

HEALTH AS TRANSCENDENCE OF ENVIRONMENT¹

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My purpose is to save one point that may get lost in the current wave of discussion of mental health. The danger that I see is the resurgence, in new and more sophisticated forms, of the old identification of psychological health with adjustment, adjustment to reality, adjustment to society, adjustment to other people. That is, the authentic or healthy person is being defined not in his own right, not in his autonomy, not by his own intra-psychic and non-environmental laws, not as different from the environment, independent of it or opposed to it, but rather in environment-centered terms; e.g., of ability to master the environment, to be capable, adequate, effective, competent in relation to it, to do a good job, to perceive it well, to be in good relations to it, to be successful in its terms. To say it in another way, the job-analysis, the requirements of the task, should not be the major criterion of worth or health of the individual. There is not only an orientation to the outer but also to the inner. An extra-psychic centering point cannot be used for the theoretical task of defining the healthy psyche. We must not fall into the trap of defining the good organism in terms of what he is "good for," as if he were an instrument rather than something in himself, as if he were only a means to some extrinsic purpose. (As I understand Marxist psychology, it also is a very blunt and unmistakable expression of the view that the psyche is a mirror to reality.)

I am thinking especially of Robert White's recent paper in the Psychological Review, "Motivation Reconsidered" (9), and Robert Woodworth's book, Dynamics of Behavior (10). I have chosen these

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because they are excellent jobs, highly sophisticated, and because they have carried motivation theory forward in a huge leap. As far as they go, I agree with them. But I feel they don't go far enough. I feel also that they contain in a hidden form the danger that I have referred to, that the mastery, effectance and competence may be active rather than passive styles of adjustment to reality, but that they are still variations of adjustment theory. I feel we must leap beyond these statements, admirable though they may be, to the clear recognition of transcendence² of the environment, independent of it, able to stand against it, to fight it, to neglect it, or to turn one's back on it, to refuse it or adapt to it. (I pass by the temptation to discuss the masculine Western and American character of these themes. Would a woman, a Hindu, or even a Frenchman, think primarily in terms of mastery or competence?) My point is that, for a theory of mental health, extra-psychic success is not enough; we must also include intra-psychic health.

Another example, which I wouldn't take seriously were it not that so many others do take it seriously, is the Harry Stack Sullivan type of effort to define a Self simply in terms of what other people think of him, an extreme cultural relativity in which a healthy individuality gets lost altogether. Not that this isn't true for the immature personality. It is. But we are talking about the healthy, fully grown person. And he certainly is characterized by his transcendence of other people's opinions.

To substantiate my conviction that we must save the differentiation between self and not-self in order to understand the fully matured person (authentic, self-actualizing, individuated, productive, healthy), I call your attention to the following considerations.

²The word "transcendence" is used for lack of a better one. "Independence of" implies too simple a dichotomizing of self and of environment, and therefore is incorrect. "Transcendence" unfortunately implies for some a "higher" which spurns and repudiates the "lower," i.e., again a false dichotomizing. In other contexts I have used it as a contrast with "dichotomous way of thinking." The hierarchical-integrative way of thinking, which implies simply that the higher is built upon, rests upon, but includes the lower. For instance, the central nervous system or the hierarchy of basic needs or an army is hierarchically integrated. I use the word "transcendence" here in the hierarchical-integrative sense, rather than in the dichotomous sense.

1. First I mention some data I presented in a 1951 paper called "Resistance to Acculturation" (3). I reported my healthy subjects to be superficially accepting of conventions, but privately to be casual, perfunctory, and detached about them. That is, they could take them or leave them. In practically all of them, I found a rather calm, good-humored rejection of the stupidities and imperfections of the culture with greater or lesser effort at improving it. They definitely showed an ability to fight it vigorously when they thought it necessary. To quote from this paper: "The mixture of varying proportions of affection or approval, and hostility and criticism indicated that they select from American culture what is good in it by their lights and reject what they think bad in it. In a word, they weigh it, and judge it (by their own inner criteria), and then make their own decisions."

They also showed a surprising amount of detachment from people in general and a strong liking for privacy, even a need for it (4).

"For these and other reasons they may be called autonomous; i. e., ruled by the laws of their own character rather than by the rules of society (insofar as these are different). It is in this sense that they are not only or merely Americans but also members at large of the human species." I then hypothesized that "these people should have less 'national character,' and that they should be more like each other across cultural lines than they are like the less-developed members of their own culture."³

The point I wish to stress here is the detachment, the independence, the self-governing character of these people, the tendency to look within for the guiding values and rules to live by.

³Examples of this kind of transcendence are Walt Whitman or William James, who were profoundly American, most purely American, and yet were also very purely supracultural, internationalist members of the whole human species. They were universal men not in spite of their being Americans, but just because they were such good Americans. So, too, Martin Buber, a Jewish philosopher, was also more than Jewish. Hobusai, profoundly Japanese, was a universal artist. Probably any universal art cannot be rootless. Merely regional art is different from the regionally rooted art that becomes broadly general—human. We may remind ourselves here also of Piaget's children who could not conceive of being simultaneously Genevan and Swiss until they matured to the point of being able to include one within the other and both simultaneously in a hierarchically-integrated way. This and other examples are given by Allport (1).

