

SOME PERSPECTIVES ON INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY IN OUR TIME

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Philosophizing on the future of Individual Psychology Alfred Adler occasionally predicted that his ideas would be integrated into modern psychological thinking and become part of it without being recognized as an independent school of thought.

Today we may say we have witnessed this development in more than one respect.

Important terms of Individual Psychological thinking have been so widely accepted by experts and the interested public alike that it seems hardly necessary to anyone to refer to the original concept.

It is a compliment the times have paid to the modest Viennese Socrates that nobody quotes Individual Psychology any more when referring to the Inferiority Complex. It has influenced our thinking far beyond the limits of a mere psychological term.

In its own field it is a difficult and by no means uncontroversial topic like other great popularizations derived from scientific thinking. But in its general application it has achieved a common sense look - like other great popularizations. And this cannot be incidental.

This development bears out the wisdom and the strength of the original concept.

The troubling issue of critical introspection lies at its bottom.

But like other great popularizations derived from scientific thinking it has been divested from its austerity to comfort the human mind. This comfort means participation in wisdom.

The same is true, it seems to me, of the Theory of the Descent of Organisms of the 19th Century as it has permeated our understanding of nature.

Here also the popularization diverged from the original concept. centering on a different part of the problem of descent. Here also an age old troubling question: "Where do we come from?" is at the bottom of it.

Nowadays we notice a similar process in the popularization of the Theory of Relativity. "Relativity" has become a comforting name for what we cannot grasp.

Our relationship to nature, to humankind, and to the Universe around us: this *dos-pei-sto* is described in the history of these popularizations of great scientific developments.

The Theory of Descent has well prepared us for the acceptance of the Inferiority Complex. The psychological question could not have been posed before recognition of our problematic place in nature.

And so also is the Theory of Relativity connected with the developments in Natural History and in Psychology.

This could be corroborated in many ways. For instance: Individual Psychology has adapted biological terms to the field of psychology.

Compensation, the complement of the Inferiority Complex, is originally a biological term.

Another aspect shows the deep connection with biological problems, namely, the importance of organic inferiority in the Theory of Individual Psychology. This chapter of Adlerian psychology has not yet been exhausted.

To point out the difference between a merely biologicistic psychology and a psychological way of thinking I only mention here the critical attitude of Individual Psychology towards an indiscriminate acceptance of ideas on heredity into the field of psychology.

We go back to our assertion that psychological thinking became strong and popular only after the outside world had been explored.

The era of psychology did not arrive before man had accepted his position in the cycle of nature.

Then, as soon as the "I" was understood as a problem, relativity in other fields had to be faced. This may apply to the history of science, it also applies to our acceptance of popularizations of scientific ideas.

We might say: the Atomic Age did not arrive before the Inferiority Complex was a familiar concept.

Another chapter of psychological thinking was set off by Adlerian psychology. We find that recent authors question psychological schools that only consider the masculine point of view.

Developments in infancy, traumatic experiences, libidinous experience do not fully describe the bisexual character of our psychology. Even the recognition of the maternal role does not alone give the understanding of this ever-present reality.

Adler was the first one of the modern psychologists who tried to understand the feminine role as such. There were scattered remarks in philosophies on the feminine attitude in a masculine world (Nietzsche), there were sociological theories on this topic.

But Adler was the first psychologist who tried to understand systematically and build into his psychology the fact of the feminine attitude in our masculine world and the psychology of the masculine reaction to this fact. He taught us to try to look at the world from both points of view. He taught us to look at it as an ever-present element of universal importance, not just a sexual or infantile one-sided experience of child and man.

We may still be very far from a full understanding of the interdependence of the psychology of the sexes. But we notice that authors have paid more attention to this fact since the teachings of the Adlerian school.

Finally a few words may be added with regard to the field where Adler is most widely accepted: that is the field of theory and practice of education. In a field of such immediate practical importance as the understanding and upbringing of children in difficult times like these the

question of formal recognition does not enter. We are glad to see in our every day work that there is not a nursery school teacher, not a social worker, not even a college professor who has not at least profited something from Adlerian teachings, how to understand and how to guide a child. Who could ask for more?