



Heuristic Thinking

Abstract : Heuristic Thinking is an important faculty of our mind that is extremely resourceful when it comes to problem-solving questions. It is a process of approximation starting with an initial pattern of thought and gradually assimilating to a target pattern that constitutes an insight into the subject matter at hand. The whole process leads to a holistic or interlaced knowledge.

We often experience in our daily application of thinking, that, after pondering upon a problem for quite some time, we suddenly and inadvertently hit upon the right solution or the brilliant answer to our initial question. This process involves Heuristic Thinking that I want to explain in more detail in this essay.

Heuristic Thinking always starts from an initial unresolved, unanswered, unknown or undecided situation, which I call "initial pattern". This initial pattern is the question or the problem to be solved or answered. Take for example a philosophical problem like the identity problem. If a philosopher embarks on a research inquiry to find an answer to this ancient problem, she has already set the initial pattern in her thought. The initial pattern alone is not sufficient, however. With merely this pattern, we would never obtain any answer, because the incipient or incitative cause for searching an answer does not suffice to attain an answer, too. The answer must already be implicitly inherent in our mind. This still latent and potential pattern is called "target pattern".

The process of heuristic thinking is therefore a gradual approximation to the target pattern by converging and merging the initial and the target pattern into a whole and complementary pattern, consisting of the question and the answer. This convergence is called "knowledge". As soon as I can say that I know something, my initial and ignorant pattern has converged with the knowing target pattern and thereby resolved my unknown ego with the knowing mind in the background. The "foreground mind" (Individual Mind - Exonoesis) with its imperfect memory system has merged with some part of the "background mind" (Universal Mind - Hyponoesis) that is all-knowing and contains all possibilities and potentialities of the universe.

This process of approximation to the target pattern proceeds circumstantially (Lat. *circum-stare* = stand around), circumambiently (Lat. *circum-ambire* = to go around) or circumferentially (Lat. *cirum-ferre* = carry around), that is from all sides, surrounding the target pattern, encircling it more and more, until having become united with the core of the target pattern, the point of absolute knowledge. Absolute insofar, as this knowledge is independent of our sensual perception and other empirical data, but can a priori be discovered in the mind itself. This point of knowledge is the central insight into a matter, a situation. It is sometimes the anticipation of the Great Chain of Being, the interrelatedness of all things, the deepest comprehension of the universe, inexpressible in words.

However, there remains a serious question: when do I know, that I have found the right answer, that I arrived at the point of knowledge? The evidence and self-certainty of this insight and knowledge comes from the process of convergence. As soon as the initial pattern fits or matches the target pattern, both of them constitute a totality, a whole. Both patterns are

complementary pieces of one whole, and only the whole is complete and this whole can be called knowledge, or absolute knowledge. Both the question and the answer, the problem and its solution are part of the knowledge pattern, that is itself holistic and always comprises both parts, the initial and the target pattern. They belong together.

One might object that this would mean, there's only one answer to a question. Not necessarily. There need not be only one solution to a problem, because the solution pattern depends on the problem pattern, and problems can be set up in variegated ways, with subtle differences in their propositions. The meaning inherent in a proposition of a problem and the meaning thought of by the author of that proposition, implicates always the complementary variant part as the solution. If the structure of the initial pattern, say, emphasizes more the logical side of a problem, the answer would also be of a logical kind, because the questioner unconsciously expects that sort of answer. She believes that only a logical answer is the correct one. There are thus structural variants of convergent patterns, that is, differentiation in semantic structure, in meaning.

This process of Heuristic Thinking I just described can be called the ordinary heuristic thinking. There is also an extraordinary heuristic mode of thinking. If we try to abstract from the subjectivity of the question by not expecting, consciously and unconsciously, a certain answer, we would be able to hit upon a completely "new" answer. This openness of mind can rarely be found amongst modern thinkers. Normally, this neutral mode of heuristic thinking demands a great discipline and objectivity that could only be found in a human being who has transcended her individuality.

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