

Piaget, affectivity and cognition

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To understand the symbolic portrayed by Jean Piaget, we must first know some concepts developed by the father of Psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud. During his studies Freud developed the so-called First Topic or Topographic Theory. It is divided into three instances: unconscious (Ucs), preconscious (Pcs) and conscious (Cs), that is, each of them is virtually responsible for a specific function in the psyche. The part studied by Jean Piaget in his book *Psychoanalysis and its relations with the psychology of the child* is the unconscious. It is the most primitive form of the human psyche, with its own laws far from the rationality of conscience, that is, it is the deepest desires where there is no moral or judgment.

“According to a second conception, which Jung brilliantly held Freud also long-recognized and increasingly defends, primitive thinking is a primitive or at least an economic way of thinking. Before thinking with words and concepts, we think with images, images that have the disjointed character of a conceptual thought” (Piaget, 1923, our translation)

For Piaget, within the rhetoric of the Ucs, the dream is the most important part when it comes to the study of human development. It is the symbolic form of the repressed desires of the unconscious, as he describes it:

“It seems then that it is necessary to agree with Freud and propose the following proportion as a principle of psychoanalysis: the dream is a symbolic story under whose images we find the unconscious desires (and fears) of the subject and consequently the knot of his psychic conflicts.” (Piaget, 1920, our translation)

Therefore, from this point of view, the child’s thinking would be between symbolic thinking and logical thinking. When she names objects, she finds it somewhat difficult to under-

stand that they are inanimate. For example, the bicycle and the sun move, so they are alive. For Piaget, children do this act:

“But they are not aware of this definition, which they nevertheless apply: they cannot find the meaning of the word “alive”, they cannot justify their idea that either the Sun or the wind are alive by saying, for example, “because they move on their own [...] This fact at least proves the relative unconsciousness of the child’s thinking in regard to his own operations and in regard to the bond that unites between them his own representations of the external world.” (Piaget, 1920, our translation)

So, playing is intrinsically linked to symbolic thinking and directly linked to the child’s unconscious. Also, some fiction games made by the little ones can be related to situations like jealousy. When a child has a younger sibling, he may sometimes have a regression in his behavior in order to gain maternal attention. Or, with her dolls, she repeats the same care as her mother and her brother.

“It is evident that the problem of the birth of babies will trouble children, to whom an absurd education refuses the truth. This disturbance will then unconsciously surpass what the subject himself knows about it. [...] it appears that the interest in birth causes a whole playful symbolism. [...] the child symbolizes several fanciful possibilities and, after discovery, plays pregnancy, but often adds new or retrofitted fantasies to this, which show, over and over, how much this domain exceeds in interest the frame of a simple causal intelligence problem.” (Piaget, 1975, our translation)

Thus, it is clear that affectivity influences both cognitions, when the child learns to “play” as mother or father, as well as an emotional factor that is “disturbed” by the momentary loss of attention from the mother. We can understand then that affectivity is related to motivation. The child was motivated to see the mother taking care of her brother and decided to play mother too. Thus, Piaget says that *affectivity intervenes in the very structures of intelligence, which is the source of original knowledge and cognitive operations.* (Piaget, 2005, our translation)

Therefore, affectivity can be understood as a superior tendency, especially the will. If a child receives a stimulus, and it generates interest, he will then investigate it to find out what its purpose is. It can be said then that affectivity and cognition are intertwined, and one does not exist without the other. To understand how this relationship works, it is necessary to study human behavior.

In this sense, Claparède formulated the theory that bears his name. Basically, it reveals that all behavior presupposes a goal (intention) and a technique (means to achieve).

