

## Individual Psychology and Democracy

LEO RATTNER, *New York*

Natural sciences have no necessary connection with politics. The findings of chemistry, physics, biology, and other sciences are valid regardless of the political organization of society and the form of government existing therein. Likewise, to be a scientist, one does not need to develop a particular political philosophy or ideology. Fascist, Communist, or Democrat, all can easily agree upon scientific theories and concepts and the correct method to prove a new hypothesis.

The situation is somewhat different in regard to social sciences and psychology. To be sure, the findings of these sciences are also true even if the government is hostile and antagonistic toward certain theories and representatives of these theories. Yet, assuming that such conditions can exist, some important problems immediately arise. What is the proper attitude of the scientist whose convictions and values happen to disagree with the ideology represented by his government? Can he assume a neutral position, claiming for himself the right to speak and write as he sees fit, without being intimidated by governmental pressure?

Unfortunately, very few governments are willing to concede such privileges to the scientist who is concerned with social problems. This is perhaps understandable in view of the fact that no government can safely neglect the findings of the social scientists. The investigation of almost every social problem demands an extensive examination of the relationships between individual and society. The results of such studies must of necessity be of intimate concern to any government that seeks to develop a coherent, successful policy which will eventually be supported by a majority of the citizens.

Social scientists have recognized this situation very early. In the field of psychology, however, such recognition has been scanty and insufficient. Quite a few psychologists still seem to hold the opinion that their professional and scientific activities are private affairs. They want to stay clear of politics and to be let alone by government and

political parties. Trying to be "true" scientists, they want first and foremost to go about their work without being told what to do and how to do it.

Unfortunately, such an attitude of splendid isolation is as unrealistic in the case of the psychologist as it is in the case of the social scientist. Modern governments cannot afford to neglect the discoveries of psychology nor its teachings. This is not surprising, since some of these teachings are clearly antagonistic to certain forms of government. Thus, both the governments of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany have all but forbidden the activities of Individual Psychologists and Psychoanalysts. Taking such restrictions as valid evidence, one must assume that totalitarian governments are afraid to let psychologists mind their own business, fearing perhaps dangerous developments to their regimes if psychologists are permitted to do as they please.

Actually, such fears are not entirely unfounded. Modern psychology is essentially anti-totalitarian; its major premises are based on a democratic "*Weltanschauung*." This is clearly the case with Alfred Adler's psychology, as will be seen later. While these premises were not so apparent in earlier Freudian psychology, Neo-Freudians like Fromm and Horney now seem to move in this direction, elaborating concepts which are rather similar to those of Adler.

/                    /                    /

What, then, are the fundamental differences between a totalitarian philosophy and a democratic "*Weltanschauung*," such as is represented by Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology? To begin with, one of the basic ingredients of the latter is a profound respect for the dignity of the individual. In totalitarian countries, the individual is entirely subordinated to the state: the state is everything while the individual is virtually nothing. In Individual Psychology, the individual—be he a patient or anybody else—is considered an equal partner whose own welfare is the basis for the welfare of the community to which he belongs.

Time and again, Adler stressed the importance of this point. He demanded from the Individual Psychologist a strictly anti-authoritarian attitude. "Treat the patient as you yourself would like to be treated," was his implied maxim. He emphasized that the psychologist should not be a dominating leader, but rather a friendly, helpful, and cooperative advisor. Psychological counseling, Adler explained tire-

lessly, is not a one-sided affair. The psychologist does not stand above the patient, nor should he place himself in a more exalted position. To be at all effective, their relationship should be based on trust and mutual respect; on recognition of the fact that all human beings are basically equal, and that therefore no one is entitled to dominate, and thus to exploit, a fellow human being.

Good counseling is essentially a sharing of experiences, the development of a give-and-take relationship between psychologist and patient. In order to attain this goal, the psychologist must free himself from prejudices and hatreds which are so characteristic of the authoritarian personality as well as the authoritarian state. This is not an easy task, yet it must be accomplished. To make distinctions between human beings because of race, creed, color, or class is to block the road which leads to the patient's recovery.

Respect for individual dignity goes together with a non-dogmatic, tolerant approach. Totalitarians, on the other hand, cannot afford to make mistakes nor to demonstrate tolerance towards themselves or others. To show understanding and tolerance would be equal to showing "weakness," thus undermining the foundations of the god-like image on which the totalitarian personality structure is built.

