



The quest for humane relations: the trajectory of an intellectual life

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We can begin to see why my research has had the trajectory it has. I set out to find a scientific basis for the moral and psychological issues which worried me as a young man. I thought I could do so by understanding the theoretical basis for the sciences underlying mental functions.¹

From his first years as a young scholar to his last years as a therapist, it was Bob's intellectual habit to cite E. A. Burtt and A. N. Whitehead on the origins of modern science. When as a student in Cambridge (this was 1966), I inquired about transferring to the history and philosophy of science (HPS), in which Bob had recently been appointed Lecturer, he told me to read Burtt and Whitehead. I did so with the kind of special attention which showed something spoke to my concern (to use an old Quaker expression). The framing argument of Burtt's book on *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science* (originally published in 1924) was a touchstone for Bob. He thought it stated the theme which was, or should be, of basic importance for inquiry into human nature: the relation between humane intuition of what it is to be human ('mind') and modern scientific knowledge ('body'). He believed Burtt had shown how this relation should be critically investigated through the intellectual history of science. In Whitehead, Bob found authoritative argument, which he often discussed in terms of 'the mind-body problem', as to why modern science and a humane vision were adrift, even opposed.

In this piece remembering Bob, I use his references to Burtt and Whitehead to posit a trajectory in Bob's life. He was an intensely embodied intellectual and subjectively well knew mind and body work together. But in this essay I shall tell an intellectual story and not personalize it in psychological terms. During his life he changed from being a medical student to become a historian of mind and brain and Darwin scholar, accompanied by becoming a libertarian Marxist and radical activist in contemporary science, followed by training and practice in psychoanalytic psychotherapy. This essay therefore starts with the observation that it may not be immediately obvious, especially to people who knew him in one phase of his life rather

¹ Young 2000: digital file [4]. Materials for a biography are scattered, contradictory and at times sensitive for a number of people. Anna-K. Mayer, in 1998, recorded an interview related to Bob's early career, as part of the British Society for the History of Science Oral History Project, but it is not publicly available. The present paper keeps to the course of Bob's thought and does not attempt biographical detail. It is a rewritten version of a talk at the conference, 'Remembering Bob Young', Darwin College, Cambridge, 13 March 2020. I draw upon unpublished introductions I wrote for collections of papers Bob wished to put online, and on the obituary, Smith 2019b, appended to the present paper. Because Bob gave many talks in different settings, his papers, some published, others unpublished, are also scattered. He set up online sites, including <http://www.humannature.com/rmyoung/papers/>, but this is currently down.

than another, that there was continuity. Readers of *Free Associations* will think of him as primarily a psychotherapist. In a way, perhaps more deeply than they imagine, they are right: he always had in view the humane values giving purpose to psychotherapy.

Burt was a US philosopher whose study of the scientific revolution in astronomy and mechanics argued that the Revolution (earlier but often not now graced with a capital letter) was a revolution in the metaphysics at the foundations of Western thought. For Burt, whatever the success of physical science, the Revolution was a disaster for philosophy and civilized culture. The new way of thought, he argued, made it impossible for there to be systematic knowledge, or true science, of the mental world of the individual or of the expression of mind in culture. This was Bob's favourite passage:

It does seem like strange perversity in these Newtonian scientists to further their own conquests of external nature by loading on mind everything refractory to exact mathematical handling and thus rendering the latter still more difficult to study scientifically than it had been before. Did it never cross their minds that sooner or later people would appear who craved verifiable knowledge about mind in the same way they craved it about physical events, and who might reasonably curse their elder scientific brethren for buying easier success in their own enterprise by throwing extra handicaps in the way of their successors in social science? Apparently not; mind was to them a convenient receptacle for the refuse, the chips and whittlings of science, rather than a possible object of scientific knowledge.²

As a young scholar, faced as he saw it with this legacy, fostering teaching and research on the history of fields where biology, psychology, medicine and social science met, Bob sought 'verifiable knowledge about mind'. His work was notably prescriptive as well as interpretive: he assumed intellectual work was work in the world, embodied work, and that it should strive to make a difference to how people live.

Whitehead's still widely read book, *Science and the Modern World* (originally published in 1926) is comparable with Burt's, though Whitehead additionally presented his arguments in the form of a profound, and profoundly difficult to read, metaphysics. Bob, like a number of literary scholars and humanist critics of modern culture, used passages from Whitehead to state that the philosophical foundations of modern natural science have isolated objective knowledge from subjective feeling, and the sciences from the arts. In so doing, the critique continued, science has fostered thought which divides human beings from each other and legitimates their treatment as objects cut off from each person's subjective worth. The kernel of Whitehead's reasoning was the claim that science has established *abstract knowledge*, not knowledge of the world filled with *values as known in everyday activity and experience*:

² Burt 1932: 318-19; cited, e.g. Young 1990b: 704-705.

