Natorp, Holzkamp and the role of subjectivity in psychology

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Abstract

This paper examines the meaning and sources of Klaus Holzkamp's concept of *doppelte Möglichkeit* which he attests to every human being as the principal enabling device for Handlungsfähigkeit, the ability to act; or simply agency. In a second step, this paper shows how the neo-Kantian philosopher Paul Natorp had a very similar understanding of human agency and aimed at a reinvention of psychology reminiscent of Holzkamp's Kritische Psychologie. In concluding I discuss if and how Natorp's ideas can potentially enrich critical psychology today.

Keywords

critical psychology, agency, Natorp, Holzkamp, Neo-Kantianism, history of psychology, subjectivity, objectivity

Introduction

In the following sections I discuss one of the central concepts of *Kritische Psychologie* as developed by Klaus Holzkamp. In *Grundlegung der Psychologie (1983)*, Holzkamp speaks of a *doppelte Möglichkeit* (pronounced: doːppɛl̩tɛː møːglɪçkaɪt), a *twofold possibility* for human action as the basis of human agency: humans can act within the social framework while at the same time they are able to go beyond this framework and thereby modify it. This *doppelte Möglichkeit* implies that every restriction given by a certain framework also generates new forms of agency that point beyond its own limits. Human beings, as Holzkamp would say, always have the option to *act differently*, thereby manipulating the restrictions or even overcoming them.

While this concept has traditionally been interpreted as part of the larger Marxist basis of Holzkamp's *Kritische Psychologie*, I want to suggest that there

is another potential source for this concept in early psychological writings, namely the thoughts of the neo-Kantian theorist, Paul Natorp. In criticizing Associationism as one of the central approaches in the discipline of psychology in his time, Natorp suggests that psychology will never be able to develop objective laws of human behavior. However, other than many of the phenomenologically oriented psychologists of his time or the proponents of *psychologism*, Natorp does not exclude objectivity from psychology altogether. He rather understands objectivity as the empirical basis of any psychological approach: Objectivity as it is enacted, established, and reproduced through subjective understandings as the raw material of psychological theorizing. For Natorp then, the goal is to (re)construct subjective experience from what we describe as objective facts. I believe there are good reasons to argue that - based on this conception - Natorp develops a more elaborate understanding of what Holzkamp describes as *doppelte Möglichkeit*. He anchors the concept in the philosophical discourse rather than in an ideological meta-framework which can - potentially - be dismissed based on a disagreement with its normative components. With the support of Natorp, I suggest to reorient the concept of *doppelte Möglichkeit*, and consider a different conceptual tradition which may help to further conceptualize the underpinnings of Klaus Holzkamp's thought and critical psychology in general.

Klaus Holzkamp, Kritische Psychologie and the meaning of *Doppelte Möglichkeit*

In this section, I am introducing several core concepts of *Kritische Psychologie* as spelled out by Klaus Holzkamp. Rather than giving a general overview, however, I want to focus on and underline the centrality of a *doppelte Möglichkeit*. My essential argument is this: Usually, the concept of agency and its variations (*Handlungsfähigkeit*, *Handlungsbeschränkung*, *Bedingungsverfügung*, etc.) in conjunction with the concept of *gesamtgesellschaftliche Vermitteltheit individueller Existenz* (referring to the societal mediation process of individual existence) is given the main attention in *Kritische Psychologie*. Generally speaking, this set of concepts is understood as the major theoretical contribution to discourses within and about (critical) psychology (Markard, 2009; Tolman & Maiers, 1991; Tolman, 1994). However, specifically the concept of agency rests, so I argue, on the idea of *doppelte Möglichkeit* without which any *Erweiterung der Bedingungsverfügungen*, that is a gradual increase of control over external conditions that shape our lives, would not be possible. Yet, *doppelte Möglichkeit*, understood as the ability to act in

accord with external and internal conditions of one's personal life while being able to always transform the conditions and restrictions - to go beyond them, so to speak - lacks the theoretical depth Holzkamp so diligently provides for his concept of agency.[1]

