The Impact of German Idealism on Laske's Work on Adult Development

Otto Laske 2017

The term *German Idealism* refers to the ideas and projects of a group of German writers and philosophers around 1800 from whose work much of the thinking of the last 200 years derives. These ideas and projects can all be called "post-Kantian", since I. Kant is the historical origin of this movement. Its aftermath stretches into almost all fields of culture, including philosophy, psychology, social science, political theory, literature, and esthetics, even the natural sciences (N. Boyle et al., 2013). American Pragmatism, the Frankfurt School, and Existentialism are some of its outcomes.

One facet of the influence of German Idealism that has been left in the dark is psychology, especially psychology which focuses on adult development. This is astonishing because central in the development of adults is their mastery or non-mastery of autonomy and self-awareness, key points in Kant's, Fichte's, Hegel's, Nietzsche's, and Heidegger's work.

In the text below, I comment on my own work on adult development since 1992 which came to fruition with the publication of the 2 volumes of "Measuring Hidden Dimensions" (2005; 2008). Second and third editions of these writings are now available in pdf form at http://www.interdevelopmentals.org/?page_id=1974.

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When J. Loevinger and R. Kegan first put forward the outcomes of their research in the 1970s they wanted to deepen the behavioral tradition of research in adult psychology, morality, and what they saw as "cognition" without having a clear understanding of their roots in German Idealism. Although notions like *autonomy, self awareness, even maturity*, are focal in that tradition, they saw only Piaget as their predecessor without grasping Piaget's own rootedness in German idealism. As a result, they interpreted their own work in a rather shallow way, not realizing that it was actually contributing to the legacies of Idealist thought as much as it was exposed to the immanent critique from the side of that thought tradition.

To begin with, the constructivist approach itself, the notion that what is "real" is constituted the subjective mind embedded in, but equally separate from, the "objective" world, is a central tenet of Kant's transcendental synthesis and appears a hundred years later in Husserl's work as the notion the an individual's "natural attitude", of being intentionally directed towards material objects (including other persons) in the world is constitutive of the *reality* of such objects. If this were not immediately evident, it is corroborated by the phenomenological character of analyses of meaning making that led to the distinction of "stages" of meaning making, a notion and term borrowed from Piaget. It is, at the same time, directly related to

Hegel's notion of successively higher levels of consciousness that are laid out, as one transforms into the other, in his "Phenomenology of Spirit". After all, the constructivist principle is grounded in a first-person view of the real world and instantiates the primacy of individual human experience, -- a central tenet not only of Kant, but of Fichte and, in a modified way, by Hegel.

As Liz Disley, Boyle's co-editor of four volumes on the Impact of German Idealism (2013) put it even more succinctly (Boyle et al. 2013, volume 1 45):

> A very important point of comparison between German Idealism and the work of phenomenologists such as Husserl is the crucial role accorded to human relationships in the constitution of social reality. As the first philosopher to talk explicitly in terms of intersubjectivity, Husserl raises questions of the role played by the Other in the constitution of the self in a way that echoes the work of Hegel and Fichte in particular.

Husserl's work is equally important for the distinction made by O. Laske between Loevinger's and Kegan's *social-emotional* and Basseches' and Laske's *cognitive* work which is a distinction between psychological and epistemological determination of what is "real" in the world (Disley 45):

> Husserl and his phenomenological colleagues were keen to restrict the influence of descriptive psychology on logic. Logical structures, according to Husserl, are not affected by the specifically human standpoint. … Our world view, and indeed our world, he claims, is determined epistemologically rather than psychologically.

In fact, without realizing it, both Loevinger and Kegan entered into the controversy between Husserl and Freud which is centered on the issue of whether the structures of conscious experience that determine what we understand as the real world are not only "logically" but also psychologically determined, and thus cannot be separated from the influence of Freud's unconscious mind (Disley 45):

> In fact, the conflict between phenomenology (e.g., Husserl) and Freudian psychology restates a key conflict with German idealism itself. After the Copernican turn or revolution (introduced by Kant), ought one to focus, as Kant does, on human subjects as centers of epistemic experience? Or ought one, alternatively, to see the study of consciousness (which is phenomenology in both Husserl's and Hegel's senses, after all), as encompassing all the richness of human psychological experience?

It is important to note that both Loevinger and Kegan opted for conceiving of their "social-emotional" findings as epistemonological, not psychological, and thus saw them in the sense of Kant, Hegel, and Husserl, not Freud). This led them to the (never spelled out) conclusion that

adults' psychological experiences are actually epistemonologically co-constructed, and thus differ depending on the level of social-emotional maturity on which such experiences are made. In addition, the role of the Other in the constitution of the self found in both Loevinger and Kegan is in parallel with Hegel's master-slave dialectic in the chapter on self-consciousness of his Phenomenology.

Dilsey concludes (46):

> The central problem or conflict that emerges in the early part of the twentieth century involves the same basic question as the problem that shapes much of the divergence in opinion between the original German Idealists.

Since we seem to be nearing the end of Loevinger's and Kegan's work itself, and of the outflow of its major ramifications (which have finally reached organizational theory as well as strategy), it might be worthwhile to consider a strand of adult-developmental research that has been left somewhat unacknowledged in all the hype that the term "developmental" has attracted since Wilber took up the notion in the late 1980s.

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One of the glaring differences between Otto Laske's work on adult development, compared to the American and European literature on this topic, is the distinction he makes in his writing between "social-emotional" and "cognitive" development. (The former is thought to be about "meaning making", the latter about "sense making"). As a consequence of this distinction, the developmental teachings of Kegan are considered by him as making up only the -- after all less important -- half of what happens in adult development.