The seventeenth century had finally produced a scheme of scientific thought framed by mathematicians, for the use of mathematicians. The great characteristic of the mathematical mind is its capacity for dealing with abstractions; and for eliciting from them clear-cut demonstrative trains of reasoning, entirely satisfactory so long as it is those abstractions which you want to think about. ... But this juggling with abstractions can never overcome the inherent confusion introduced by the ascription of *misplaced concreteness* to the scientific scheme of the seventeenth century.³

For Whitehead, followed in this respect by Bob, the concrete is the presentational immediacy of the world as it exists for an actual person's perception, a world of colour, warmth, feeling and, in Whitehead's word, 'worth'.⁴ Whitehead shaped a new metaphysics, 'process philosophy', intended to replace the framework passed down from the seventeenth century and to do justice to the individual and collective experience modern science has dismissed as merely subjective. It was not Bob's way, however, to step back and attempt systematically to elaborate philosophy.⁵ Rather, he referred to Whitehead, as he referred to Burt, to legitimate historical and critical analysis of science, to expose dehumanizing thought about people across the biological, psychological and social sciences (broadly, the human sciences).

This way of thinking began for Bob, I surmise, in his decision to become a medical student and to train as a psychiatrist at a time and a place (Rochester, NY, the late 1950s) when the course of study included psychoanalysis. He did not complete the training but moved to Cambridge, England, for PhD research and then into teaching history and philosophy of science, focused on the mind-body problem. How, he asked, could incoherent language describing body separate from mind, and mind separate from body, ever have come about? He thought it profoundly mattered because this incoherence divided our thought about what goes on 'inside' from what goes on 'outside' a person, culture from nature, values from facts, the observer from the observed, the sacred from the profane, the self from the other. Here was an intellectual theme for a lifetime that mattered personally and mattered for the world.

Burt and Whitehead may have had a place in inspiring Bob's trajectory. As a scholarship boy, he first studied philosophy at Yale, and in retrospect he remembered Whitehead, 'to whom I have continued to return as a guide since I first read him as a second-year undergraduate'.⁶ His teachers, including the philosopher Richard Rorty, whom Bob was later to cite for his understanding of metaphor in knowledge, certainly stimulated him. When he switched to the prestigious University of Rochester School of Medicine, he seems not to have found what he was looking for in the way mental medicine was then discussed and practised. In Cambridge, he began to use the history of science to unravel the intellectual sources of his disquiet, interpreting the history of the localization of mental functions in the brain as the key to mind-body questions. It was by this route, he thought, that science tried to integrate the study of mind-brain.

³ Whitehead 1953: 70. For an excellent introduction to Whitehead and Whitehead scholarship: Desmet & Irvine 2018. I also introduce Whitehead in, Smith 2020.

⁴ Whitehead 1938: 149.

⁵ The closest he came to doing this was in an early article on primary and secondary qualities, Young 1989 (written 1969), a contribution to the festschrift for John Greene, another historian of science drawn to the field for its potential for insight into science and values.

⁶ Young 1989: digital file [246].

His historical dissertation work, nominally written under the supervision of the experimental neuropsychologist Oliver Zangwill, attracted the attention of Gerd Buchdahl and Mary Hesse in the sub-department of the History and Philosophy of Science, where he became an Assistant Lecturer. The thesis appeared as Bob's first book, *Mind, Brain, and Adaptation in the Nineteenth Century: Cerebral Localization and Its Biological Knowledge from Gall to Ferrier* (1970, republished with new Preface, 1990). The localization of mental functions in the brain, he argued, was the key step in the aim to create a science of (non-spatial) mind in the material (spatial) body, making possible a biological approach to human nature.⁷ The issues are topical again: the highly questionable reasoning in the nineteenth-century Bob studied is pervasive in the contemporary neurosciences, in which scanning, some enthusiasts claim, enables us 'to see' localized operations of mind.

The focus on brain localization could have been derived from Burt, who concluded his book with an illustration of the mess bequeathed by mind-body dualism in philosophy by examining the question, where it can be said we feel our sensations. It is, he argued, only the prejudice of our belief, deferential to the Newtonian explanation of events in terms of change of motion in time and space, which makes people say that feelings are in the brain. Ordinary language, by contrast, locates the feel *in the relations of a person* with the object of perception (e.g. the pain is in the finger where the knife cuts), not 'in the brain'.⁸

Bob's work was original, and his brilliance was recognized in the mid-sixties by his election to a Fellowship at King's College, Cambridge, alongside the university lectureship. He taught the history of biology, and, responding to an innovative move by the History Faculty at Cambridge to have a course on the history of science, set up 'Science and public debate in Britain, 1830-1876' as a special subject. Teaching this course, Bob went deeply into Darwin studies and published papers which, along with the work of other scholars, pioneered the understanding of Darwin in relation to the intellectual culture of his time and located Darwin in relation to the development of the biology of human nature. This work also provided the scholarly template for Bob's later general studies of science as culture. Bob left Cambridge in 1975/6 but later brought together the Darwin work in *Darwin's Metaphor: Nature's Place in Victorian Culture* (1985).

I have heard it both said and denied as not strictly accurate, that Bob, brought up in Dallas, Texas, had a fundamentalist religious background.⁹ Whatever the truth of this, his family was Presbyterian and laid out heavy moral obligations. It is interesting that Burt wrote with a combination of historically descriptive and philosophically prescriptive voices, and Bob shared this: he was something of a preacher. Indeed, one of his better known papers, which began life as his papers so often did, as an inspirational lecture, opened: 'I begin, rather as a clergyman would, with a text ...'¹⁰ As in a life directed by religious faith, Bob understood the way people think and the

⁷ Chris Lawrence reflected on the importance of this book, in his paper for the conference, 'Remembering Bob Young', 'Band of brothers: Bob Young, Rupert Hall and Alexandre Koyré.'

