

## Entrevista com Thomas Sturm

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Thomas Sturm é atualmente um dos nomes mais expressivos no campo da História e Filosofia da Psicologia. Sua formação envolveu estudos iniciais nas Universidades de Göttingen e de San Diego da Califórnia, assim como um doutorado na Universidade de Marburg. Hoje professor e pesquisador da Faculdade de Filosofia da Universidade Autônoma de Barcelona, Thomas Sturm já lecionou nas Universidades de Marburg e de San Diego da Califórnia, na Escola de Economia de Berlin, além de ter sido pesquisador no Instituto Max Planck para a História da Ciência em Berlin, e coordenador o grupo de pesquisa interdisciplinar “Pensamento e Prática Psicológica” na Academia de Ciências Berlin-Brandenburg.

No ensejo do V Simpósio de Psicologia e Desenvolvimento Humano, IV Encontro de História e Filosofia da Psicologia e III Colóquio de Psicologia Social e Políticas Públicas do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Psicologia da Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora, ocorrido entre 22 e 24 de maio de 2012, Thomas Sturm concedeu-nos a presente entrevista, pela qual somos imensamente gratos.

### **1. Psicologia em Pesquisa: Doctor Sturm, could you tell us something about your training and the main influences on your work?**

**Thomas Sturm:** Primarily, my training consisted of a mixture of analytic philosophy and the history of philosophy and science. I also studied history and political science, and moreover took a few courses in psychology and economics. The strongest influences upon my formation were Günther Patzig, Lorenz Krüger, and Wolfgang Carl, and Lorraine Daston (at Göttingen University in Germany), and then Philip and Patricia Kitcher, Henry Allison, and Paul Churchland (at the University of California at San Diego). I later on collaborated with historians of psychology such as Mitchell Ash or Horst Gundlach, and psychologists, most especially with Gerd

Gigerenzer. These diverse thinkers created a mixture that probably distinguishes my work from both “pure” analytic philosophers who often ignore the history of philosophical problems, and from “pure” historians who usually avoid – or claim to avoid – taking stances on their subject matter and who are not trained, or not trained as much, in methods of rigorous conceptual analysis and argumentation that characterizes analytic philosophy. Unlike many historians, I wish that its methods became used more generally throughout the humanities. Perhaps too few analytic philosophers are willing to get their hands dirty, which is a pity: They would reach larger audiences thereby.

### **2. Psicologia em Pesquisa: What are your current academic activities?**

**Thomas Sturm:** My current research can be divided into two main strands: First, I pursue Kantian themes – most recently, the relation between concepts and perception in Kant and its impact upon later philosophers and psychologists. Secondly, I study current disputes in the psychology of human rationality, which present fascinating materials both for philosophy and history. Over and above these, I’m beginning to write a book on the relation between ethics and science, which is pretty complex task: Can there be a scientific ethics, that is, can ethical norms be justified by a method we could approximately view as scientific? Conversely, can there be a scientific explanation of ethics? Also, what research ethics should scientists follow? And finally, what new ethical challenges are created by science – say, in medicine or technology?

### **3. Psicologia em Pesquisa: We understand that the historiography of psychology is (still) understood by many scholars and professors as a purely revisionist activity, introductory and pedagogic in character, therefore dispensable for the actual development of psychological science**

**and the training of new psychologists. We would like to know what function you attribute to the history of psychology regarding psychological science and the training of new psychologists.**