2. Furthermore, only by such a differentiation can we leave a theoretical place for meditation, contemplation and for all other forms of going into the Self, of turning away from the outer world in order to listen to the inner voices. This includes all the processes of all insight therapies, in which turning away from the world is a sine qua non, in which the path to health is via turning into the fantasies, the dreams, the preconscious and conscious, the archaic, the unrealistic, the primary processes; that is, the recovery of the intra-psychic in general. The psychoanalytic couch is outside the culture to the extent that this is possible. (In any fuller discussion, I would certainly argue the case for an enjoyment of consciousness itself and for experience-values.) (2, 6, 8).

3. The recent interest in health, creativeness, art, play, and love has taught us much, I think, about general psychology. From among the various consequences of these explorations, I would pick out one to emphasize for our present purposes, and that is the change in attitude toward the depths of human nature, the unconscious, the primary processes, the archaic, the mythological and the poetic. Because the roots of ill health were found in the unconscious, it has been our tendency to think of the unconscious as bad, evil, crazy, dirty or dangerous, and to think of the primary processes as distorting the truth. But now that we have found these depths to be also the source of creativeness, of art, of love, of humor and play, and even of certain kinds of truth and knowledge, we can begin to speak of a healthy unconscious, of healthy regressions. And especially we can begin to value primary process cognition and archaic or mythological thinking instead of considering them to be pathological. We can now go into primary process cognitions for certain kinds of knowledge, not only about the self but also about the world, to which secondary processes are blind. These primary processes are part of normal or healthy human nature and must be included in any comprehensive theory of healthy human nature.

If you agree with this, then you must wrestle with the fact that they are intra-psychic and have their own autochthonous laws and rules, that they are not adapted to external reality or shaped by it or equipped to cope with it. More superficial layers of the personality differentiate out to take care of this job. To identify the whole psyche with these tools for coping with the environment is to lose something

which we no longer dare to lose. Adequacy, adjustment, adaptation, competence, mastery, coping, these are all environment-oriented words and are therefore inadequate to describe the whole psyche, part of which has nothing to do with the environment.

4. The distinction between the coping aspect of behavior and the expressive aspect is also important here. On various grounds I have challenged the axiom that all behavior is motivated. Here I would stress the fact that expressive behavior is either unmotivated or, anyway, less motivated than coping behavior (depending on what you mean by 'motivated'). In their purer form, expressive behaviors have little to do with environment and do not have the purpose of changing it or adapting to it. The words adaptation, adequacy, competence, or mastery do not apply to expressive behaviors but only to coping behaviors. A reality-centered theory of full human nature cannot manage or incorporate expression, unless with great difficulty. The natural and easy centering point from which to understand expressive behavior is intra-psychic.

5. Being focused on a task produces organization for efficiency both within the organism and in the environment. What is irrelevant is pushed aside and not noticed. The various relevant capacities and information arrange themselves under the hegemony of a goal, a purpose, which means that importance becomes defined in terms of that which helps to solve the problem; i.e., in terms of usefulness. What doesn't help to solve the problem becomes unimportant. Selection becomes necessary. So does abstraction, which means also blindness to some things, inattention, exclusion.

But we have learned that motivated perception, task-orientation, cognition in terms of usefulness, which are all involved in effectance and in competence (which White defines as "an organism's capacity to interact effectively with its environment") leaves out something, and therefore is a partial blindness. For cognition to be complete, I have shown that it must be detached, disinterested, desireless, unmotivated. Only thus are we able to perceive the object in its own nature with its own objective, intrinsic characteristics, rather than abstracting it down to "what is useful," "what is threatening," etc. (4).

My point is that, to the extent that we try to master the environment or be effective with it, to that extent do we cut the possibility of full, objective, detached, noninterfering cognition. Only if we let it be, can we perceive fully. Again, to cite psychotherapeutic expe-

rience, the more eager we are to make a diagnosis and a plan of action, the less helpful do we become. The more eager we are to cure, the longer it takes. Every psychiatric researcher has to learn not to try to cure, not to be impatient. In this and in many other situations, to give in is to overcome, to be humble is to succeed. The Taoists and Zen Buddhists taking this path were able a thousand years ago to see what we psychologists are only beginning to be aware of.

But most important is my preliminary finding that this kind of cognition of the Being (B-cognition) of the world is found more often in healthy people and may even turn out to be one of the defining characteristics of health (7). I have also found it in the peak-experience (transient self-actualizing) (6). This implies that even with regard to healthy relations with the environment the words mastery, competence, effectiveness suggest far more active purposefulness than is wise for a concept of health.

As a single example of the consequence of this change in attitude toward unconscious processes, I hypothesized that sensory deprivation, instead of being frightening, should for very healthy people be pleasing. That is, since cutting off the outer world seems to permit the inner world to come to consciousness, and since the inner world is more accepted and enjoyed by healthier people, then they should enjoy sensory deprivation. (I have recently heard of one experiment in which highly creative people reacted in just this way, but I don't have the details.)

SUMMARY

What these considerations can teach us about the theory of health is:

1. We cannot obliterate the autonomous self or pure psyche. It must not be treated as only an adaptational instrument.
2. Even when we deal with our relations with environment, we must make a theoretical place for a receptive relation to the environment as well as a masterful one.
3. Psychology is in part a branch of biology, in part a branch of sociology. But it is not only that. It has its own unique jurisdiction as well, that portion of the psyche which is not a reflection of the outer world or a molding to it. There could be such a thing as a psychological psychology.

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