⁸ Burt 1932: 308-321. (This is from the completely rewritten concluding chapter of the 2nd edition.) For modern argument that the mind is not 'in' the brain, see the readable and persuasive, Noë 2009.

⁹ Bob stated that when he went to university, he was a biblical literalist: Young 1993: digital file [10] (written 1986).

¹⁰ Young 1993: digital file [1].

way people live to be inseparable. His references to Burt and Whitehead were ‘texts’ for Bob’s message.

Academic work in the last decades of the twentieth century considerably revised the earlier picture of the scientific revolution.¹¹ Historians of science became self-consciously professional about what they wrote and distanced themselves from earlier studies. Burt’s contribution was dismissed; extraordinarily detailed work was undertaken on Darwin’s science; the early history of psychoanalysis was massively revised; the roots of scientific psychology were unearthed. These issues mattered to Bob. But when he left Cambridge and specialist scholarly work, yet continued, for instance, to cite Burt, some people judged him out of date. As Jim Second has thoughtfully discussed, the subsequent direction of Darwin scholarship allows for argument about the relations between Bob’s intellectual history approach and the approach of social and cultural history.¹²

Two comments, then, will help to recall what was going on in the second half of the 1960s. First, Burt’s book did in fact provide a model for the project of HPS as it existed in Cambridge at the time of Gerd Buchdahl, Mary Hesse and Bob himself, the time when there was profound exploration of the untenability of the positivist theory of knowledge. Referring to the new science of the seventeenth century, Burt wrote: ‘the precise nature and assumptions of modern scientific thinking itself have not as yet been made the object of really disinterested, critical research’. This might have been a manifesto for HPS. Burt continued: ‘One hardly philosophizes to-day in the true sense of the word unless one understands how it was that this veritable upheaval in the main current of intelligent thought has historically come about. And this is precisely the question we wish to ask.’¹³

The purpose of HPS was to demonstrate the relationship between metaphysics, concepts and science. Bob participated in this project, and he did so in an original way because he drew in the life sciences (including medicine and psychology), and also because he turned attention from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and encompassed evolutionary science. Bob related ‘the Darwinian revolution’ to the search, since the seventeenth century, for the Science of Man (to use the Enlightenment expression). In doing so, he translated very general philosophical claims about the sciences of human nature into specific research projects in the history of the biological and human sciences. It was an enormous strength that Bob put his large vision to work in particular historical studies. In his best known work, he persuasively argued that Darwin’s science of evolution by means of natural selection developed in a ‘common context’ of thought shared by political economy, natural theology and natural history.¹⁴ The same exploration of a large vision through particular case material was evident in his later contributions to psychotherapeutic theory. The Darwin studies, for their part, compelled empirically oriented historians of

¹¹ For a summary of the new view of the scientific revolution, Shapin 2018; for a snide review of Burt, Daston 1991; and for criticism of Burt’s understanding of seventeenth-century metaphysics, Hatfield 1990.

¹² James A. Second, ‘It leads to everything’: Robert M. Young’s ‘Malthus and the evolutionists’ revisited’, paper to the conference ‘Remembering Bob Young’.

¹³ Burt 1932: 3, 11.

¹⁴ This inspired a large number of scholars. For example, the future prize-winning biographer of Pavlov, Daniel Todes, published on evolutionary thought in Russia (Todes 1989: 15-19; and personal conversation), and he acknowledged Bob’s inspiration.

science, humanists and scientists, even those uninterested in or antagonistic to the larger picture, to respond to what he was doing.

The second comment is that Bob was concerned with the framing argument, and missionary voice, and not the historical or philosophical detail of Burt's book or Whitehead's philosophy. For Burt, and for Bob, the progress of the natural sciences, following the pattern of celestial and earthly mechanics, deprived the human sciences of their proper subject matter – the whole, value-oriented person. If one believes in the identity of knowledge and practice, as Bob more and more self-consciously did as he became politically radical, the failure of a general framework of thought is a failure of a way of life. For the Christian believer, which Bob was not, though he knew something emotionally about what personal belief might mean, the general framework deprived people of their soul.¹⁵ Burt's book had opened with contrasted passages from Dante and from Bertrand Russell, the one filled with God's plenitude and the beauty of the creation, the other portraying atoms in humanly meaningless relations.

The reverberations of this contrast in British debates in the 1960s on 'the two cultures' was not lost on anyone. Burt had posed a question in rather a melodramatic way: had it, after all, 'been worth the metaphysical barbarism of a few centuries to possess modern science?'¹⁶ It was not a large step, in the early 1970s, to reformulate this question (in my words): 'Was it worth social, political and military barbarism to possess modern science?', and to translate the intellectual issues at stake into the practice of 'radical science'. When Bob became an activist, he in effect declined to be a Cartesian mind, a philosopher using abstract reason as if reason had independent standing. He sought instead to expose reason's activity in actual work, including scientific work. Many of his papers hinted at philosophical claims, but his voice engaged the implications scientific knowledge had in practice. His voice was compelling, confrontational, not abstract and analytic. Yet he was also very, even painfully, concerned about the reputation of his scholarship. After he had left the academic institutional setting, he was inclined to polemical and ambivalent views about just how much detailed scholarship served intellectual understanding, as opposed to advancing careers that evaded critical political self-reflection.

