

Causality versus Indeterminism

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"NOTHING IS, BUT THINKING MAKES IT SO," said Shakespeare. The extent to which this is true is far greater than is commonly believed. We like to believe that there exist somewhere the absolutes of Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and similar virtues. We seek the one "true" religion and the one "true" psychology with a deep feeling that there must be such a thing. From the beginning of time, man has sought the "cause" of things. Nothing seems more obvious to us than the law of cause-and-effect. It is so obvious, we think, that it is beyond question, and we are sure that "everything has its cause."

As long as we believe that cause-effect is a natural law that governs the outside world by fiat, we do not look further to find any other way of looking at the world around us. It does not occur to us to question this matter at all. All our questions are within this framework of cause-effect and the answers must, of course, be likewise. And, in so far as these answers "work," it makes no difference. The final test is survival. As long as we survive, we assume our investigations and conclusions regarding cause-effect are "true."

Newton, the physicist, built a whole explanation of the physical world on cause-effect. His explanation remained unchallenged for many years. There were, however, a number of things that could not be adequately explained by this "explanation." This led Einstein to his theory of relativity. Relativity is indeterminism rather than cause-effect. In short, he looked at the same phenomena that Newton faced—but explored them with a different *point of view*. By selecting a different way of looking at the same things, he was able to solve problems that had been impossible to solve in the previous frame of reference.

Now, it is more clearly understood that such things as cause-effect, indeterminism, and similar terms, are *devices of thought* which the psyche employs in its effort to adapt to the world that the individual may survive. Cause-effect, then, is not a law of nature (objective reality) but rather, it is a *way of looking at* circumstance and experience. The mind is like a workman who is free to choose which tool he

will employ to accomplish his task. He may and should choose the one that serves his purpose best.

While it was believed that cause-effect was something that was a part of "objective reality," our thinking could progress only to that point. It was much like the world before Columbus. Men thought the world was flat and therefore dared not sail out of sight of land. Once they changed their idea of the nature of the world, new land opened up for them. And a similar situation obtained for physicists with regard to the nature of light. Light was thought to travel as waves. But, this did not explain some observable facts. A new view or theory was proposed: that light behaved as quanta or particles that were emitted from a source. Now both views are used, depending on which happens to be most appropriate to the need.

The contribution of philosophers has helped us greatly to understand the rules of human thought. One of the most helpful theories is "The Philosophy of 'As If'" of Vaihinger. He shows how the psyche employs a variety of devices and *fictions* as a way of achieving solutions to problems. He shows us that we may consider a body of data in the frame of reference, cause-effect, or we may choose to look at it *as if* we were dealing with means-to-ends. In short, we may choose the kind of "spectacles" through which we will look.

The study we call psychology was once a part of philosophy before it split off in a separate *discipline*. It came into being during the period when Newtonian physics was at its peak of approval. The cause-effect frame of reference was piling up wonderful and useful findings in physics and chemistry. It is not surprising that the early psychologists should have attempted to construct their science within the same framework. They labored to see *causes* of human behavior. If a man had a neurosis, they sought the *cause* somewhere in his past and regarded the neurosis as an *effect* of this past circumstance. Or, if a child woke up with night-terror, they sought in his past for the *reason*. It seemed only reasonable to do so.

Curiously enough, Einstein and Adler brought out their first work at about the same time (1905-1907). Both had abandoned the mental tool called cause-effect and had been working along the lines of indeterminism and relativity. The hunt for *causes* gave way to the study and observation of relationships. A whole new way of looking at the universe and man was opened and explored. Einstein saw that energy and matter were not two different things but that they were interchangeable.

Adler changed the formulation about human behavior just as radically. Instead of asking, "What causes such behavior?" he asked, "For what purpose does a man act in such a way?" In short, what is he trying to accomplish? No one had regarded a neurosis as a means to an end before. No one had stopped to consider that such a thing could provide *benefits* to its owner. They thought the neurosis was a power holding on to the man. From Adler's view, it appeared that it was a man holding on to a neurosis, much as one hangs onto a block of stocks because they pay good dividends.

This shift in emphasis makes a whole world of difference in therapy. In the first case, the man is in the role of a "helpless" victim who is being hurt against his will by a power beyond his control. We must try to slay the dragon that devours this blameless man. But, in Adler's therapy, we must show him that he created this neurosis to protect himself from what he considered might be a greater evil. From it, he gains an easier situation in life and *at added expense* to those around him. Neurosis is a form of exploitation of the community.

It is easy to see why other forms of psychological therapy are far more popular than Adler's therapy. When one is regarded as a helpless victim, he is the object of much devotion and is excused from *personal responsibility* for his situation. But, if we regard neurosis as his own artistic creation, even though he has fashioned it without full awareness of his intention, then the whole therapeutic approach is changed.

Adlerian therapy depends on making him aware of *his part* in the creation and maintenance of the neurosis of which he complains. As may be suspected, the majority flee immediately when they are not allowed or encouraged to believe that they are "helpless" victims and that they must be responsible for their failures as well as for their successes. But this is really a small matter. It is up to the individual whether he chooses to be a neurotic. Our job as scientists is to find the proper approach for those who may want to be responsible human beings rather than martyrs.

Neurosis, when viewed in terms of cause-effect, cannot come up with any answer other than that the individual is the victim of the causes in his past. This is all determinism can provide. On the other hand, neurosis, viewed in the framework of indeterminism, becomes a means to an end. As such, it is the creation of the individual, over which he has control. He is free to retain his neurosis as a means to the end of solving a confronting situation, or he is equally free to seek a more productive solution of his social problems.

Any psychology, then, is a body of observation and theory purporting to explain human behavior. It is a coherent structure within itself and is either in the framework of cause-effect or is framed in terms of indeterminism, Individual Psychology and Gestalt psychology being the only notable indeterminate psychologies. He who would operate must take his stand within one or the other approach. It is not possible to combine the two for they are mutually exclusive. Each therapist must consciously decide whether he will consider human behavior as an *end result of causes* or whether he will consider behavior as "*an attempt to reach a point of vantage*" (Adler). Adlerians choose the latter—and stick to it.