The concept *doppelte Möglichkeit* - as so many Holzkampian terms - cannot easily be translated into English. The terms *twofold possibility* or *dual possibility*[2] *could work*. However, in my reading, *Möglichkeit* does not refer so much to what is actually *possible* as to an idea of potentiality. It designates a restricted but expandable space in the social world that guides our actions and defines our agency. It denominates our ability to act in certain foreseeable ways most of the time during our everyday interactions. At the same time however, *doppelte Möglichkeit* also refers to our ability to turn these implicit rules and guidelines for action into explicit statements. We can be conscious of these guiding forces in our lives. By making these rules and regulations explicit, we are transgressing into a new space of agency, a space in which we not so much break the rules, as we are applying them 'creatively'. We enter a continuous process of questioning - either cognitively or behaviourally - existing rules and transform them. *Doppelte Möglichkeit* as apotentiality thus refers to the human ability to understand how the world is shaped around us and to manipulate this worldly shape according to our needs.[3] I read *doppelte Möglichkeit* as one of Holzkamp's central concepts precisely because of this: It describes how human beings act within a certain set of rules in a society and by doing so transform these rules. *Doppelte Möglichkeit* is the major building block of emancipatory action: By transforming the world according to our needs, we increase our agency, that is we gain more freedom and more choices for our actions.

Holzkamp rests *doppelte Möglichkeit* on Immanuel Kant and his concept of Enlightenment as the

> …human being's emancipation from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one's intellect without the direction of another. This immaturity is self-incurred when its cause does not lie in a lack of intellect, but rather in a lack of resolve and courage to make use of one's intellect without the direction of another. (Kant, 1784)

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[1] I am not touching the historical development of Kritische Psychologie in this paper. Such accounts can be found, for example, in Papadopoulos (2009) or Markard (2009).

[2] "Dual Possibility" is the translation Ernst Schraube and Ute Osterkamp chose in the introduction to a translation of some of Holzkamp's articles in 2013 (Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013, p. 4)

[3] For a similar reading of the term see also Dreier (2003 &2008) and Chimirri (2014, p. 133).

Following Kant, Holzkamp affirms that concrete life conditions are self-made and can be transformed by one's own actions.

Doppelte Möglichkeit in this sense refers to a primary (or more manifest) set of restrictions inflicted upon us by external circumstances (as for example the necessity of a certain educational degree to apply for certain jobs) or restrictions due to our biological outfit (as for example the inaccessibility of the Paris Metro for people with disabilities). It also refers to restrictions we have placed upon ourselves (as for example not applying for a certain job because of self-assumed inability/incompetence or a principal disapproval of public transport due to assumed inaccessibility). While it seems relatively easy to overcome the second set of restrictions (namely by applying for that job or giving public transport a try) the first set seems - on the outset - to be a little trickier. Holzkamp would however argue that such restrictions may appear to be naturalized conditions - i.e. external conditions one cannot influence - yet, they are *in reality* self-made or at least co-constructed by affirmation.

For Holzkamp then, it is the primary task of psychology to uncover these restrictions (Holzkamp, 2009, p. 39) as human-made, and by doing so unfolding emancipatory potential.

The centrality of emancipation in Holzkamp's concept of *doppelte Möglichkeit* reveals another important intellectual source to the endeavour of *Kritische Psychologie*: Holzkamp insists on a historical reading of his theory, i.e. not 'naturally given'; he emphasizes historical contingency, a conviction that *it could have also been different*, and that indeed everything *can be different*. He shares this conviction with Natorp which precludes naturalized forms of explanation for both. Holzkamps understanding of 'critique' is based on Critical Theory concepts: *It does not accept the status quo as the standard, it does not expunge the possible from what exists* (Markard, 2009, pp. 67, translation MD).