Cartesian dualism involved incoherent talk about a non-spatial mind existing in, and having knowledge of, a spatial world. As a result, whatever the triumphs of Newtonian science, seemingly incompatible language and concepts developed, and indeed flourished, in inquiries into 'the human' in which mind and body co-exist. Bob cited Whitehead: 'In between [the concepts of mind and body] there lie the concepts of life, organism, function, instantaneous reality, interaction, order of nature, which collectively form the Achilles heel of the whole system [of scientific materialism].'¹⁷ These concepts, Whitehead and then Bob judged, sustained thought and language, which we still use even in the face of materialist neuroscience or genetic determinism,

¹⁵ He characteristically stated (Young 2000: digital file [10]): 'I am not a theist, though I sometimes nostalgically wish I could be. I am, however, a believer in the collective wisdom contained in religious traditions.'

¹⁶ Burt 1932: 303.

¹⁷ Whitehead 1953: 71. In Smith 2019a, I developed a large-scale historical study of this theme, pointing to the importance of sensed self-movement in the experiential world. Sensed self-movement, for which there is a non-dualist language, is at the centre of thought about human participation in the world. This book also provides a historical background for understanding Whitehead. The issues go back to the PhD I did, under Bob's supervision, 1967-70, and I intend to take them further in my contribution to the forthcoming festschrift for Bob, edited by Bob Hinshelwood and Kurt Jacobsen. For my own trajectory, Smith 2013a.

in everyday talk about people. Bob taught the history of biology and the human sciences as an agonistic field in which inquiry, in spite of the legacy from the seventeenth century, has attempted to locate mind in nature, not to separate mind from nature. He therefore discussed topics such as the Great Chain of Being, irritability in organic tissues, the localization of mind as brain functions, the law-like association of ideas underlying utilitarian thought and, most especially, Darwin's search for empirical evidence for the evolutionary continuity of human and physical nature.¹⁸ He rejected the idea that the history of science would conclude with the triumph of objective physical science in knowledge of what it is to be human. This was because, he argued, objective science requires knowledge of the human production of knowledge, in which psychological (or psychoanalytical), political, social, economic and moral factors all have a place. Using psychoanalytic thought, he wanted to take a lead in the quest for such a synthesis, though he was well aware how far there was to go.

Teaching a history special subject, with material open to history students untrained in scientific knowledge, led to the work for which Bob is best known among academics, the studies of Darwin, natural selection and the Victorian debate on 'man's place in nature' (in T. H. Huxley's phrase). This was influential work linking methods or practices in the history discipline with what was going on in history of science, a field before that time dominated by scientists and philosophers. He wrote landmark papers on 'Malthus and the evolutionists: the common context of biological and social theory' (1969), and 'Darwin's metaphor: does nature select?' (1971).¹⁹ The claim that Darwin's theory was directly indebted to social thought guaranteed attention to this work. Just how exciting and controversial this was at the time needs to be recalled.

Turning to Darwin, Bob was very aware that he staked a claim to be a scholarly presence at the heart of the modern understanding of science. Darwin was a name to conjure with. Bob was also drawn in because, if any science should have brought mind into nature and rejected dualism, it was evolutionary theory. Indeed, it is the standard story told by writers who think reductionist explanation, explanation in terms of physico-chemical properties, constitutes the goal of science, that Darwin opened the road fully to including human beings in natural science. But what Bob and other observers found was that neither the Victorians nor many later writers accepted this. For Bob, as for Whitehead, this was because physico-chemical knowledge is abstract knowledge, magnificent for certain purposes, impotent for others. Working out the details, as they occur in actual social practices, then informed Bob's radical science. As concerned the Victorians, Bob found an extremely complex story, in which evolutionary thought did not directly open up the royal road to a science of mind. He engaged issues concerned with science and religion and social change, and this made his work of interest to historians of Victorian culture and society generally, and of interest to a public fascinated by everything surrounding Darwin, science and religion. There was interaction between Bob and historians like John Burrow and Gillian Sutherland and theorists of the history of political thought like John Dunn and Quentin Skinner. In the idiom of the time, this involved intense debate about 'context', and this concern with context firmly brought the practice of the history of science into relation with mainstream history. Bob's 'contextualism' was also encouraged by his engagement with the group of historians of science Jerry Ravetz assembled in Leeds, who brought about a lasting change in studies of the European setting of the new

¹⁸ He wrote a number of short articles – Young 1967; 1968; 1973; 1990b – in which he opened up lines of research rather than worked systematically at historical detail.

