

A KEY TO EXISTENCE

EDITORIAL

Existential psychology which has developed in Europe during the last few decades has recently become established in the United States as well. Important books on the subject have appeared and been well received, several groups of existential psychotherapists have been formed, and an existential quarterly has been founded.

While through these developments existential psychology is beginning to be appreciated among American psychologists in general as a movement directed away from mechanism and atomism, toward a holistic, organismic, phenomenological and idiographic psychology, the term existence itself still has a certain strangeness. The term can, however, be made more accessible to simple understanding by using a convenient key which has been provided by Ludwig Binswanger, one of the founders of existential psychology. Once, a few years ago, when using the term existence (*Dasein*), he inserted parenthetically, "formerly one would have said 'life'" (3, p. 11).

Let us see how this key works by substituting *life* for existence or existential in a few phrases gleaned from existential writings. We find then, for example, that according to Ellenberger existential analysis "takes into account the entire *life* structure of the individual," and that "the 'mode of *life*' is the dimension of *life* in regard to the fellow men" (7, p. 121). Binswanger speaks of transcending love and friendship as "the core of normal *life* experience" (7, p. 122) and of schizophrenic symptoms as "forms of *life* which has failed" (3, p. 12). Frankl uses the concept of "frustration with regard to *life*" (5, p. 162). Therapy, according to Hora, would be "to help the patient understand the language of *life* whether it speaks from his body, his mind, or his destiny" (6, p. 168).

We feel sure that the uninitiated reader will have gotten more meaning from these passages than if the original existence or existential had remained instead of having been replaced by *life*.

The key may also be applied in a reverse sense, namely, by substituting *existence* or *existential* for life in an older psychology. We are thinking of the Individual Psychology of Adler, where the term life is used in connection with a number of central concepts. According to Adler, then, "styles of *existence* are the proper subject-matter of

psychology . . . and schools which take any other subject-matter are occupied, in the main part, with physiology or biology" (1, p. 48). "The goal of superiority . . . is an *existential* striving" (1, p. 58). Adler frequently speaks of "the three *existential* problems" (1, p. 262), all of which require social interest for their successful solution. Social interest, the criterion of normality (2, p. 154), manifests itself as a "form of *existence*" (2, p. 135). Those who have not found an adequate "meaning of *existence*" (1, pp. 3-24) are predisposed to become "*existential* failures" (1, p. 18).

The reader will agree that by such substitution of *existence* and *existential* for the term life, the homely language of Adler, who has so often been accused of being too simple, immediately assumes a modern and intriguing cast.

When Phyllis Bottome, the biographer of Adler, wrote in 1939, "Adler was the first founder of an existence psychology" (4, p. 199), this seemed farfetched. The above little substitution exercise may serve as a practical demonstration that Bottome's statement can, in the light of our present-day understanding, no longer be dismissed so lightly. As Van Dusen shows in the first article of this issue, in spite of certain differences, "Adler's system . . . translates rather directly into ontology" (8, p. 156).

This being so, it may turn out to be a good teaching device to introduce students to existential psychology by having them start with the simpler psychology of Adler. To use the analogy of the key once more, Adler may serve as a key to "existence."

REFERENCES

1. ADLER, A. *What life should mean to you* (1931). New York: Putnam Capricorn Books, 1958.
2. ADLER, A. *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler*. New York: Basic Books, 1956.
3. BINSWANGER, L. Leitsaetze zum Verstaendnis der daseinsanalytischen Interpretation in der Psychiatrie, In *Synopses of lectures*. Zurich: Second Int. Congr. Psychiat., 1957. Pp. 11-13.
4. BOTTOME, PHYLLIS. *Alfred Adler, a biography*. New York: Putnam, 1939.
5. FRANKL, V. E. The spiritual dimension in existential analysis and logotherapy. *J. Indiv. Psychol.*, 1959, 15, 157-165.
6. HORA, T. Epistemological aspects of existence and psychotherapy. *J. Indiv. Psychol.*, 1959, 15, 166-173.
7. MAY, R., ANGEL, E., & ELLENBERGER, H. F. *Existence, a new dimension in psychiatry and psychology*. New York: Basic Books, 1958.
8. VAN DUSEN, W. The ontology of Adlerian psychodynamics. *J. Indiv. Psychol.*, 1959, 15, 143-156.