For this reason, Laske has strenuously insisted on including M. Basseches' and, later, Roy Bhaskar's. work in the study of adult development since both of them throw new light on the development of cognition in the broad sense. The main motivation for this is that, at least in Laske's view, Basseches' empirical work on the development of dialectic, and Bhaskar's philosophical work on the dialectic of the real world (being), is not only an indispensable addition to social-emotional studies, but in fact their very foundation.

For this reason, Laske's categorization of Kegan's work on meaning making as social-emotional - is meant to convey that it excludes cognitive development in the broader sense. It is a critical move meant to put in full view the de-totalization that adult development has been subjected to ever since 1982 when Kegan's work first appeared and began to be thoughtlessly copied. The narrowness of Kegan's research is indicated by Laske's term of *sense-making*, as explored in his

2nd volume on *Measuring Hidden Dimensions* (2008; 2017) and further in his "Dialectical Thinking for Integral Leaders" (2015).

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To understand Laske's concept of adult development better it is helpful to recall the influence on his work of what is called "German Idealism" (Boyd et al, 2013). As Boyle and his collaborators have shown, this influence is very broad and has pervaded not only 200 years of philosophy but also natural and social science, literature, esthetics, and religious studies. The term "German Idealism" was created by Boyle and his collaborators to shed new light on the vast and ongoing consequences of work by Kant and his followers (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Schopenhauer) for the cultural history of Western culture since 1800.
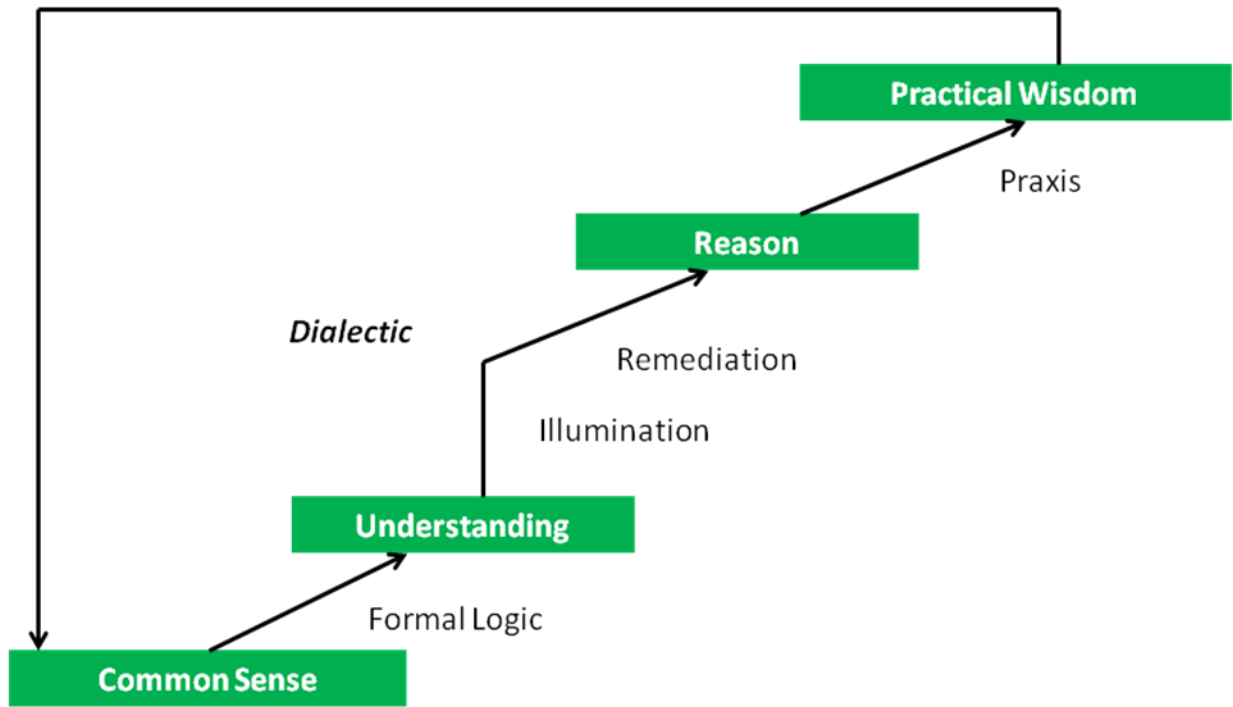
To put it in a nutshell, what makes Laske's sense making (or simply cognition) a term broader than meaning making is the Kantian distinction between Verstand (understanding) and Vernunft (Reason) which is the foundation of Laske (as well as Hegel's and Adorno's) concept of dialectic. While Understanding is chained to formal logic (and thus prone to becoming purely instrumental reason), Reason is dialectical.

I mean by that specifically the broadening of the term "adult development" that has occurred in my own work from the very outset, and which has led me to make a careful critical distinction between Loevinger and Kegan's work on one hand, and the work of M. Basseches and R. Bhaskar, on the other. The reason for this distinction is outlined below in terms of its connection with the tradition of German Idealism.

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One of the major distinctions put forward by Kant, however partially relativized by 19th century neo-Kantianism is that between Verstand (Understanding) and Vernunft (Reason.)

One might ask what beyond the obvious historical connection between Laske's work and (Boyle's) German Idealism -- thus the work of Kant and his idealistic followers -- is the relevance of the distinction between Understanding and Reason made in Laske's *Measuring Hidden Dimensions (volume 1 2005; volume 2 2008)*.

Eras of Cognitive Development after Laske (2008)

Practical Wisdom

Praxis

Reason

Dialectic

Remediation

Illumination

Understanding

Formal Logic

Common Sense

(Laske 2009: 120)

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