¹⁹ Reprinted in Young 1985a.

science of the seventeenth century and of Newton. Both Ravetz and Bob then became involved with the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science.²⁰

When working on cerebral localization, Bob looked into the literature on the history of psychology, seeking to understand the difficulties psychology has had in shaping itself as science. With a few exceptions, he was appalled at what he saw, and he wrote a paper saying so.²¹ He contributed in a number of ways – by highlighting the historical importance of phrenology, by studying localization, by contributing chapters on Alexander Bain and on Herbert Spencer (influences on functionalist psychology), and by writing on the place of psychology in the Darwin debates.²² He called for the field to reform itself, and a decade or so later, partly with his admonishments in mind, history of psychology did indeed start to become a properly historical field, though by this time his commitments lay elsewhere.

It was a driving belief with Bob, even before his politics became radical, that nineteenth-century argument continues into the present. He put the case in the 1970s and 1980s with reference to evolutionary biology and to the development of the social sciences.²³ The argument that the history of the biological and human sciences exposes the limits of reductionist natural science as the basis for humane living ran through all this work. So, when he trained in and then practised psychotherapy, he did so in a self-conscious turn to non-reductionist forms of knowledge about people. Bob made this very evident, for example, in the inaugural lecture (delivered with characteristic humour, just before retirement) he gave as Professor of Psychotherapy and Psychoanalytic Studies at the University of Sheffield in 2000.

The public face of Bob's work took off when, in the 1970s, he contributed exploratory and provocative talks and papers seeking a Marxist theory of scientific knowledge.²⁴ Bob always wanted, even demanded, an audience, and without a doubt he was an inspirational teacher and talker. In talking, he developed a very distinctive rhetoric, which could both inspire because it persuaded listeners that he addressed topics that really mattered, and could repel because of hyperbole and self-reference.²⁵

In effect, Bob thought that the modern attempt to create the human sciences on the model of the physical sciences established in the seventeenth century entailed violence to what it is to be human. It was no great step from that belief to political engagement in response to the role of modern science and technology in political violence – mass violence, as in the Vietnam War, or individual violence, as in physical

²⁰ Jonathan Rosenhead ('Bob Young and the radical science movement', on the BSSRS) and Les Levidow ('"Let's move on": Bob Young's contribution to radical science concepts and practices') contributed papers at the conference, this issue 'Remembering Bob Young', and Gary Werskey, who was in the 1970s close to Bob, circulated a memorandum to participants at the same conference, this issue; also, Werskey 2007.

²¹ Young 1966.

²² Young, 'The role of psychology in the evolutionary debate' (first published 1973), reprinted in 1985a; 1990a.

²³ Young 1971; 1981.

²⁴ Perhaps principally: Young, 'The historiographic and ideological contexts of the nineteenth-century debate on man's place in nature' (first published 1973), reprinted in 1985a; 1977; 1985b.

²⁵ Maureen McNeil beautifully illustrated the rhetoric in her contribution to the conference, 'Remembering Bob Young', 'Science *is* social relations: some reflections', this issue.

therapies in mental illness.²⁶ With Bob's adoption of radical Marxian political arguments, at the very end of the 1960s, the intellectual position derived from Burt and Whitehead merged with belief in the inhumane alienation inherent in labour under capitalism. The attempt to pursue the human sciences could not succeed, Bob supposed, unless these sciences grounded themselves in the constitution of 'the human' in the actual history of the relations of production. The argument, crucially, avowedly combined facts and values, the combination hidden in the ideology of the transcendental objectivity of science that Bob sought to reveal. For Bob, the facts of the history of science exposed the limits of abstract natural science as knowledge, and the mechanistic values science actually upheld exposed the limits of natural science as ideology appropriate for humane living. This understanding, I think, also underlay the turn, or as it really was, the re-turn to psychoanalytic work.

Bob retained from his early teacher, Rorty, an understanding that learning 'is not passive but is the consequence of what we do'²⁷. This aphorism points to the seeds of the politically radical activism and psychoanalytic practice of Bob's post-university years. Around 1970, his research on Darwin's context opened up a pivotal case concerning the manner in which it could be said scientific knowledge is a 'product of' social and political conditions. With political radicalization, engaging this issue became of paramount importance for Bob, not just in theory but in terms affecting institutional support for scholarship and the public understanding of science. He directed a pioneering Wellcome Centre for the History of Medicine in Cambridge, and when this didn't work out, moved to London and created a radical science collective and promoted public 'radical science'. Later, the same motives drove him to take an active role in psychoanalytic studies and institutions.

The trajectory I am attributing to Bob exemplifies the Enlightenment project to realize a science of the human in the service of a just society. In late eighteenth-century terms, in the tradition developed by Kant, Feuerbach, Marx, Spencer and many others, he sought an 'anthropology'.²⁸ An anthropology (in this tradition) requires knowledge true to the actual sensuous, passionate, individual, phenomenal world of being human, the world formed in the social relations inescapably present at birth. A true science has to be a science adequate to explain and express the values Bob knew as intrinsic to life – indeed, given in the very word 'life'. A science, to be worth its name, must encompass in its knowledge the observing subject, the subject who produces knowledge. For Bob this meant encompassing the historically particular, materially, technologically and economically particular subject as member of a social entity. It also meant encompassing the psychological subject, the self formed in the intimate but social relations of the earliest days and years. In his work, he followed all this up with psychoanalytic knowledge, rather than the detailed social and cultural history some people thought his Darwin work pointed to. He could not conceive of human science that did not engage with psychoanalytic practices. The move into psychotherapy, while clearly also about earning a living (Bob, after all, had theorized the economic base), smoothly continued the earlier trajectory.