The Individual Psychologist does not need such rigid defense mechanisms. He is tolerant because he knows that we all are liable to make mistakes. He knows that human beings—including himself—are not infallible and thus likely to err in acts and judgments. Adler was the first to admit such a possibility. We must constantly be aware of the fact, he once wrote, "that everything can be entirely different." This is still a valid maxim which should be inscribed on the walls of every practicing psychologist's office.

The differences between democratic and authoritarian attitudes are most clearly apparent when the problems of social policy are approached. In the totalitarian mind, all social relationships are dominated by the will to power. The world is divided into leaders and those who must be led. Force and coercion are indispensable tools, because the authoritarian personality, as well as the authoritarian government, does not believe in voluntary cooperation. Lacking inner strength and security, they cannot trust others because they do not trust themselves.

It is the predominance of this attitude which haunts present-day civilizations. Greed, hatred, and lust for power seem to rule absolutely in our world. The psychologist, while making a correct diagnosis, does

not know a short-cut cure for these diseases. It is only by his example, by demonstrating a more democratic attitude in his professional and social relationships, that he can show the possibility of another approach to human relations. This is actually what Individual Psychology demands from its followers. Forty years ago, Alfred Adler emphasized the necessity for Individual Psychologists to be pioneers in the fight against the manifestations of the will to power. The necessity is even more urgent today.

Again, we know of no recipe which promises easy success. To succeed here is perhaps the supreme test of the proficiency of any psychologist. For the Individual Psychologist, it means a mature understanding of the content as well as the spirit of Adler's work. To guard oneself against authoritarian attitudes, one must be aware of tendencies in oneself and society which favor their continued existence.

A democratic psychologist is not born. He is made by learning, training, and the insight which he acquires in the course of his studies and professional work. To succeed in his calling, he must be able to grow; to free himself from prejudices which he inherited from his social environment in early childhood. Lack of such ability and knowledge must have serious consequences. It is extremely doubtful, to say the least, whether successful psychological counseling is possible as long as the counselor has not overcome the authoritarian tendencies in himself. In many cases, such a deficiency is outright dangerous.

Thus we suggest that in order to be a good psychologist, one must be a good democrat, too. This is not meant in a partisan sense. Rather, it means that every psychologist should develop a personal philosophy, a "*Weltanschauung*," which is based on democratic principles. However, such a *Weltanschauung* would be meaningless if merely lip-service were paid to it. More than almost anyone else, the psychologist must make a living reality of democracy in order to succeed in his professional work.

Psychologists have a stake in democracy. The rights of free speech, free investigation, and the free expression of their ideas and experiences are indispensable to them. So, too, is a certain atmosphere which apparently can only develop in a democratic society. Respect for the individual—be he sick or healthy—goodwill, tolerance, and trust cannot exist in a community which is dominated by fear and terror.

Yet, without the presence of such conditions, we can hardly expect the development of satisfactory relations between psychologist and patient, which seem to be the presupposition for a therapeutic success.

This does not mean that we should accept democracy without questioning. Certainly no society is perfect, and democracies, too, can stand improvement. Knowing all too well that most of our social institutions hinder individual development instead of furthering it, the psychologist can and should have a voice in social reform movements. Yet, he who does not work actively for such reforms will hardly be asked for advice.

Individual Psychologists, however, are well prepared for such a task. They know that a healthy personality can only develop in a society where social equality and equal economic opportunities are guaranteed for all. While nowhere completely reached, some societies are actually approaching this goal, the fulfillment of which might well reduce social pressure to a considerable degree. Thus, to further such a development is perhaps quite as important as the individual treatment which the psychologist can provide.

John Dewey's philosophy has been called the "Philosophy of Democracy." Likewise, Alfred Adler's psychology seems to us to deserve the honorary title of a "democratic psychology," for no other psychologist was more conscious of the necessity of a democratic orientation. Witness to this thesis is his introduction to "The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology," where he described the goal of his psychology thus:

... to gain a reinforced sense of reality, the development of a feeling of responsibility, and a substitution for latent hatred of a feeling of mutual goodwill, all of which can be gained only by the conscious evolution of a feeling for the common weal and the conscious destruction of the will to power.

This is still a valid goal today.