The Holzkampian endeavor to create a new psychology rests partly on the belief that there is 'more' to being human than what is expressed and visible in everyday life and what can be explained by our mere biological outfit. This reflects the belief, moreover, that it is possible to realize this 'more' through concrete, psychological interventions. Psychology in Holzkamp's understanding is not so much concerned with finding objective facts about human life as it is about how human beings deal with and shape our objective reality. Holzkamp calls this interaction *Mensch-Welt-Zusammenhang*, or human-world-interconnection (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 187).

To discern this human-world-interconnection, Holzkamp follows a dialectical approach. His work is deeply rooted in Marxism and the analytical method follows historical materialism: Starting from the 'manifest surface', the *Erscheinungsoberfläche*, also called the 'imagined concrete', the

Vorstellungskonkretum (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 51), he investigates the historical emergence of common analytical terms and describes them as 'preliminary terms' (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 50). A term in dialectical materialist thinking can only be understood if properly worked through. Such a course of action seems complicated, at first sight maybe even unnecessary, especially if it adds up to a book of 600 pages (Holzkamp, 1983). However, in order to show that certain restrictions which appear to be given by nature or at least exhibit an aura of being unchangeable, are in fact human-made, Holzkamp chooses to bring the *sublated processes* buried in familiar terms to the fore. The analysis needs to *show the terminological form of a historicity which is concealed in the present* (Holzkamp, 1983, pp. 51, translation MD). A look at Marx's treatment of the term 'population' exemplifies Holzkamp's logic:

> The population is an abstraction, if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed. These classes are in turn an empty phrase if I am not familiar with the elements on which they rest. E.g. wage labour, capital, etc. These latter in turn presuppose exchange, division of labour, prices, etc. For example, capital is nothing without wage labour, without value, money, price etc. Thus, if I were to begin with the population, this would be a chaotic conception [Vorstellung] of the whole, and I would then, by means of further determination, move analytically towards ever more simple concepts [Begriff], from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions until I had arrived at the simplest determinations. From there the journey would have to be retraced until I had finally arrived at the population again, but this time not as the chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations. (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 237)

In working through several terms in this kind of fashion, Holzkamp comes to an understanding that captures the human being from two analytical angles: the *objective position* within the reproduction process of society and the *subjective life-circumstances* which determine how this objective position is enacted. Holzkamp depicts two sides of the same coin: life as determined by concrete and objective circumstances and life as concretely lived and thus partially liberated from objective restrictions through processes of interpretation and circumvention. *Position* and *life-circumstances* thus reflect *doppelte Möglichkeit*: objective determination meets subjective interpretation and personal meaning-making. The relationship between individual and society becomes a possibility-relationship, a *Möglichkeitsbeziehung*, as Holzkamp calls it, in which societal necessities become subjective possibilities. Again, for Holzkamp this ability to relate to one's own situation consciously – the *bewußte Verhalten-Zu* (Holzkamp, 1983, p.

237) – is not a mere accident or a God-given feature of all human beings. Instead it is a necessary consequence of the socialization of humankind (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 352) since socialization means labor division and labor division is the backbone of a gradual development of individual choice, that is a reflection about one's own position within the societal framework and a realization that this position can (and will), in principle, be modified and changed.

For Holzkamp, the relationship of objective restrictions and subjective interpretation/circumvention is mediated by what he calls *Prämissen* or premises.[4] The position of a person (i.e. with a job, without a job, high salary, low salary, family father, single parent, etc.) does not define the person in full. Rather this concrete position allows for certain premises upon which subjective actions take place. Not to have a job can devastate a person (and create the premise 'to find a new job'), while for another person being without a job can unfold 'freedom' (creating a premise of 'finally doing what I always wanted to do' etc).: Concrete actions of an individual cannot be understood from the perspective of the position of the person within society because the position is not a determining factor for actions. However, the position is obviously not irrelevant. Rather it creates specific premises and plateaus that ground the subjective meaning making of a concrete situation. Premises provide the source of subjective reasons for concrete actions: *The different and often contradicting manifestations of the psychic life thus stem from the difference or contradiction of the premises on which the individual reasoning rests* (Holzkamp, 1983, pp. 352, translation MD). *Premises are the subjective interpretation of objective possibilities or restrictions of action on the societal level.* They take into account the *individuelle Befindlichkeit*, the *personal sensitivities* (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 353) of the subject from which the net of personal meaning unfolds.