**Thomas Sturm:** Let me tell you a story first. Right after he had received his Nobel prize in Economics in 2002, Daniel Kahneman gave a talk in Berlin. He had been invited by the late Paul Baltes, a developmental psychologist with whom I was working then. At the dinner table, Baltes asked Kahneman what he would recommend to junior researchers who are thinking about how to make a successful scientific career. Kahneman replied that they should concentrate on running their experiments, produce good data and avoid, as far as possible, theoretical or methodological controversies. No one would doubt that the first part makes sense; but I was a little bit surprised to hear the latter half stated to bluntly. I think such suggestions are close to an invitation to boredom if not disaster. Insofar as such a stance comes up in science, it is the task of philosophy and history to fight against it. We know pretty well that experiments require a theoretical and methodological framework, and this is neither innocent nor comes from nowhere. In other words, Kahneman's suggestion implied that younger scholars just adopt the frameworks uncritically. In the "rationality wars" that I am studying, by the way, Kahneman's well-known heuristics-and-biases approach provides such a framework, and when he developed it, it contributed to overcoming a then existing, problematic consensus itself! In the meantime, it has been shown that this approach is lacking in several important respects: its data are often questioned, and so are its methods of psychological testing and its explanatory concepts. This is true even despite of all the positive reviews of Kahneman's book *Thinking fast and slow* in popular media. The media are too uncritical when someone is a Nobel prize winner. – Needless to say, if philosophers or historians can do any service to psychology, they must do one thing: Understand the science they are dealing with very closely and carefully, or else they make themselves quickly ridiculous. But if they do engage close with the science, they might become able to question the presuppositions of a dominant program and help develop alternatives to it.

**4. Psicologia em Pesquisa: We notice that a significant part of your work regarding the history of psychology is dedicated to the study of great thinkers such as Immanuel Kant. How much does this kind of study, according to your view, still matter in the historiography of psychology?**

**Thomas Sturm:** Inside the history of philosophy, such work is standard practice. Kant scholarship is perhaps the largest industry inside the history of philosophy, with several journals, countless conferences, and so on. But, despite of some disadvantages, there are good background reasons for this. One is that the history of philosophy provides a kind of *lingua franca*, to cite an idea of Wilfried Sellars': The history of philosophical thinking provides a shared toolbox for identifying problems and possible solutions, as well as for the concepts and arguments we are using in discussions not only in philosophy itself, but also at the interfaces between philosophy and science and society. Now, the historian of psychology may despise those philosophical historians who focus on the "classics" as following outdated forms of history. Perhaps the following model helps. Consider studying a war. We may study only its beginning, then the military events, and its end. But that is nowadays indeed an outdated mode of history. In his brilliant book *The American Civil War*, Peter Parish has pursued a much more complex mode of analysis. He compared this war to a collecting lense which helps the historian to bring together important previous events and developments in US history: The hope of Thomas Jefferson and others that the issue of slavery would be solved slowly, without a major conflict; the expansion of the United States into the West during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the frequent and increasingly intense debates about in which new states slavery would be allowed, with its crises and ultimately untenable compromises (the Missouri compromise of 1820, the Nullification crisis, and so on); the industrial rise of the North, while the South remained dominated by the plantations; the emergence of Abolitionism and the new Republican party; and so on. Now, when I write on Kant – and I think similar points hold for other truly great thinkers – I also think of his work as a kind of collecting lense: It helps us to recognise important debates of

his times. I accordingly reconstruct the arguments of authors he had read – even those he should have read – and then compare them with his views. I analyze not only how other philosophers such as Descartes or Hume or Rousseau influenced him, but also what less well known figures such as Johann Nicolas Tetens, Johann Heinrich Lambert, or even forgotten scientists such as Patrick D’Arcy or Tobias Mayer meant to Kant’s views on psychology. I moreover think about stages in which arguments for and against a certain claim developed. That way, Kant’s views become not only better understood and prepared for evaluation. One also develops a new image through which we understand the history and philosophy of psychology in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and realize its significance for today. To me, that is both historically and philosophically instructive. I’ve also experienced that I can thereby reach both philosophers, historians, and psychologists as well.

