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the establishment of international organisations, phenomena like decolonisation, ecologism and cosmopolitanism, and lately the shift of the centre of gravity from the West to the East – since all these, the cognitive order of modernity shaped on the basis of the Enlightenment has been undergoing subtle and not so subtle drifts, evolutionary shifts and cultural elaborations (Strydom

2000, 2011b, 2011c). It is nevertheless still sufficiently available as the horizon of the present to put some incursive pressure on all existing social worlds and the recalcitrant constraining elements of their respective cognitive underpinnings.[iii] Although this is the case, a new rendition of integration in the cognitive order, a reconstitution of systemic procedural mechanisms toward its operationalization, and new practices aimed at its actualisation – taken together, 'a new art of integration' as Giri eloquently yet all too briefly calls it – are indeed a desideratum. A new rendition of integration could be achieved only by a renewed selection and combination of a number of appropriate principles from the cognitive order, particularly new interpretations of such principles as: rightness, sovereignty, legality, freedom, equality, solidarity, constitutionalism, authenticity and learning. Such a cognitive reconfiguration would for the first time secure the kind of integration at the macro or global cosmopolitan level demanded today. Complementarily, operationalizing procedural mechanisms for the organisation of society such as the economic, political, techno-scientific and other systems would require far-reaching transformation. In turn, the practices embodying and actualising the potentials of the cognitive order and the procedural mechanisms call for an equally drastic transformation of the underlying modern cognitive competences and the cultivation of new ones. Crucial to the achievement of a new art of integration at all these levels, therefore, is learning – individual, institutional, collective and above all societal learning.

Giri is also correct, therefore, that the pursuit of a new art of integration in this sense is central to the contemporary societal as well as the social scientific task. Yet his formulation of this requirement begs the question: If it is to be more than merely an appeal to an impotent ought, if it actually forms part of a movement of immanent transcendence, what precise basis does the call for a new art of integration have in reality? And further: If, as we have learned historically, integration typically involves over and above legitimate means also elements of compulsion and even force, then the question arises whether more should not be made of individuation, autonomy and both the capacity and responsibility to say no. The cultivation of 'weakness', 'servanthood' and 'non-sovereignty', surely, cannot mean acquiescence or, even worse, languishing in heteronomy?

On the whole, then, greater precision could be achieved if, instead of reproducing the traditional contrast between 'the cognitive and the emotional', the cognitive making of the social world – particularly in the sociocultural but also the biological sense – were taken into account (Strydom 2011a, 2011c, 2012).[iv] How else could weak naturalism and 'weak ontology' converge and meet?[v] Attention would here be paid to generative or constructive cognitive competences such as action and interaction, to cognitive coordination mechanisms such as discourses, systems and cultural models and their structure-forming interrelations, and finally to the cognitive order of society in both its constitutive and regulative roles. The possibility of cooperation, coordination and the social bond – i.e., of integration – could then be accounted for, together with any interfering forces in the process rendering them vulnerable and damaged. More deeply still, light would be shed not only on the ontological status of the cognitive order – which enables 'non-difference' – and its incursive shaping of society, but also on the human capacity for 'transcendence' responsible for disclosing potentialities, thus constructing and reconstructing the cognitive order (Strydom 2011a). A 'new art of integration' requires each and every one of these moments. Signs are that the promise of these moments are already present in our time, but whether they will be sufficiently actualised, not to mention realised, depends entirely on the degree to which we contemporaries engage intellectually, practically and emotively. Adopting the principle of charity, I take exactly this to be the thrust of Giri's argument.

References

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Notes

[i] Among other things, Durkheim identified the cognitive – which allows for both commonality and difference – with the collective which snuffs out difference and breeds authoritarianism, as in his theory of education. Parsons more so than Habermas, but even the latter, tended to reduce the cognitive to the normative, with the comparable effect of playing down difference and contestation. In addition, Habermas misconstrued system, an essential emergent cognitive mechanism of coordination above the action level, as being exhausted by the exploitative and dominational form given to it by modern class structures. In a certain sense, he might well be seen as having remained ensnared in a line of thinking running from Schiller to Heidegger.
[ii] By the cognitive order of society, I understand the complex of idealised yet necessary and universal suppositions that constitute a social world by making communication possible, allowing the regulation of action, interaction and discourse, and endowing the members with the cognitive ability to reflexively assess reasons and justify their speech and actions. Far from necessarily imposing homogeneity, however, these suppositions also stimulate differences, being as they are common reference points for mutually contested interpretations and attempts at their immanent realisation.
[iii] The following gives a by no means exhaustive overview of the cognitive order of modernity embracing a complex of reflexive meta-rules qua principles or standards which emerged over time in particular domains and articulated by representative figures. Although a number of these presuppositions have meanwhile undergone modification and transformation or are still undergoing change today, their structuring or incursive force continues to be felt to varying degrees with distinct emphases in different civilizational-societal configurations around the globe.