With these remarks in mind, Holzkamp's concept of *Handlungsfähigkeit*, 'the ability to act' or simply 'agency' seems less opaque: If societal restrictions are not determining, the subject can consciously relate to those restrictions by forming personal premises for action. If the premises are not mere subjective interpretations of objective restrictions of a person's position, then the person must also have the *Handlungsfähigkeitsbedingungen*, the conditions of the possibilities for action (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 354) at their disposal. Human beings inherently manifest the *doppelte Möglichkeit*.

Let me bring in another example to drive this point home: On some American airports, you can read a warning sign at the security check: *All remarks concerning bombs and weapons will be taken seriously.* Obviously, the sign is put up to prevent people from making jokes like *I have a bomb in my shoe.* —

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[4] About the concept of 'premises' in *Kritische Psychologie* see also Sieland & Chimirri, (2018)

thus restricting the possibility to 'make fun' of the security check idea which should, so it seems, instead be *taken seriously.* However, a statement like *If I were to remark I had a bomb in my shoe, you would have to take that remark seriously, wouldn't you?* would again ridicule the whole security check process while circumventing, that is disabling, the concrete restriction of action because a conversation about 'bombs' would have effectively taken place. Jonathan Culler, who is the originator of this example, explains:

> A metasign, 'All remarks about bombs and weapons, including remarks about remarks about bombs and weapons, will be taken seriously' would escalate the struggle without arresting it, engendering the possibility of obnoxious remarks about this sign about remarks. (Culler, 1982, p. 125)

In realizing that the ability to act and to make sense of such actions is the driving ability for human beings to shape their world, Holzkamp concludes that it is

> not 'labor' as such [as Marx would have it; M.D.] as the first life-need (Lebensbedürfnis), but 'labor' only in so far as it secures the participation of the individual in the determination (Verfügung) of the societal process, that is enabling 'agency' (handlungsfähig). Hence, not 'labor' but 'agency' (Handlungsfähigkeit) is the primary human life-need—this is the case because agency is the most general framework-quality (Rahmenqualität) of a human and humane Dasein while a lack of agency (Handlungsunfähigkeit) represents the most general quality of human misery and dependence (Ausgeliefertheit) on concrete circumstances, anxiety, bondage, and degradation. (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 234, translation MD)

Paul Natorp and the inversion of objectivity and subjectivity

The name Paul Natorp rarely rings too much of a bell even among academics. The people who know of him usually work in the continental section of philosophy departments. It might be surprising then that the situation in the 1920's in Germany – and also elsewhere in Europe – was very different. Back then Natorp was professor of philosophy and pedagogy at the prestigious University in Marburg and – together with Hermann Cohen and others – a member of the so called neo-Kantian movement.[5]

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[5] More about neo-Kantianism can be found in Beiser (2015). The most compelling account of Paul Natorp's body of work can be found in Jegelka (1992) (German only).

He was one of the leading public intellectuals of his time. Beyond his academic publications, he wrote articles in regular newspapers and commented on education policy (Natorp, 1920a; 1919; 1920b) and Germany's foreign politics (Natorp, 1915a & 1915b).

His academic publications cover three broad areas beyond the Neo-Kantian school (Natorp, 1958): He was an expert in the history of philosophy, specifically the ancient Greeks (Natorp, 1903), he published in pedagogy about the works of educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (Natorp, 1909), and he was concerned with psychology (Natorp, 1893; Natorp, 1888; Natorp, 1904). His attempts to tackle the problems of the discipline as he identified them amount to over 330 pages in a book entitled *Allgemeine Psychologie nach kritischer Methode* or 'General Psychology from the Perspective of Critical Methodology,' originally published in 1912 (Natorp, 1912) and reprinted for the first time only recently (Natorp, 2013).