**5. Psicologia em Pesquisa: A widespread opinion amongst psychologists is that psychology and philosophy have been definitely separated since the former became an autonomous science in the late 19th century. How do you evaluate this opinion?**

**Thomas Sturm:** Definitely? As is often said, it is difficult to make predictions, especially about the future. What happened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was a fierce fight over the status of especially formal logic, and I do think that as far as we know by now, logic does quite well without a psychological underpinning. However, once this antipsychologistic stance had become convincingly argued for especially by Gottlob Frege, it became applied by Rudolf Carnap, Hans Reichenbach and other to other areas of philosophy, such as epistemology, philosophy of science, or even ethics. And this is a more complicated issue. I do think that there are questions in epistemology that one can pursue without psychology – for instance, the mere question of what knowledge is, and whether we possess any of it. But there are very important questions, including normative ones that might well profit from certain approaches in cognitive psychology. What epistemic strategies are rational? What forms of reasoning are efficient in science? And so on. And there is another reason why I think philosophy and psychology should collaborate more than they do. Psychology

has its own philosophical or a priori presuppositions, and because psychologists are not always trained very much in conceptual analysis, philosophers might help a bit. Good psychologists such as Paul Meehl have seen this earlier on. Perhaps it is less important to think about how to reunite the two disciplines and more how to achieve concrete and specific collaborations between philosophers and psychologists.

**6. Psicologia em Pesquisa: Currently, you are one of the scholars that have been doing some research about the notion of crisis in psychology. Considering that clarity regarding object, method, conceptual framework and theoretical unity remains a challenge for psychologists, would you say that contemporary psychology is also in crisis? If so, can it, or, must it be overcome?**

**Thomas Sturm:** I don’t think that ‘crisis’ is a good term for a description of the general state of psychology today. One reason is simple: Psychology is a very broad field, so any such statement has to be relativized to some subfield or other. But even if one would want to say things such as that there’s no crisis in perceptual psychology but there’s one in research on rationality, I’d be hesitant. Historically, those who have diagnosed a crisis in psychology or in any other science, have meant very different things: sometimes a deep clash between theory and data, sometimes a continued existence of metaphysics, sometimes a fragmentation of theoretical and/or methodological approaches, sometimes a lack of practical or social relevance, and so on. Unfortunately, those who continue to use the terminology of “crisis” in psychology do not work very hard on explaining what they mean. The term has thus the danger of being more a polemical than an analytic tool.

**7. Psicologia em Pesquisa: One of your main interests is the Philosophy of Science, more specifically, the definition of science. Considering the numerous disputes regarding this concept, would you say that it is possible to build a unique concept of science? And what about humanities, would there be a unifying concept for their various disciplines? Could the history of science offer some contribution to these debates?**

**Thomas Sturm:** Well, the topic of defining science is not one of my primary objectives, but yes, I do think there is a good proposal for a unified concept of science. It comes from Kant – who here was influenced especially by Johann Heinrich Lambert, a philosopher-scientist who would certainly deserve 10% of the funding that goes into Kant scholarship nowadays. (I think Kant would agree.) In any case, Kant’s view is this: Whatever differences there are between all the sciences – and there’s no doubt that they are often profound – science is distinguished from common knowledge by its systematicity. What Kant meant thereby were two basic things. First, any science consists of a rich number of knowledge claims that must be integrated according to the standards and guiding idea of that science. We do not just pile up scientific assertions: We connect them through means of logic, mathematics, through means of justification and explanation, and so on. Second, each science requires a definition that helps to distinguish it from other sciences, namely especially in terms of methods, goals, and subject matter. We can conceive thereby, at least as a regulative ideal, a more or less comprehensive system of all the sciences dividing up the epistemic labor we’re faced with. And yes, that is a notion that can include the humanities. By the way: Kant – contrary to what many people probably think of him – was fully aware that such a definition might change over time, or that we learn about the philosophical frameworks of science alongside ongoing research. Recently, the German philosopher Paul Hoyningen-Huene has also developed a sophisticated account of the concept of science in terms of systematicity, and he admits Kantian influences in his views. He denies, however, that his view is normative. He thinks he can base it upon a purely descriptive analysis of science. I’m a bit skeptical about this point – perhaps we can find enterprises that are highly systematical but that we wouldn’t call scientific. But I do think that systematicity is of great importance in science. It is also an interesting research program for both historians and philosophers: What forms of systematicity were developed in the history of science? How did they become introduced, more widely accepted and then perhaps used as a standard tool? How did they contribute to the complex state of knowledge in which each particular science is now? What questions are generated by forms of systematicity for future research?