

PHILODRAMA AND PSYCHOPHILOSOPHY*

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The thousands of years of written and unwritten human history have been marked by a series of continual dissatisfactions with the status quo, a constant effort to change, either through revolution or evolution. Man's continual impatience creates a frustration which is further aggravated by the ever-popular conception of the futility of life: a trout battling its way upstream, only to perish before ever defining its goal.

These definitions of goal have been the basic concern of social scientists long before Socrates planted those seeds of curiosity on the seven hills of Athens, but only recently has consideration been given to defining the conditions in which men must set their objectives, and searching for a concrete tool through which men may examine and settle upon them.

The following is an attempt to outline several relevant contributions regarding these questions in the past, and synthesize these contributions into a new sort of philosophy of the psyche; for future reference, a Psychophilosophy.

Now it appears that we are dealing with two disciplines: Psychology and Philosophy. For example: each has gained its own place in our educational institutions as separate academic departments. To those of us involved in the science of man, this is indeed a lamentable development. William James agrees when he points out in his textbook, *Psychology*, that "it is obvious that problems irrelevant from one standpoint may be essential from another. And as soon as one's purpose is the attainment of the maximum of possible insight into the world as a whole, the metaphysical puzzles become the most urgent ones of all. Psychology contributes to general philosophy her full share of these."

Therefore, a necessary basis for an inter-disciplinary thesis as the one I am about to undertake is a recognition both of the vital questions which philosophy poses and the queries which psychology makes and contributes to these.

Let us go on now to analyze the specific relationship of Psychology to Philosophy, for a basic understanding of that relationship will prove necessary later on.

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There is a fascinating paradox with regard to the relationship of these two disciplines. We are well aware that historically, the philosopher claims the role of the pioneer in nearly all phases of scientific inquiry. The Greek scholars were "philosophers," (from the Latin "philosophia"), but they sought to understand all phases of their surroundings, from Democritus' first theorizing the atom of physics, to Socrates' first definition of civic responsibility, giving rise to a science of politics.

In one sense, therefore, the philosophy is indeed the parent of all the sciences, including the newcomer psychology. In a far more vital sense, however, philosophy, and all the other sciences, is the result of these very factors in the human personality which psychology has endeavored to study.

Let me clarify this point by quoting John Dewey, in his essay "Psychology as Philosophic Method," where he states: "Were not the universe realized in the individual, it would be impossible for the individual to rise to a universal point of view, and hence to philosophize." Further, and this is the key, "The Universe, except as realized in an individual, has no existence." What Dewey is pointing out to us is simply this: philosophy studies man's universe and, because it is man's universe philosophy studies, psychology, the science of man, is the window out of which philosophers must look. Is not the whole issue of the fallibility of the great philosophers incumbent on the point that they are but men, and are therefore subject to the very reactions to stimuli with which the psychologist is concerned, and that these reactions may be inappropriate, and that they may therefore miss the philosophical or ethical point?

I raise this discussion simply to emphasize that we are not dealing with two clear-cut disciplines, but that each is vitally involved with the other; that each shares the distinction of being the mother and the father of the disciplines. The mother is philosophy with the potential to produce many offspring. But the father is psychology, the psyche, which must fertilize the mother's reproductive organs with the chromosomes which will be the determinant of the nature of the offspring, whether it be physics, chemistry, mathematics, sociology and so on.

Dewey gives us an appropriate summary of this point: "The relation of psychology to philosophy now stands, I suppose, something like this. There is an absolute self-consciousness. The science of this is philosophy. This absolute self-consciousness manifests itself in the knowing and acting of individual men. The science of this manifestation, a phenomenology, is called psychology."

The reality, of course, remains that philosophy and psychology have, for

better or for worse, been divided in the past. It is my thesis, however, that each is now crying out to the other for what only the other can give; that the two sciences are not merely related in the above outlined manner but that each may engage the other in the utilization of the best points of each. The two were married long ago to produce the family of man's sciences. They were the victims of a divorce. But now, in 1971, they are ready to encounter each other again.

Let me illustrate my point by describing the recent developments in each area which have led me to suggest this.

Philosophic study is still embroiled in a debate which has been raging among its scholars for years. On the one side stand the linguists and, on the other, the contextualists. Each accuses the other of being shortsighted and unrealistic, and, until I make the following proposal, there has seemed to be no way to reconcile the two groups. Let us first understand the position of the linguists, whose greatest spokesman and founding father may be Immanuel Kant.