In many ways Holzkamp's and Natorp's starting positions for their quest to develop a new psychology share common grounds. Holzkamp faced an Americanized psychology shaped by associationism, behaviorism, and cognitivism. He diagnosed a lack of *Wissenschaftlichkeit* or scientific rigor (Holzkamp, 1985) and warned of pseudo-scientific methods (Holzkamp, 1995) within the discipline. He therefore envisioned a new, truly scientific – or rather *wissenschaftliche* – psychology.

Natorp and the Marburg School of neo-Kantianism on the other hand had to handle a loss in reputation and importance of philosophy as a discipline in comparison to the natural sciences which increasingly came to predominate every aspect of life. Left with the choices to either side with *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* (Dilthey, 1957; Jaspers, 1960) or to join the choir of *The Decline of the West* (Spengler, 1991), they turned philosophy towards the natural sciences seeking to become their validating instrument. The goal was a critique of reason (in the Kantian sense) within the modern natural sciences. This critique does not mainly concern discoveries and how they should be produced (i.e. a positive critique of epistemology) but discoveries and the ways they are currently produced in actual scientific practice (i.e. a regressive critique). If the scientist was in the business of making discoveries, the Marburg School believed the philosopher to be in the role of checking the procedures of those research processes for accuracy and logical stringency. For the Marburg school, the process of collecting data represented only the first half of scientific discoveries. The second, more important part of the research process took place at the desk, or rather in the mind of the researcher where logical theories are constructed that *make sense* of the data. Whenever this sense making process comes to a halt and is captured in a logical theory, objective knowledge emerges out of the subjective

impressions and discoveries made by the researchers. It is in this framework that the title of Natorp's book is to be understood: *Allgemeine Psychologie nach Kritischer Methode* (Natorp, 2013), "critical methodology" obviously referring to the Kantian critique of reason.

To this respect, Natorp's analysis starts with the same argument as Holzkamp's: to show how existing attempts in psychology to explain the psychic life are unscientific or pseudo-science, that is, they are not reasonable. Moreover, Natorp and Holzkamp agree in their diagnosis that traditional psychology (that is associationism in Natorp's case and behaviorism/cognitivism with Holzkamp) does not capture the subject matter at which psychology should aim. Traditional psychology in their view cannot make scientific statements about higher psychological functions. Holzkamp proofs his point by looking at the methods which traditional psychology – or *Variablenpsychologie*, the psychology of variables, as he calls it (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 522) – applies. For Holzkamp the central problem is that psychological experiments reduce the premises for the participants to an extent that only certain forms of behavior remain possible, namely the kinds of behavior already expected by the researcher. He claims that the subject in such experiments exhibits relatively primitive behavior because it leaves them no choice since the purpose of an experimental setting remains hidden to them; all they can do is *herumprobieren* – behavior based on trial and error (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 112).

Natorp, on the other hand, argues on an epistemological level. He shows a principal dilemma at the foundations of psychology as a discipline, that is as a *Wissenschaft*. The argument goes something like this: A scientific discipline aims at finding objective truths in form of natural laws or at least certain regularities in the world. If psychology is the science of the human mind (if it has the human mind as its *Gegenstand*) then its goal would be to establish objective facts about the workings of such a mind. This mind however is *subjective*. Now, if we turn the mind as inherently subjective into something objective (that is, we describe it objectively) we are changing the subject matter in an unacceptable way, we are turning the mind into something else in order to study it. If we do that however, any (objective) statement made about such a subject matter does not pertain to our original *Gegenstand*; it describes something else. Natorp in his own words elaborates on this 'something else' as follows:

> Description is abstraction: […] description is conveying. […] Hence it is also distancing from the immediateness of the experience. And there is something else connected to this: Description brings a standstill to the stream of experience, it is assassination of consciousness. […] The moment one has realized that, one cannot get rid of the impression that reading psychology books is like walking through dissecting rooms: one