The scale and generality of such thinking may have exasperated specialist scholars. The specialist scholars, of course, exasperated Bob. He wrote: 'Unlike Rip van Winkle, I keep waking up twenty years on and discovering that the fundamental

²⁶ Bob, when a student, worked as a volunteer in a 'snake pit' asylum in Arizona. See his interview, this issue.

²⁷ Young 1993: digital file [7].

²⁸ Though Bob used 'anthropology' to describe his project (1985a, 214, 243), he did not relate it to the term's German-language cultural roots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

issues are the same and wishing I had a greater sense that historians of science were engaged with them. Surely the reason we do history of science is to try to shed light on the meaning of life – of life itself, of humanity, and the husbanding and enhancement of generous values?’²⁹

Though Bob participated in the 1960s in exposing the so-called theory-laden content of empirical science, he was a realist in the theory of knowledge. This was a significant element in the suspicion, at times amounting to antipathy, with which he viewed the writings of ‘French theory’ and its postmodern avatars. Though accepting that he was a social constructionist, Bob was a realist in the sense Whitehead was a realist: knowledge must do justice to the shared, social, empirical realities with all their colour, feel, evaluative content and force. As a result, the Marxist concept of mediation became a very important part of his thinking, since it provided a framework for understanding how the material practices of daily life and of science alike have resulted in belief (‘idealism’) about reason and feeling existing detached from material life. Bob wrote, reflecting his training in the Kleinian tradition:

Why do I want to talk about labour process theory, group dynamics and symbolic breasts? To anticipate my own framework, what *use value* do I wish to derive from the labour process of this enquiry? I've thought a lot about this and have spent a long time engaged in autobiographical ruminations - a morass which I will spare you, except to say that the thread running through all of my writings from my first publication in an undergraduate journal and my senior undergraduate essay, entitled, respectively 'The Process of Belief' and 'The Problem of Transcendence' - has been the limits of human nature. The enquiry has taken various forms, but there is a common core relating values and politics to human limitations and to concepts of nature.³⁰

His realism was evident in his recreation of theoretical generalizations as historical claims, and later as psychoanalytic claims, about specific theories, or specific people, in specific contexts, and about the inbuilt constraints of human nature. His enthusiasm for biography as a genre of writing, and in his estimation even the model genre for human self-understanding, reflected this.

Bob’s realism was also connected with his lack of sympathy for the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK) developing in the 1970s, which surprised me at the time. Having in his own way established the need for contextualist scholarship – understanding statements and actions by reference to the setting in which they occurred – he then argued for a Marxist-realist understanding of the nature of these settings. He saw SSK as a partner in contextualist history but thought it failed to engage politics as it should be engaged. Explaining his argument for ‘the common context’ of biological and social theory in the nineteenth century, he asserted that two approaches had to be combined: ‘The first is to place oneself in the midst of the periodical literature of the period and to discover the highly integrated network of issues in all these spheres. The second lies in applying certain fundamental assumptions of the sociology of knowledge or of one of its parent traditions – Marxism.’³¹ At one point, he called this practice ‘social intellectual history’.³² But as

²⁹ Young 1989, digital file [182].

³⁰ Young 1986: digital file [153].

³¹ Young 1985a: 186.

³² Young 1985a: 170.

his commitment to a Marxist interpretation of science in general developed, he turned away from the language of contextualism to stress *the common constitution* of science and society: ‘the whole distinction between the content and the validity of an idea and its content should also be considerably softened. Nothing is ultimately contextual; all is constitutive, which is another way of saying all relationships are dialectical.’³³

His political consciousness raised, Bob searched in the Marxian literature, initially of the Left psychoanalysts and in Marcuse, before reading Marx himself and major studies like Lukács on cultural mediation, Habermas on instrumental and emancipatory interests and Harry Braverman on the labour process. As a hugely ambitious academic in an institutional setting that took a lead in cutting-edge scholarship, he attempted to turn his reading into concrete, institutionally supported projects. As witness to this innovative activity, I recall the great range of people who came to study or to have discussion with him in Cambridge. I remember from across the Atlantic, like himself, Ruth Schwartz Cohen, George Stocking and Ruth Leys, for instance, and later Donna Haraway. His students and contacts were many, and it was he who attracted a rather special history student, Roy Porter, to his course on the Darwin debates, to the vast enrichment of the history of science and medicine.