“[...] The goal supposes an interaction between affectivity and intelligence. [...] The goal depends on the field as a whole, and will not be the same, for example, according to the intellectual means available to the subject. Therefore, there are cognitive elements in the realm of goals.” (Piaget, 2005, our translation)

Pièrre Janet, on the other hand, divides behavior into two types of actions: primary (outer world) and secondary (inner world). They are related, respectively to cognition and affectivity:

“[...] in primary action, affectivity can already intervene (choice of the object perceived in the whole field). [...] On the other hand, the economic regulation system includes a double adjustment: an internal adjustment, and also regulatory exchanges with the environment in which structures and cognitive elements can intervene.” (Piaget, 2005, our translation)

Finally, Kurt Lewin, from the perspective of topological psychology *on the side of the perceptual field, intervenes in the notion of the total field* (Piaget, 2005). This field is divided into two different but inseparable aspects: 1) a structure, perceptive or intellectual (thus cognitive); 2) a dynamic, which is affective. (Piaget, 2005) Following the parallelism between affectivity and intelligence, and analyzing the stages of development proposed by Piaget, when deepening the sensorimotor period (0 to 2 years), the division of step by step is possible, as the previous theories exposed are exact:

“Since there is effectively no structure without energy and, reciprocally, each new structure must correspond to a new form of energy regulation, a certain type of cognitive structure must also correspond to each level of affective behavior.” (Piaget, 2005, our translation)

When analyzing the sensorimotor period, a phase that comprises the period from 0 to 6 years, one can find a continuous and parallel evolution between affectivity and cognition. Regarding hereditary devices, children’s reflexes happen as something instinctive, something led them to do that. It coordinates your reflex (cognition) to achieve your goal (affection), such as breastfeeding for example. From then on, perceptions that are linked to feelings enter - when the child does something that causes him pain, he will probably not do it again - and, learning to speak - a period in which the sensations of success and failure are activated. At the preoperative level (2 to 7 years) there is a reasoning construction, for example, the small child

went out to ride a bicycle hidden from the mother, if she falls, this event will be attributed to disobedience. And not the fact, for example, that she still doesn't have enough skills for such an act, causing a feeling of inferiority.

“A boy touches a pair of scissors that his mother had forbidden him. Nobody saw it. A little later, he walks and crosses a stream on a log; suddenly, it gives way and the boy falls into the stream. “Why did he fall?” The older ones will answer without hesitation that it is because the trunk was eaten away, and that there is no relationship between the two parts of the story. The younger ones, on the contrary, relate the two parts of the story, resisting any kind of suggestion: Why did he fall? “Because he had disobeyed.” “What if I hadn't disobeyed?” “It would have fallen the same way.” “So why did he fall?” “Because he disobeyed.” Etc.” (Piaget, 2005, our translation)

In the actual operative period (7 to 11 years old) children become more empathetic and less egocentric. To define which behaviors in the stage where normative affects prevail, Piaget was inspired by William James:

“First, there must be conflict between two tendencies; the initially weakest tendency must become the strongest in the course of the voluntary act. It is of this change that we must account.” (Piaget, 2005, our translation)

Despite initially agreeing with James, Piaget further says that the theory is not fully explained when he says the phrase *“it verifies that the will is inscribed in the sense of the greatest resistance, and that a change then takes place in the relation of the present forces. But he can't explain the change.”* (Piaget, 2005, our translation) In the formal operating stage (11 years or more) adolescents are able to make their own decisions based on facts and approaching adult decisions, in other words, *“formal thinking is the indispensable instrument for the adolescent's insertion into adult society”* (Piaget, 2005, our translation). The young person understands himself as an adult, but sometimes they can contradict him. To conclude, Piaget suggests that the affective unconscious and the cognitive unconscious are similar and walk together. One can take as an example the beginning of the operative stage where:

“new reciprocity relationships are developed [...] in connection with the formation of reversible operations. In the domain of moral feelings, a weakening of the effects of the superego and of authority in benefit of feelings of justice and other aspects of moral or affective reciprocity is verified at this same level [...] affective and cognitive mechanisms are always inseparable although different and it

is evident that if these suppose an energetic, they suppose structures.” (Piaget, 1973, our translation)

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