> can see corpse after corpse and a hundred busy hands to take away the last signs of life, even the most distant memory of it. […] One does not subsume the living organism of the psyche, but subsumes the dead limbs wrested from it under completely dead, rigid and motionless terms. (Natorp, 2013, pp. 176, translation MD)

If psychology proceeds the way it does in Natorp's analysis, it examines dead phenomena and takes them for the real thing:

> One is not really researching the psyche. Instead one researches something different, something beyond the psyche as if we already knew what the psyche was. This is what all objectifying Wissenschaft does, and it is the right procedure. Doing so however is not psychology but the opposite: Objectification. (Natorp, 2013, pp. 176, translation MD)

I cannot overstate the consequences of such a dilemma: Traditional psychologists as scientists principally adhere to the same methodology like every other discipline: researchers collect data in the field and try to make sense of these data by establishing logical connections between the data points. Those connections are eventually spelled out in a scientific law and thus become objective facts until they are challenged by some new logic deriving from new data points. However, this procedure, that from the perspective of the Neo-Kantians works so well for the rest of science, fails psychology for it turns its subject matter, namely subjective experience, into its opposite, dead objective terms.

Before I can try to elaborate on Natorp's solution to this dilemma, I want to throw a brief flashlight on a debate that predates Natorp's thoughts. At the beginnings of psychology, many of the famous founding fathers of the academic discipline where actively discussing where psychology belongs. And the *Methodenstreit* in the social sciences offered two main alternatives: psychology could be regarded as *Naturwissenschaft*, or natural science (Dilthey, 1989), that follows nomothetic methods (Windelband, 1913), or it could be regarded as *Geisteswissenschaft*, or part of the humanities (Dilthey, 1989), that follows idiographic methods (Windelband, 1913).

The difference between the two might be summarized as follows: The task to look at inner processes, how they emerge and how they combine and react to external conditions and influence those, is a very different task compared to the analysis of every single moment of (psychological) existence as a form of consciousness with the intent to describe those in distinct terms.

Windelband – a neo-Kantian himself and member of the Heidelberg school – was convinced that psychology belonged to the natural sciences and defined the task of psychology accordingly:

> The natural sciences [Naturwissenschaft] parse experience along its elements and isolate them by division. The method is experiment or the analysis of the behavior of each individual according to scientific law. This happens in physics, chemistry and psychology according to the rules of the particular discipline. Because of this, experience in all these disciplines is reconstructed according to the principle of mechanical causality; which means that the complex physiological and psychological entities are understood in a way that the whole is the result of its parts and through and through defined by them. (Windelband, 1913, p. 44, translation MD)

And Hugo Münsterberg reads in the same vein when he attests that *psychology can only successfully complete its task if everything conscious is the sum of its parts* (Münsterberg, 1900, p. 332, translation MD).

In contrast, Wilhelm Wundt hoped for psychology to be the *Wissenschaft* of immediate experience. He attests a *principal difference of psychological and natural sciences' methods* regarding how they present their results (Wundt, 1922, § 1-2, translation MD).

It is perhaps noteworthy that this debate was not simply a matter of choice of one school against the other. For example, Hugo Münsterberg who – as we have seen above – argued for psychology as a natural science, was deeply versed in philosophy. Indeed, he taught both psychology and philosophy at Harvard University where he was hired by William James to create the first psychology laboratory in the United States. Münsterberg's argument for psychology as hard science was not mere conviction, it was philosophically grounded. Interestingly, his argument is Kantian:

> Natural science may assume that the world is causally explainable. In fact, natural science molds the world with its terms that it becomes explainable nature instead of finding causalities that already exist. Psychology operates in the exact same way. (Münsterberg, 1900, p. 332, translation MD)

The reason why Münsterberg believed psychology had to operate in the exact same way is rather simple: It's the success of physics despite the polemic against, for example, the theory of atoms which