I was less in contact with Bob at the time he directed the Wellcome Centre and made the shift from academic employment into radical science activism and into psychotherapeutic practice. I never saw a break. As for the psychotherapy which came to be the dominant interest of the last thirty and more years of his life, it should be remembered that he encountered psychoanalysis as a medical student, at the time when there was intense discussion in the US, especially around the work of David Rapaport, on the relation of psychoanalysis to mainstream scientific psychology. This coincided with historical research on the importance to Freud himself of his scientific training, his early ‘Project for a Scientific Psychology’ and his views about creating psychoanalysis as a science. In a way, though I don’t know exactly what weight to give this, the writing on brain localization and on Darwin could be seen as a long detour to explore the intellectual conditions and possibilities for a psychoanalytic discipline of the human. Political radicalization, for Bob and for the generation to which he belonged, in which I count myself, was a long experiment in engaging the conditions which are and are not responsive to human needs and desires. Turning to psychotherapeutic practice, which was also a re-turning, Bob envisaged a way of life in which knowing and doing, and the personal and the political, were a unity. I leave the assessment of what he contributed to psychotherapeutic studies to others. Karl Figlio circulated a paper to participants at the ‘Remembering Bob Young’ conference, and, as I read it, it exemplifies the way Bob wanted to relate the personal and the social in individual lives, and the way he turned to psychoanalysis (in the Kleinian tradition) for the necessary intellectual and clinical resources.³⁴ He thought such work gave content to the slogan, so central to early radical years, ‘the personal is political’.

I have, it turns out, created an awfully solemn portrait. Well, Bob could be solemn. He reduced some people to tears. At the same time, especially in later life when sometimes bitter experience, ill-health and intense awareness of what personally most mattered to him in his relations, had had an effect, he appreciated many of the ironies of his ambition. He welcomed the friendship, intimacy, sharing of emotion,

³³ Young 1985a: 241. Here he cited the work of Alfred Schmidt, Lucien Goldmann, Bertell Ollman and Raymond Williams.

³⁴ Karl Figlio, “‘The lineage of the superego’”: a psychoanalytic view of entrenched beliefs’.

popular music and collective solidarity that made it possible to sustain hope and commitment.

I was extremely inexperienced and ignorant when I first met Bob. His teaching was central to the wonderful way in which the history of science opened up for me a place, as I like to think, in European intellectual culture. I was the first of his PhD students to complete. In my own way, I extended Bob's understanding of the Burt-Whitehead thesis into different and new historical areas and, staying within the university setting longer than Bob, tried to make clear what the arguments meant when it came to writing the history of psychology.³⁵ My recent book, *The Sense of Movement*, was in press, with the small Process Press Bob founded, at the time of his death. The sense of movement, kinaesthesia, phenomenal expression of being in the world informs the very concepts of self and other, nature and culture, mind and body, cause and effect – the very dualisms that first set Bob on his intellectual trajectory.

Awareness of life as a process lit up each passage in this trajectory, and he would, I think, have thought it right to render that awareness in biographical mode. I therefore attach an obituary I wrote shortly after his death.

Appendix

An obituary (a much shortened version appeared in *The Independent*, 20 August 2019).

Robert Maxwell Young (Bob Young)

26 September 1935 – 5 July 2019

The historian of the evolutionary and psychological sciences, psychotherapist, analyst of science, academic and critic of academics, publisher and TV producer of radical science, libertarian socialist and family man, Bob Young, died, aged 83, early on 5th July. In later years he had a number of medical complications; an added infection proved too much. A large man with a large, often dominating presence, exceptional vitality of intellect and personality made him a big influence in many people's lives. He was combative in manner and often embraced controversial personal and institutional roles, giving life to the slogan 'the personal is political'. Underlying the colourful surface, which, as he wished, was always a focus of attention, there was a deep moral and philosophical commitment to the value of the individual person. He thought life came with certain values. His search for ways to live these values, first in academic intellectual terms, then through a radical Marxian interpretation of science and then in psychotherapeutic practice and teaching, built up the layers of a complex intellectual life. He created an exceptionally rich, if at times difficult, life – for himself, and for those around him.

Bob was born into a Presbyterian family in Highland Park, a rich suburb of Dallas, in Texas, though his family was not rich. He retained a love of aspects of that culture – steaks, the novels of Larry McMurtry, popular music and the rhetoric of the preacher. He was a scholarship boy at Yale University before beginning training at the University of Rochester Medical School. He discovered the intellectual theme that was to run throughout his life: the gap between the medical conception of the body and the mental world of purposes and values. With boundless intellectual energy and ambition, he looked to psychoanalysis to bridge this gap, but seeing that it did not, he turned to the history of science of the nineteenth century to understand why. He moved to the UK and to King's College, Cambridge University (1960) to write a thesis under Oliver

³⁵ Shaped as a general account in, Smith 2013b.

Zangwill. He wanted to understand, and ultimately to transcend, belief in dualism of mind and body, of subject and object, of culture and nature and of values and the material world. His thesis, translating this search into concrete historical terms of approaches to mind via brain, became his first book, *Mind, Brain, and Adaptation in the Nineteenth Century* (1970; reissued 1990), which continues to be cited as path-breaking. His argument led to close examination of the intellectual development in the nineteenth century, the theory of evolution, which, more than any other, drew the understanding of the mind and the person into nature. Young's readings of Darwin, the theory of natural selection and the Victorian debates of which they were part pioneered the study of Darwinian thought in context. It is hard now to recall the degree to which the sciences, and such revered geniuses of science as Darwin, were then treated apart from the wider culture as the creators of purely objective knowledge. Young's studies of 'the common context' of Darwinian and Malthusian ideas (1969) and of Darwin's metaphor of 'natural selection' (1971) transformed scholarship and lie at the base of a huge amount of work undertaken by other scholars. Bob also wrote (1966) a famously devastating critique of the state of the history of psychology, a critique that other scholars then sought to address, moving out from Bob's Anglo-American perspective.