In his *Critique of Practical Reason*, published in 1788, Kant introduced the concept of the "Imperative," which, he thought, was the command of Reason, and the obligation fell upon the Will to obey that command. Further, there were two types of Imperative: the Categorical and the Hypothetical. In the hypothetical imperative, the action chosen is *instead of* the other possible actions; in other words, Action A is chosen over Actions B and C not because it is good in itself, but because the others are clearly the poorer alternatives. In the Categorical Imperative, Action A is chosen not because it is preferable, but because Reason dictates that it is absolutely the best possible alternative; it is chosen for its own worth; it is objectively necessary. This latter point, to Kant and his followers, is precisely what makes Philosophy more than simply an intellectual exercise, but a real science: that the Absolute in a situation is not only extant, but recognizable. The Linguistic Analysts, therefore, work toward the recognition of those Absolutes.

Now, let's try to keep all that in mind as we examine the position of the Contextualists, for whom one of the greatest of theorists is William James. In his book *Pragmatism*, published in 1907, James outlines the pragmatic method, which attempts "to interpret each motion by tracing its respective practical consequences." It is conceivable to James that no alternative may be truly sound, and therefore, in his words, "all dispute is idle." This principle of Pragmatism was first introduced by Charles Peirce in 1878.

The room for argument between the two groups is obvious. The Linguists reject the notion that one may *have* to explore a number of possibilities before

acting, as they feel there must be a categorical imperative to make philosophy a science. The Contextualists are still defending the position that there may be no categorical imperative, and there probably is not. Dr. Evelyn Shirk, a contemporary philosopher, presents a cogent argument for the latter in her book: *The Ethical Dimension*, in which she points out that man's entire life is embroiled in a series of choices, from birth to death, morning till night, and that this choosing can only occur in the light of the situation. Let me point out that it is essential for the modern psychologist to lend his tools to the philosopher in the pursuit of the answer to the question of choice. As John Dewey stated three quarters of a century ago in *The Quest for Certainty*: "Science has placed in our hands the means by which we can better judge our wants, and has aided in forming the instruments and operations by which to satisfy them. That the same sort of thing has not happened in the moral and distinctly humane arts is evident. Here is a problem which might well trouble philosophers."

In fact, as psychophiologists, two questions will trouble us:

1. By what techniques is the debate between the contextualists and the linguists soluble?
2. What are the benefits which accrue to the psychotherapist through the application of this technique?

The following is an actual case which will allow me to illustrate the practical application of the answers to these two problems. What is remarkable is that the Psychodramatic director was unaware that she was pursuing the technique which I call Philodrama—the ethical inquiry through psychodramatic techniques.

The patient's name is Ann: she is an eighteen year-old high school senior, not unattractive though slightly overweight at the time of this session. She has had a suicidal history for the past six months with a brief period of hospitalization, but has somehow managed to remain in school and graduate. She explains to the director during the warm-up that six of her friends have died in the last year, either violently or as the result of illness, and the trauma of seeing so many with whom she was involved sociometrically suddenly and completely disappear forced her into this depressive state.

The director proceeded to ask Ann, the protagonist, to place six chairs on the uppermost level of the psychodrama stage, each empty chair representing one of her deceased associates. The director knew intuitively that her problem was to illustrate to Ann the various possibilities open to her. The director asked Ann to reverse roles with each of the deceased by sitting in

their chairs and taking their roles. In each of the chairs the director asked Ann, as the double for each, to evaluate this girl in the light of her potentials and achievements, as they knew her. In each case Ann responded quite differently in the chairs than she did as herself regarding the correct choice: i.e., to live or die.

"She's always been really smart in school, one of the top kids in her class," Ann would respond as one of her deceased friends. This was a far cry from the manic-depressive young girl who held little hope for herself, as herself; but stepping into these new roles made the choice quite clear to Ann; when removed from subjective emotion, the choice "to live" was the obvious one, simply because as she herself said in role reversal, "Ann has everything to live for."

Ann's problem, in Kantian terminology, was that her comprehension of the categorical imperative was blurred by her emotional involvement. Hypothetically, in her confused state, she perceived suicide as the most likely alternative to living in a world where life itself appeared fruitless. When placed in a role reversal where her emotion was controlled, however, she recognized that the only truly logical choice open to her was that of life, thus, for her and in her particular situation, she discovered the elusive categorical imperative through the psychodramatic techniques employed by the director.

