

CONVERGENCE OF CONCEPTS OF ADLER AND ORTEGA Y GASSET

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There is a remarkable convergence of the Individual Psychology of Adler and the quasi-existential philosophy of Ortega y Gasset insofar as their concepts of human conduct are concerned. This will be the subject of discussion of the present note.

MAN'S FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

Ortega's philosophy centers about the notion that man's existence is his choice. It is man who chooses his being. "Nothing that is substantive has been conferred upon man. He has to do everything for himself" (3, p. 20). Thus life itself becomes the essential problem, and the task of man is to live.

For this life that is given us, is not given us ready-made, but instead every one of us has to make it for himself, each his own. This life that is given us, is given us empty and man has to keep filling it for himself, occupying it. Such is our occupation . . . Circumstance, I repeat, the here and now in which we are inexorably inscribed and imprisoned, does not at every moment impose upon us a single act or activity, but various possible acts or activities and cruelly leaves us to our own initiative and inspiration, hence to our own responsibilities (3, p. 43).

Within this framework, thought, intelligence, and ideas, rather than being ends in themselves, become tools for living.

The similarities between such a view and Adler's concept of life plan or life style emerge at the outset. For it is a cornerstone of Adlerian psychology that thoughts, feelings, actions, including disturbances, such as phobias and obsessions, are both consistent with and justify the individual's life style, which itself is of the individual's choosing.

Thus for both Ortega and Adler, mental phenomena have meaning only within the context of a person's action possibilities and the structures of his life situation. The views of both lend themselves as little to an analysis of neurosis in terms of "mental illness" (in the traditional sense of the word illness) as to a sterile deterministic view of man. Rather and quite succinctly, they seek the meaning of the

choices that man makes within the context of his life setting which requires his relating to things and people.

Ortega suggests two basic modes of relating, or two kinds of people who exist on this earth. The few courageous ones who "decide to decide for themselves" and those who "decide to let the other decide for them" as exemplified by what Ortega calls "mass-man" whose characteristics shall be discussed below.

Man, every man, must every moment be deciding for the next moment what he is going to do, what he is going to be. This decision only he can make, it is not transferable. No one can substitute for me in the task of deciding for myself, in deciding on my life. When I put myself into another's hands it is I who have decided and who go on deciding that he will direct me; thus I do not transfer the decision itself but merely its mechanism (2, p. 23).

What matters is how a person accomplishes this task. Adler envisions two basic possibilities: the neurotic mode of relating (for Adler essentially an unfruitful mode, or way of life), and relating on the basis of social feeling, which is more meaningful and based on appreciation and respect for the other.

NEUROTIC AND MASS-MAN

The life plan of the neurotic is one of retreat and withdrawal to a narrowed plane of existence. Both the symptom and life plan are intended to accomplish just that which is not possible, namely to "transfer" by various strategies responsibility for one's existence to another. Such strategies are necessary to the neurotic who acts "as if" he were inferior and believes in it as an outcome of the mode of action that he has chosen. As a consequence he adopts the "hesitating attitude" of Adler—remains on the sidelines and utilizes his symptom to further "secure his retreat." Neurosis—with its sufferings, trials, and tribulations—is attributable then not to any accident of nature but is the creation of the individual and his way of life. The meaning and consequences of such neurotic strategies have to do with the intent to maintain oneself in the position of one who, as described by Ortega, "decides to let others decide for him." His suffering and way of life are intended to allow him to perpetuate this stance, and simultaneously with it he nurtures the hope to "have triumphed" by manipulation of his fellowman. However, as existence is never quite "transferable" the neurotic quest for triumph always remains illusory; but his suffering unfortunately does not.

Ortega has characterized the mass-man (1) as the prototype of

human existence in the modern era who in many fundamental aspects of his life plan has much in common with the life style of the neurotic. The mass-man is he who simply drifts, who constructs nothing meaningful of his own. He may have talent but does not use it. In many ways he lives in what may be considered to be a "private world" for he too is "shut up" in himself. The mass-man is thus also characterized by inertia and reluctance to make any demands upon himself; "he has no obligations" (1, p. 59). His traits together "make up the well-known psychology of the spoiled child" (1, p. 58).

Mass-man and the neurotic perpetuate life plans based on inertia and retreat. Since all men inevitably maintain an interest in their being, inertia generally leads to reliance on exploitation and coercion of others through different strategies.

GOAL ORIENTATION

Both Adler and Ortega communicate a sense of optimism regarding the possibility that man may change, by emphasizing goals lying in the future. Adler in his concepts of the "goal," "whither" rather than "cause," and so forth, construes the possible impact of a traumatic and overburdening past as secondary to the present and future mode of man's conducts. He and Ortega both emphasize that it is precisely the future which is crucial and central for man who must perpetually decide. It is the open and unsealed future rather than man's past that "weighs" most significantly upon him. In this vein Ortega comments: This retrospective fatality—what we now are—does not enslave our future, does not inexorably predetermine what we are not yet. The past, then, our destiny, does not influence us in any imperative and mechanical form but is a guiding thread of our inspirations. Destiny directs, it does not drag (3, p. 133).

Thus to live and to act means to feel oneself propelled towards the future. Adler in his well-known aphorism "anything is possible," postulates that man has the possibility of shaking himself free of his past.

Another challenge with which man is confronted is the preservation of his self, inseparable as this is from the problem of time and in particular of death. Ortega proposes as a means of resolving the dilemma of man's interest in his being in face of the inevitability of the annihilation of the self by death that we should teach the mortality of man, and he indicts society for having failed to do so.

If we undertook to discuss the disadvantages of immortality in this world—a thing that, though you will hardly believe me, has never been done—we should

immediately see the benefits of mortality, of the fact that life is short, that man is corruptible, and that, from the moment we begin to be, death enters into the very substance of our life, collaborates in it, compresses and densifies it, makes it urgency, imminence, the need to do our best at every instant. One of the great limitations—not to say disgraces—of all the cultures that have so far existed is that none of them has taught man properly to be what he constitutively is—namely, mortal (3, p. 157).

The man who honestly contends with his mortality must realize that he cannot live in equanimity out of himself alone. Only he who accepts a fundamental contradiction of existence (death and the eventual annihilation of the self) and appeals to standards beyond himself and risks directing his life accordingly, can ultimately hope to regain firm ground.

Adler's concept of social feeling similarly implies that man must reach out beyond himself; it is the satisfaction derived from having contributed to the well-being of society that enables man to confront the inevitable prospect of his death. The alternative is to trap oneself, perhaps unwittingly, in the predicament of one who has to do only with himself. It is to the genius of Adler that we owe the crucial notion that the meaning and suffering of neurosis is nothing more than the outcome of a style of life directed only to oneself.

SUMMARY

The philosophy of Ortega and the psychology of Adler both confront us with the following: Man "begins" by painstakingly "making" himself; he is inevitably interested in his being. At the same time, as the plight of both the mass-man and the neurotic, based on their exaggerated concern for themselves, show, man can ill afford to "end" with himself. He must commit himself to a cause outside, beyond and more lasting than himself.

REFERENCES

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