> meets the same scepticism that atoms don't have color and don't smell and make no sounds and therefore couldn't be real. The physics professor has failed his job as long as the atoms still smell and sound. Only once their reality-behavior is stripped off can the world of physics come into being. In the same vein must the psychological will stop wanting something. The psychological fact needs to be true but not real. The psychological will that

> still wants something is not better than the physical atom that still smells
> and gleams (Münsterberg, 1900, p. 332, translation MD)

It is within this debate that tries to push psychology in one or the other direction that Natorp's argument is situated and it is Natorp's attempt to overcome the dualism presented by Dilthey and Windelband. To do this, the first step for Natorp is to declare that *Naturwissenschaft* and *Geisteswissenschaft* are indeed different in many respects. However, they do not differ in their main goal, which is *objectification*. And since objectification is not the business of psychology, it cannot be part of either one of them:

> The historical orientation created a specific problem which can only be
> dealt with in a separate discipline (Wissenschaft), namely psychology. The
> problem is that of consciousness or subjectivity as such. Everything that is
> an object in any way or that demands objective validity is covered by other
> disciplines: The   natural   sciences   or   the   cultural   sciences
> (Naturwissenschaften *and* Kulturwissenschaften)   because   they   are
> thoroughly objectifying. (Natorp, 2013, p. 25, translation MD)

In effect, Natorp claims the need for a new discipline called psychology, a discipline that yet needs to be conceptualized and that requires a new set of methods beyond *Naturwissenschaft* and *Geisteswissenschaft*, a discipline that researches an object which turns out to be a subject. This claim is similar to Klaus Holzkamp's attempt in the late 1970s to the mid 1990s to develop a new psychology with the subject at its center: a *Subjektwissenschaft*. As we have seen, Holzkamp relies on dialectical materialism, rigorous analysis of the historical emergence of the psyche and a substitution of his newly conceived concept of *Handlunsgfähigkeit for labor* as the central category.

Natorp takes a different route. The problem of consciousness - which for him is equal to the problem of subjectivity - stands at the beginning of psychology. And his first analytical step consists in identifying different, yet intertwined components of consciousness:

> It is three moments which the term 'consciousness' entails. They are
> closely connected but can be held separately for analytical purposes: 1. the
> thing (das Etwas) which I am conscious of; 2. that which is conscious of
> something; 3. the connection of both: that something is conscious in
> someone. I call […] the first 'Content', the second 'I', and the third 'Self-
> Consciousness' [Natorp introduces the German neologism 'Bewußtheit'
> here to differentiate the term from Bewußtsein, M.D.] (Natorp, 2013, p.
> 27, translation MD)

It is within this third component that the inherently subjective lies. The relationship of something being conscious in someone cannot be objectified. While the 'Content' of consciousness can be an object, indeed something that can be objectively described and the 'I' as well represents an object describable in the real world, it is their relationship that marks an inherently subjective interplay.

From here, the next step in Natorp's thinking follows the neo-Kantian tradition and at the same time transcends it. For the neo-Kantians, objective knowledge is the consequence of an objectification of subjective theories about the world generated by science based on data. If this is so, why not go the other way round? That is: Why not pose as the challenge of psychology the reconstruction of what is objective? How does self-consciousness deal with the objectified facts of the world? As a result, we can identify two different analytical directions: *Objectification* and *Subjectification*. For Natorp, the relationship of objectification and subjectification is identical to a scale we can walk back and forth:

> The subjective […] is not relevant for the realization of the object. It is the basis of objective knowledge, but it is put aside once it has done its duty. But precisely because of that it remains possible to go back to the subjective; it is always possible and always implied to raise the question about the subjective experience from which the objective emerged. (Natorp, 2013, p. 67, translation MD)

For Natorp, it is essential to move away from an understanding of subjective experience which leads (through rigorous thought) to objective knowledge as a one-way street. For him it is always equally important to be able to go back, and indeed, to actually go back and revisit the subjectivities that have led to forms of objective truth. In essence, this is what Natorp considers the central task of psychology: To reconstruct subjective experiences from what has been established as objective fact; to recognize and acknowledge the *totality of subjective experience* as the central driving force from which everything emerges. Everything objectified must be reconstructable to its original subjective content which is the primordially concrete, the *Urkonkrete* (Natorp, 2013, p. 39). This *Urkonkrete* for Natorp resembles a potency, a *Dynamis* of all the objectifications that stemmed from it and can potentially derive from it in the future.

