

GOETHE ON PSYCHOTHERAPY

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The young Goethe, with the intuition of the poet's genius, anticipated in his first drama one of the most realistic modern dream theories, that of Adler, as this writer has shown elsewhere in a note interpreting Goetz's dream from *Goetz von Berlichingen* (3). In view of such psychological astuteness on the part of Goethe we are not astonished when discovering that he also had a clear understanding of psychotherapy which is quite in line with Adlerian and other socially oriented theories.

Goethe's modern tenets of psychotherapy are expressed or implied in a passage from his novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Book V, Chapter 16, which reads as follows.

"Wilhelm [payed] a visit to the clergyman, with whom the [mentally deranged] Harper had been placed to board. He found him in a pleasant district: and the first thing that he noticed in the parsonage, was the old man teaching a boy to play upon his instrument. The Harper showed no little joy at sight of Wilhelm; he rose, held out his hand, and said: 'You see, I am still good for something in the world; permit me to continue; for my hours are all distributed, and full of business.'

"The clergymen . . . told him that the Harper promised well, already giving hopes of complete recovery.

"Their conversation naturally turned upon the various modes of treating the insane.

" 'Except physical derangements,' observed the clergyman, 'which often place insuperable difficulties in the way, and in regard to which I follow the prescription of a wise physician, the means of curing madness seem to me extremely simple. They are the very means by which you hinder sane persons from becoming mad. Awaken their activity; accustom them to order; bring them to perceive that they hold their being and their fate in common with many millions; that extraordinary talents, the highest happiness, the deepest misery, are but slight variations from the general lot: in this way, no insanity will enter; or, if it has entered, will gradually disappear.

" 'I have portioned out the old man's hours; he gives lessons to some children on the harp; he works in the garden; he is already much

more cheerful. He wishes to enjoy the cabbages he plants; my son, to whom in case of death he has bequeathed his harp, he is ardent to instruct, that the boy may be able to make use of his inheritance. I have said but little to him, as a clergyman, about his wild mysterious scruples; but a busy life brings on so many incidents, that ere long he must feel how true it is, that doubt of any kind can be removed by nothing but activity. I go softly to work; yet if I could get his beard and hood removed, I should reckon it a weighty point; for nothing more exposes us to madness than distinguishing ourselves from others, and nothing more contributes to maintain our common sense than living in the universal way with multitudes of men. Alas! how much there is in education, in our social institutions, to prepare us and our children for insanity!

"Wilhelm . . . heard . . . many curious narratives, not of the insane alone, but of persons such as commonly are reckoned wise and rational, though they may have peculiarities which border on insanity" (2, pp. 322-323).

This remarkable passage tells us:

1. Goethe realized that in certain forms of insanity a non-medical re-educator, such as a clergyman, can heal a sick person, provided he has enough "common sense." Naturally, where "physical derangements" are involved, the lay psychiatrist must have the assistance of a physician.
2. Goethe saw clearly that a pathological case, vegetating in isolation, at a distance from real life and its tasks, must be won for useful work in and for a concrete community. The Harper's occupation permits him to feel he is "still good for something in the world," the healthful way of combatting inferiority feelings.
3. The mentally disturbed must be made to feel that he holds his "being . . . in common with many millions." His underdeveloped or frustrated social interest must be raised and trained.
4. Goethe expresses the keen insight that "the means of curing madness . . . are the very means by which you hinder sane persons from becoming mad." One of these means is "accustoming" the insane person "to order." This is the basic antithesis of self-centeredness, in that it involves seeing oneself as fitting into some larger scheme.
5. Goethe suggests, one should avoid talking with the deranged about their "wild mysterious scruples." Since Adler we understand

better that one's scruples are often used in the pursuit of a neurotic purpose: they enable the neurotic to waste time which is threatening him with its demands, and allow him to abstain in an outwardly moral manner from socially useful activity.

6. Goethe recognized that eccentric attire is an immature means of giving oneself a fictitious importance, destined to cover up the neurotic feeling of inferiority. He saw, too, that this is a way to set oneself apart from others.

7. Goethe's psychotherapist explains, "I have said but little," and "I go softly to work" for he knows one cannot force the patient, and must have the patience to wait until the latter responds by returning the interest and cooperation he has been receiving from others.

8. Lastly, Goethe recognized "how much there is in education, in our social institutions, to prepare us . . . for insanity!" He may well have meant by this the competitive and acquisitive aspects of society with its doubtful educational goals of personal success and being on top, which leads its members to the wrong mental training of self-centeredness and may cumulate later on in neurosis or delinquency, the latter often hidden by social injustices.

Goethe was a contemporary of Pinel, and *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* first appeared in 1795, two years after Pinel, in the course of the great French Revolution, had liberated the inmates of lunatic asylums from their chains. Goethe's suggestions, including especially occupational therapy and social rehabilitation in general, are strikingly parallel to the concepts and practices of those who, following Pinel, were applying "moral treatment" (1) to the insane. This enlightened method which for some one hundred years was abandoned, is only now returning to full use and finding a theoretical foundation. In this connection the passage from Goethe presented here would seem particularly timely.

REFERENCES

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2. GOETHE, J. W. v. *Wilhelm Meister's apprenticeship*. Trans. T. Carlyle. New York: Collier Books, 1962.¹
3. ROM, P. Goethe as an interpreter of dreams. *Lit. Psychol.*, 1962, 12 (2), 37-38.

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