Bob Young's innovative brilliance was recognized and he became an Assistant Lecturer in History and Philosophy of Science at Cambridge and a Fellow (and Graduate Tutor) of King's College. These were years of radical political protest and ambition for major social change. At the end of the sixties, Bob's already liberated life-style and commitments became radical, personally and politically, fuelled by intense reading of Marxian literature and an understanding of the role academic institutions, including science itself, had in mediating ideology in the wider world. He linked his own work on the Darwin debates with twentieth-century science, especially in a notoriously massive paper in a book of essays (which he edited with Mikuláš Teich) honouring Joseph Needham (*Changing Perspectives in the History of Science*, 1973). He organized an influential seminar at King's, including scholars then transforming the history of science like Charles Webster and Piyo Rattansi, and the young star, Roy Porter, on the contextual understanding of science. He was an inspiring teacher, seen to be where the action was, and he attracted a range of students and colleagues who went on to occupy positions in the history of science and medicine, some sharing his political commitments, others moving away from them.

He lived a life in which thought mattered, which intended unity of theory and practice. He became head of a new Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine in Cambridge, with Karl Figlio as a close associate. Locked in conflict with conservative interests in History and Philosophy of Science at Cambridge and in the Wellcome Trust, a conflict which involved marked differences of personality as well as substance, in 1975/6 he resigned and moved to North London. There, off the Caledonian Road, he lived the rest of his life. He was the motivating centre of a radical science collective, which was responsible for the *Radical Science Journal* and, later, *Science as Culture* (now commercially published) and a prominent voice on the political Left, in conflict with more traditional Marxists as well as the academic establishment. What is perhaps his key political paper, 'Science is social relations', which interprets science as part of the labour process, dates from 1977. He helped produce teaching materials for the Open University. His earlier papers appeared in a volume from Cambridge University Press, *Darwin's Metaphor: Nature's Place in Victorian Culture* (1985). He trained as a psychotherapist in the Kleinian tradition and, with others, began to publish the journal, *Free Associations*, and books under the same imprint (Free Association Press, which continues in other hands). He supported the work of the US feminist scholar, Donna Haraway, and was the first to publish her

classic, *Primate Visions* (1990). Bob's choice of the title, 'Free Associations', illustrates his sense of play, and sense of seriousness, at the task of unifying different areas of life – personal, therapeutic, collective, political. Indeed, much of his work built on an understanding of the profound content of metaphor. He published his Kleinian study under the title *Mental Space* (1994). Bob was also the central force in the 1980 TV Channel 4 documentary series, 'Crucible', on science in society, which included a memorable film on Newton introduced by Simon Schaffer, later head of History and Philosophy of Science in Cambridge. He also established Process Press (yet another metaphor, and a nod to two philosophers who guided the framework with which he approached the history of science, A. N. Whitehead and E. A. Burt).

Psychotherapeutic practice, teaching and publishing increasingly occupied Bob's formidable energies. He looked critically on developments in the history of science after leaving the field professionally, at times thinking that the central position history of science, and especially Darwin, should occupy in understanding the human political condition had been given up for the pursuit of detail without purpose, except in narrow career terms, and for what he was inclined to see as the dead-end of 'French theory'. He was unsympathetic to relativism and retained a longing for a metaphysics that would ground knowledge of the whole person – a longing which, he was well aware, linked him with religious ways of thought. He judged biography, with its capacity to integrate the moral, the social and the personal, to be a key genre of human self-understanding. He himself had deep, warm and highly emotional personal feelings for family and friends; at the same time, he could impose intolerable demands. No one was or could be indifferent.

After the changes in Europe in 1989, he took a central part in introducing psychotherapy training in Bulgaria. Young also accepted a new position as Professor and Chair in the department of Psychotherapeutic Studies at the University of Sheffield Medical School, where he established a swathe of new courses, many online. He continued to give inspiring, accessible lectures calling for unity in ways of thinking about the whole person – moral, political, biological, psychological. In retirement, he was hampered in movement by weight and knee-joint problems. He relished the internet as a medium for spreading and sustaining access to his work and rejoiced in the egalitarian voices it brought into his study. He organized sites around the theme of 'human nature', which he took to be the topic that mattered. His study was a fantastic marvel (or horror, depending on who looked) of the heaped paperwork, books, discs, electric cables, loudspeakers, broken chairs, of a life-time as an intellectual. Even Bob mellowed a little, though he retained sharply critical independent views, a sense of irony about his life and life in general and a fierce belief in the intellectual calling for a humane understanding of the human sciences – and of the people these sciences are supposedly about. People love to talk about his impact, and there, indeed, spread over many people and institutions, is this impact.

I cannot help but note one of Bob Young's websites (www.psychoanalysis-and-therapy.com/rmyoung/pubs.html) had, at the top left corner, a small moving image of Sisyphus, rolling his stone uphill – over and over again. But something came of it.

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