It is in this respect that Natorp's psychology becomes emancipatory: it privileges the subjective over the objective as the primary source of creativity, development and the inception of something new. It underlines the task of a continuous reconstruction of subjective reasons behind objective facts. It relieves

psychology as a discipline from finding natural laws by describing the core of its subject matter as inherently subjective.

Conclusion

In this paper I underlined the importance of the concept of *doppelte Möglichkeit* in Klaus Holzkamp's body of work. I argued for the fundamental significance of the concept for *Kritische Psychologie* in general and the category *Handlungsfähigkeit*, or 'agency,' in particular. The human ability to always act differently (which includes not to act at all) is central to the concept of *Subjektwissenschaft* that aims at considering each and every individual human being and their personal sensitivities (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 353).

I also elaborated on the works of the neo-Kantian Paul Natorp, who - similarly to Holzkamp - thought it necessary to reinvent psychology in its entirety and allow for subjectivity to take center stage within the discipline. For both Holzkamp and Natorp, traditional psychology does not describe the richness of human consciousness and the human psyche. While for Holzkamp traditional psychology, or *Variablenpsychologie* (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 522) lacks a sufficient set of methods to capture the richness of human experience, for Natorp the problem goes deeper: It concerns the fundamental question of how science, or *Wissenschaft* operates. For Holzkamp, psychological methods and psychological experiments are constructed in ways that reduce available premises for the participants to an extent that leaves them with basic trial-and-error behavior, effectively foreclosing actual human behavior along the lines of a *doppelte Möglichkeit*. Natorp on the other hand criticizes how traditional psychology objectifies psychic life such that it takes *away the last signs of life, even the most distant memory of it* until psychology can effectively only speak about dead corpses (Natorp, 2013, p. 176, translation MD).

For Holzkamp, *doppelte Möglichkeit* is engrossed in the concepts of *life circumstances* and *position*, where *position* represents the objective conditions under which life is formed. *Life circumstances,* in contrast, is conceived more broadly. It encompasses the concept of *position* but from the standpoint of the subject. It thus analyses the subjective meaning-making processes of an individual existence; how human beings make sense of the world they live in.

In a similar vein, Natorp describes a movement from subjectivity to objectivity. In line with a neo-Kantian understanding of scientific progress he describes the emergence of new knowledge as rationality that forms subjective interpretations into objective facts. The crucial argument for him with psychology however is this: It is a mistake, he attests, to think of the subjectivity-

objectivity movement as a one-way street. It is a mistake to think of objectivity as privileged over subjective thought. In many ways - and specifically for psychology - the opposite is true: objectivity becomes tantamount to a halt in the stream of thought, a coagulation of something that used to be in motion. Subjectivity on the other hand represents that stream of thought, a continuing process of creation of something new, a never-ending creative endeavor. Natorp understands the subjectivity/objectivity relationship as a *dynamis* and turns the task of psychology – to reconstruct the subjectivities from which our objective world emerges – into a normative endeavor.

I argue that we can learn from both Holzkamp and Natorp that psychology lies beyond a discussion of hard versus soft science, *Naturwissenschaft* versus *Geisteswissenschaft*, *qualitative* versus *quantitative methods*. In addition to their deep appreciation of subjectivity as the central category of psychology, both provide the grounds to reconceptualize psychology as a discipline of its own. It aims to capture a subject matter, a *Gegenstand,* like no other: the rich, ever changing and evolving, ever different phenomenon of human experience.

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