

Anthropology and Individual Psychology¹

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In his opening speech at the Congress, Professor Guth, former dean of Zürich University, noted that psychology is about to merge with anthropology. Professor Portmann, in the preface of his book entitled *Biologische Fragmente zu einer Lehre des Menschen*, expresses the belief that the main task of our time consists in formulating a doctrine of man relating more closely to present-day realities, and that he had discovered contributions to this new doctrine in many places.

Since its beginning, Individual Psychology has furnished such contributions in various areas of anthropology. It may seem surprising that many of the new sciences which, at the beginning of this century started to investigate man, were forced to create the very basis for their future development. Not satisfied with the achievements of biology, sociology, psychology, ethics, etc., they made contributions to all of them.

I shall attempt here to give a brief account of the important contributions which Individual Psychology has made to a more realistic anthropology generally and to philosophical anthropology and biology in particular, as well as the contributions to ethics, an explanation of meaning (*Sinndeutung*), and metaphysics.

I shall not try, however, to prove how important the contributions of Individual Psychology have been nor how correct its findings. I shall be content to indicate the various planes on which Individual Psychology perceives man.

In the last few decades we were privileged to gain an understanding and to learn a great deal in the area of the doctrines of man. But it is safe to claim that Alfred Adler was among the first to introduce a new method of approach to the problem: he had the courage to use new methods of research. He introduced methods of understanding and interpreting man at the beginning of this century, at a time when most other scientists were still relying exclusively on causality and admitted as scientific only the results which had been obtained by

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methods of experimentation. Here, Individual Psychology has made a long step forward; a step which other sciences were reluctant to follow even in the Twenties.

In his book, *Soziologie als Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*, Hans Freyer stipulates the necessity of creating a new type of science in order to really comprehend man. He feels that a "science of reality" needs to be fashioned alongside natural science and philosophy (*Geisteswissenschaften*), capable of focusing on man as he really is. Natural and theoretical sciences are concerned with the investigation of objects of nature and products of the human mind. Natural sciences treat and investigate man as an object, yet, whereas in fact, man is not only an object, but also a subject. He is a thinking, acting and deciding creature of concrete reality. To a large extent, Freyer's postulations were anticipated, however, by Individual Psychology in the Twenties, wherein man was interpreted as a thinking and self-deciding unit.

In the past years we have seen that in all sciences concerned with man there is implicitly contained a certain image of him. Without going into details about the image of man in Individual Psychology, I should like to quote from Adler's book, *What Life Should Mean to You (Vom Sinn des Lebens)*: "The oneness of the individual can not be compressed into a brief formula." Such a formula of the human personality will perhaps never be discovered because we encounter it in real life only. Life itself must be the answer to the question of sense and value of man. Knowing that we have only made certain contributions to a doctrine of man, we realize that the image of man in Individual Psychology is not, and cannot be, an exhaustive one.

I should like to describe its main aspects as follows:

1) At an early stage of his investigations, Adler saw the individual—the personality—as something unique and unified; as something that can never repeat itself again. Later, Erwin Wexberg devotes the first chapter of his *Exposition of Individual Psychology* to the personality as a teleological unit.

2) Adler sees man as a being that acts in accordance with a definite concept of his goal, i.e., as a teleological being. This concept of direction toward a goal, this finality, was at first not more than a methodological tool, because Adler thought that it would be simpler to understand man if it could be assumed that he was guided by direction towards a certain definite end. At a later time, this purposive

direction of all mental functions towards a goal had become one of the most important and basic tenets of Individual Psychology.

3) Adler's concept of the importance of the opinion of the individual about himself and the world at large is possibly the most important part of the image of man in Individual Psychology. It is likely that the word "opinion" has confused many who believed it to be of no importance. Adler, however, understands "opinion" as something very essential.

The Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce also believes the philosophy of each man to be the basic precondition for all his thinking and acting. He uses the word *empfinden* (sensing) in order to show that he does not mean a system.

Adler, in speaking of "opinion about the world" insists that this "opinion" forms the basis of the world-image of a person and decisively influences his thinking, feeling, and willing. The "opinion" of which Adler speaks is something lying deep behind the *Weltanschauung* of man; in other words, it is the really profound and not the surface type of "opinion."

He expresses this idea best in *What Life Should Mean to You*, which can be considered, together with *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology*, his most important work. In it, he says literally: "The opinion a man forms of the meaning of his life is not a vain endeavor, because it provides the direction for his thoughts, feelings and actions."

