

Causality versus Indeterminism

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This subject, with its many philosophical and scientific implications, goes far beyond the scope of a short paper. One can only treat certain aspects of the problem, without giving the necessary evidence. It seems that the question of determinism, especially in the anthropological field, is becoming more and more the main problem of our time, not only for philosophers (for whom the problem is all but new), but also for those engaged in almost any branch of cultural activity today. The Western world finds itself locked in a deadly struggle for political "freedom" against the concept of a totalitarian state, which is clearly based on the principles of materialism and scientific determinism of the past century. If it should be really true that man is bound to follow the trend of the "struggle for life," or to be ruled by a historical process in the same way as a natural law—with all his cultural activities amounting to nothing but a screen to hide these "natural" tendencies—there could conceivably be no reason why he should not be governed by a totalitarian regime. The consistency of this thought is more strongly felt in the East than in the West, where traditions of humanism and individualism are more deeply rooted. But these traditions or tendencies are constantly undermined by the terms, which reflect theories in the natural sciences. We in the Western civilization are usually not aware of that "splitting-up" of the mind, perhaps one of the main causes of the insecurity-feelings which seem to be growing every day.

Impressed by the great achievements of the natural sciences and influenced by their theories, man began to feel lost in a universe, strange and far away from his own inner life. "Freedom" and other spiritual and ethical values could be experienced or acknowledged in a certain sense, but could not be thought of in the same way as the natural laws. More and more they were looked upon as a tradition, if not a mere convention, rather than as something belonging to the human existence such as breathing, or eating. In spite of the spirited constructions designed by many philosophers to bridge the gap between natural laws and moral norms, most of these solutions seem to be solely of a verbal

character. They do not answer the vital questions which present themselves more or less consciously to everyone. Take, for instance, the notion of *responsibility*, which is so essential in Individual Psychology. It cannot by any means be reconciled with the idea of an exclusively mechanical occurrence of events, let us say, in the human brain. Nowadays one is told everywhere that materialism and mechanism, in the above mentioned sense, have long since become obsolete. Are we sure about that? True, in a theoretical discussion, very few Westerners will acknowledge themselves to be materialists; but in nearly all scientific activity, especially popular science and education, materialism is, although not always clearly defined, the basis of thought and practice. This situation is perhaps more dehumanizing and paralyzing for the sense of responsibility than one might superficially think. Perhaps in the same way that moral decrees became unconsciously prohibiting factors with regard to human desires (Freud), so determinism and materialism now become psychological prohibitions with regard to spontaneity, self-confidence, courage, activity, responsibility, etc., in short, the essential features in Adlerian psychology. This cultural and historical background of modern psychology and education is especially stressed here for further discussion.

Considering these assumptions, it seems of paramount importance that more light should be thrown on what Adler called "creative power" in man, i.e., the possibility of making a "new start" at any moment and of (re)arranging determining factors in life. A deeper and broader foundation of this "central fact" in human existence is necessary. The negative and vague term "indeterminism" is not sufficient. It reminds us too much of the concept that became important in the development of modern physics when it was discovered that not every physical process was ruled by a strict causality and that therefore the outcome could not have been absolutely predicted from a given situation at the start on the basis of natural laws; that there is only a certain probability for the final outcome. Some saw in this development a kind of "gap in nature" which could make human freedom possible, but chance is of course not a basis for responsible activity. Neither is vitalism, although biological processes are still more "indetermined." Something in man must reach beyond the sphere of his physical and his vital nature. There is a strong tendency in the recent development of philosophy to acknowledge this. Existentialism, especially, draws attention to this point in a radical way. Choice and decision are seen as independent from outer laws, even though these outer laws exist

only as a construction of the human mind, whereas man in action is the only reality, his knowledge being powerless and unreal.

In Individual Psychology the two pillars of analysis and reeducation are: *insight* and *training*, both being interdependent. From the point of existentialistic philosophy this would make no sense, insight being impossible. You could only advise your clients always to come to decisions, to do something, no matter what. Attention is drawn here to the *Philosophie der Freiheit* by Rudolf Steiner (*Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* in the English translation). The basic idea in this work is that an indetermined act is only possible if decisions are taken in full consciousness; Steiner further discusses whether or not "full consciousness" is possible. If one asks whether man acts "free" or "determined," one can find as many arguments in favor of one as the other. But we ask which state of mind is needed to enable one to act by "one's own determination," and if and how that state could be attained. This state evidently is not the common one. The whole question needs a review of the possible theories of cognition and action, which cannot be given here; but the conclusion is that "thinking" is—in its true nature—not a process following logical laws, as treated in rationalism, but a real "spiritual activity," if fully developed. All the arguments against "freedom" can be shown to be inconsistent in themselves; but on the other hand, while man's creative power cannot be proved theoretically, it can be demonstrated in *practice*.

Most Individual Psychologists will perhaps be satisfied with the last argument and leave the rest to philosophers; but it is doubtful whether this is wise, since Adlerian psychology is treated as "superficial," especially in academic circles.

It is not easy to discover at first sight the full significance of the view outlined above. It contains more than can be said in a few sentences, but a thorough study could give more insight into what it means to evoke the "creative power" or "spiritual activity" by which alone neurotic behavior can definitely be overcome.