Ann was making a choice, an ethical decision, i.e., life or death, and thus was making an ethical, philosophical decision of the highest order: the very continuation or *discontinuation* of the I, the ego, the self, or whatever one may call it. This particular session was not only a psychodrama but a philodrama: an inquiry into an individual's philosophy, using psychodramatic techniques.

But how would this process satisfy the prerequisites of both the linguistic and the contextualist philosophers?

Recall that the objective of Kant and his modern followers was twofold: discovering that choice which was absolute in a given situation, and using a definitive method for finding that categorical imperative, thus making philosophy a true "science." The philodramatic technique described above fulfills the linguistic prerequisites: Ann, under the direction of the therapist, was forced to employ Reason to discover that choice which was undoubtedly the correct one. Kant thought that the true categorical imperative would be obvious to the individual upon revelation, and certainly the fact that this choice of life was apparent even to a girl who had been suicidal indicates that this was indeed the resounding categorical imperative. I think the linguist would further be satisfied with this technique as it is just that, a

specific methodology: Psychodrama, recognized as a logical therapeutic process.

The contextualist would also find satisfaction in this process because we are looking at the alternatives in the *context* of the situation. We have found that alternative which may be termed the "better," as the contextualist would call it.

I believe that, for the first time in the history of metaphysics, a real parallel has been found in the debate between the absolutist and the pragmatist. This philodramatic approach is by no means a compromise between the two groups, but rather a method which may concretize many of the questions which have been haunting contemporary ethical thinkers.

But how does this discussion relate to those of us in clinical psychotherapy? Of what good is it to us that the philosopher has a new ground from which to operate? After all, we may say, the philosopher deals in abstract issues. It is we, the psychologists, who must deal with the spectrum of real human difficulties every day!

The crucial point in this entire paper is that we have just given philosophy a psychotherapeutic tool with which to work. Philosophy, as I see it, has for hundreds of years, had a goal but no concrete method, one which could consolidate the various groups. On the other hand, modern psychotherapists have a plethora of methods for dealing with individuals and groups, but no concrete goal in the long-term rehabilitation of an individual or the re-cohesion of the group. Instead, we have a wide range of loosely prescribed goals when we deal with a patient, from "cure" to "re-socialization." I am satisfied with none of these. Rather, I believe it is time we recognized and dealt with another basic drive in the human consciousness, one vital in both a man's outlook on life and in his relationship with those around him. Experiments have demonstrated that there is indeed a curiosity drive; this is the central need that all of us involved in scientific inquiry feel; but it is also inherent in a psychophilosophy whose function will be to answer those ethical questions facing us all.

This proposal has not been influenced by the several previous efforts in a similar direction, simply because the author was not familiar with them at the time.

The term "Psychophilosophy," I should point out, has been used before, but not to represent a new field of concern based on the fusion of the two disciplines. Among these previous efforts have been Victor Frankl's Logotherapy and Albert Ellis' Rational Psychotherapy.

The differences between my technique of philodrama and these previous applications of philosophic thought will have to be dealt with at length elsewhere. Suffice it to say that these systems have recognized the necessity of a healthy ethical outlook to the individual, but have narrowed the scope of this idea unnecessarily. They both attempt to apply a specific philosophic system to a psychological problem. Frankl, for example, utilizes the existential viewpoint in his logotherapy. Ellis' rational psychotherapy seeks to point the patient in the direction of a rational self-analysis of his situation, à la the dialectic, first introduced by the ancient Greeks.

Other philosophic systems have also been applied to psychological problems, among them the stoic philosophy's application to psychotherapy by William Sahakian. Each has had some success with immediate readjustments of the patient's viewpoint.

They all, however, seem to have underestimated two contentions inherent in psychophilosophy: that the creativity of the patient needs to be restimulated so that he may establish his own ethical base, and that this original philosophy of the patient's is more deep-rooted and personalized than any application of a previous philosophical system could be.

Psychophilosophy, therefore, does not attempt to utilize existing philosophies, but rather encourages the patient to formulate his own; and, through the philodrama, he tests and re-tests this viewpoint.

In the tradition of the psychodramatic and sociometric ideals of growth and individual creativity, the psychodramatist's first concern is not with influencing the patient in a particular direction, but rather, with encouraging the individual's philosophic growth and experimentation.