This "opinion" is probably also identical with what Dostoevski and Berdjajev call the "idea." According to the latter, the ideas of man are his most important realities. He says: "*La supreme realité, ce sont des idées par lesquelles l'homme vit.*"

How did Adler see man? Because Individual Psychology considers the opinion—the mind of man—to be decisive, all other factors automatically are of lesser importance.

The well known Viennese psychologist Victor Frankl also says: "The human begins where biology, sociology and psychology end."

4) Individual Psychology's view of man as a free being—relatively, if not absolutely free—is well in accordance with the importance of the basic mental attitude of man (*Grundeinstellung*). Human responsibility is indeed based on man's free decision. The philosophical basis of Individual Psychology has been most clearly formulated by Dr.

Alexander Neuer and restated by Dr. Leonhard Deutsch. According to them, we no longer look upon man as a determined being; our present view of man is based less on causality and much more on his creative freedom.

5) One more aspect—perhaps the most important in Individual Psychology—may be mentioned: Adler considered man as a social being throughout. To him, the concept of an isolated human being seemed absurd. In one of the lectures at this Congress it has been mentioned that social feelings (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*) are given to man as a possibility, a potential, which he himself has to develop. It is something which is not only man's chance but even more, his duty. I want to add that this social feeling, to be properly understood, must be seen also on a metaphysical plane.

Five aspects have been briefly touched upon: Man as a *complete* and *responsible* being, whose *opinion* is decisive and whose mental efforts *determine* his responsibility. This human being can live only with other human beings and is therefore a *social* creature.

These five points are basic to all branches of philosophy and anthropology which consider man from a personalistic point of view. The fact that nowadays other theories follow the same pattern only confirms the correctness of Adler's concept.

Individual Psychology is the psychology which endeavors to help man develop into a personality with the help of his own mental effort.

Berdjajev, too, understands "personality" as a constant task. He believes that in order to develop a personality of one's own, man must have sufficient inner freedom.

These are the most important contributions of Individual Psychology in the field of philosophical anthropology.

In the sphere of biology we find many misunderstandings as to the contributions of Individual Psychology. Repeatedly it is said that Individual Psychology is a biological doctrine. According to others it is sociological, and either too much or too little ethical, too much or too little interested in religion. The opinion is also advanced that Individual Psychology is a doctrine of drives (*Trieblehre*) which presupposes man as a being guided mainly by his drive for power and authority.

Paul Tillich describes man as being aware of his own feelings and human existence as conscious existence.

As a human being, man must care for himself like all other living things; must support himself and must have a personal task. Yet, all these definitions do not hit the mark. The biologist, Portmann, believes, for instance, that the expression "drive" for "self-preservation" is too pathetic. Nevertheless, conditions of strain must be resolved, and since man's instinct and drive towards security are insufficient to achieve equilibrium, higher level powers must be relied upon. Man must stand his ground; he must assert himself. These powers are biologically present in everybody but it is up to the individual to decide when to use them and when to assert himself.

In difficult conditions, man can do what other beings cannot do: he can anticipate danger and can try to change a given situation. He can compensate and can find means and ways for survival. Compensation itself, as well as the desire to assert, however, can become too powerful. It may even degenerate into a drive for authority and power. While it is necessary to be able to stay above a situation, this ability can degenerate into the wish to lord it over others. If man does not feel too much threatened and does not need to mobilize all his reserves in order to assert himself, then he can try to interest himself in other people. As Portmann says: "The meeting, the over-individual is from the beginning latent in every individual." Self-assertion as well as the ability of devotion are biologically present in every man but either one can be developed or suppressed according to the individual mentality.

Besides biological and psychological problems there is, finally, one more important question to be considered: the query about the sense of life. Two important statements of Adler are mentioned here:

"Man's opinion about the sense of life is not vain because it serves as direction for his thinking, feeling and acting."

"It is of value to ask about the sense of life only if one keeps the system of relations between man and cosmos in mind. Cosmos, it is easy to understand, has forming powers in this relationship as if Cosmos were the father of everything living."

Maybe a last objectivity has prevented Adler from speaking of the Creator in this connection. But is it useless to argue whether Individual Psychology is ethical, social, or religious. All science is exploration, and as such has nothing to do with metaphysics, even if it approaches metaphysical areas.

The scientist is at the same time man. It is his privilege to ponder about the last questions of humanity after his daily work is done.

Professor Guth quoted Pascal who differentiates between the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I believe that the difference is in the fact that I can reign over the God of the philosophers but the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob reigns over me.

We do not know whether Adler believed in God or whether he had his own personal God, but we have a feeling that God was with him because "He strongly speaks out of his work."