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CENTURY	REPRESENTATIVE	DOMAIN	PRINCIPLE/STANDARD
12th	Andreas Capellanus	intimacy	love
15th	Filippo Brunelleschi	technology	effectiveness
16th	Nicolo Machiavelli	power	control
16th	Jean Bodin	state	sovereignty
16-17th	Galileo Galilei	nature	mathematisation
17th	Francis Bacon	knowledge	instrumentality
17th	René Descartes	*cogito*	self-reflection
17th	Isaac Newton	science	mastery
17th	Thomas Hobbes	coercive law	legality
17th	John Locke	civil society	freedom
17th	Pierre Bayle	conviction	critique
18th	Adam Smith	economy	efficiency

18th	Montesquieu	civil society	constitutionalism
18th	Jean Jacques Rousseau	civil society	solidarity
18th	Joseph Sieyès	civil society	legitimacy
18th	Thomas Payne	rights	equality
18th	Immanuel Kant	culture:	
		pure reason	truth
		practical reason	rightness
		judgement	authenticity/ appropriateness/ *sensus communis*
18th	Jean Jacques Rousseau	education	learning, learning to learn, reflexive learning
19th	Søren Kierkegaard	the self	authentic, responsible auto-relationship

iv The traditional contrast of the cognitive and the emotional suffers from at least two serious limitations. First, the cognitive is understood in a rather narrow intellectualist and purposive-rational sense rather than in its full scope of a differentiated set of biologically based cognitive competences (making possible cognition, perception, empathy, social interaction, memory, reflexivity, recognition of norms, different kinds of knowledge, context-transcendent imagination, etc.) which in their developed human form are supported by a vast complex of cognitive cultural structures or the cognitive order of society. Second, the reference to the emotional raises the question of which theory of the emotions (see e.g. Cornelius 1996) is presupposed by this contrast. It seems to come closest to William James' theory according to which the emotions are bodily responses to bodily changes. But then there are a number of other theories, including the Darwinian, the cognitive, the constructivist and the contemporary cognitive neurophysiological. A careful, critical, comparative consideration of these theories would suggest that the traditional contrast is untenable. The emotions have a cognitive neurophysiological base, but should not be confused with sensations as James tends to do, since they arise from a cognitive evaluation of both experience and the environment, and are therefore of a general nature, structured by cognitive cultural structures, thus able also to fulfil a Darwinian adaptive function. An option that is even less plausible than James' would be to treat the emotions nominalistically as purely socially constructed phenomena.

v 'Weak naturalism' is an ontological position which assumes that there is continuity between nature and the sociocultural world without, however, reducing the latter to the former, as in strong naturalism. Nature is here understood as the natural historical or evolutionary process that, among other things, gave rise to human beings characterised by their unique cognitive endowment and cognitive competences which took millennia to attain the level of development they exhibit since 40,000 years ago. 'Weak ontology', in my understanding, appertains to the sociocultural world. It is a position which indeed assumes the existence of the human cognitive endowment and competences, but it pleads for a more balanced and justifiable employment of our intellectual, moral-ethical and emotive potentialities for the purposes of constructing a well-ordered interpersonal world than has been the case in the wake of such events as: the emergence of the modern state, the capitalist economy, science driven by the technological *a priori*, and the unencumbered self – especially *homo economicus* or the possessive individual but also the self-absorbed aesthetic self – as well as the dogmatic and authoritarian moral self. In so far as weak naturalism as an ontological position avoids strong reductive naturalism, it converges with weak ontology. From a social scientific point of view, both are focally concerned with the sociocultural world. In this they complement each other. Weak naturalism (together with its complement, a pragmatic-epistemic realist epistemology) brings the necessary cognitive structuration of the sociocultural world through a learning process from the

micro to the macro level to light, while weak ontology specifies a range of conditions as well as a meaning reference or orientation complex which is relevant to steering the contemporary phase of the formation of society in a constructive direction.