SELF-TRANSCENDENCE AS A HUMAN PHENOMENON

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THERE are two specifically human phenomena by which human existence is characterized. The first is constituted by man's capacity for *self-detachment* (Frankl, 1964). Another capacity of man is that for *self-transcendence* (Frankl, 1965a). In fact, it is a constitutive characteristic of being human that it always points, and is directed, to something other than itself. It is, therefore, a severe and grave misinterpretation of man to deal with him as if he were a closed system. Actually, being human profoundly means to be open to the world, a world, that is, which is replete with other beings to encounter and with meanings to fulfill.

This self-transcending quality of human existence is ignored and neglected by those motivational theories which are based on the homeostasis principle. According to these theories man is basically concerned with maintaining, or restoring, an inner equilibrium and to this end with reducing tensions. In the final analysis, this is also assumed to be the goal of the gratification of drives and the satisfaction of needs. As Charlotte Buhler (1960) has rightly pointed out, "from Freud's earliest formulations of the pleasure principle, to the latest present version of the discharge of tension and homeostasis principle, the unchanging end-goal of all activity all through life was conceived of as the re-establishment of the individual's equilibrium." The pleasure principle, as we see, serves the purpose of the homeostasis principle; but also, in turn, the purpose of the pleasure principle is served by something, and that is the reality principle. According to Freud's statement, the goal of the reality principle is to secure pleasure, albeit delayed.

Allport (1955) objected to the homeostasis theory and said that it "falls short of representing the nature of propriate striving" whose "characteristic feature is its resistance to equilibrium : tension is maintained rather than reduced." Maslow (1954) as well as Charlotte Buhler (1959) has aired similar objections. In a more recent study, Buhler (1964) stated that "according to Freud's homeostasis principle, the ultimate goal was to obtain that kind of full gratification which would restore the individual's equilibrium in bringing all his desires to rest. From this point of view, all cultural creations of humanity become actually by-products of the drive for personal satisfaction." But even with a view to future reformulations of the psychoanalytic theory Charlotte Buhler is doubtful, because, as she says (1965), "the psychoanalytic theory can, in spite of all attempts to renew it, never get away from its basic hypothesis that the primary end-goal of all striving is

homeostatic satisfaction. Creating values and accomplishing things are secondary goals, due to the overcoming of the id by the ego and superego, but, again, ultimately serving satisfaction." In contrast, Buhler "conceives of man as living with intentionality, which means as living with purpose. The purpose is to give meaning to life. . . . The individual . . . wants to create values." Even more, "the human being" has "a primary, or native orientation, in the direction of creating and of values."

With specific reference to the pleasure principle, my own criticism goes even further, for it is my contention that, in the final analysis, the pleasure principle is self-defeating. The more one aims at pleasure, the more his aim is missed. In other words, the very "pursuit of happiness" is what thwarts it. This self-defeating quality of pleasure-seeking accounts for many sexual neuroses. Both orgasm and potency are impaired by being made the target of intention. This occurs all the more if, as is frequently the case, excessive intention is associated with excessive attention. Hyper-intention and hyper-reflection, as I am used to calling them (1965b), are likely to create neurotic patterns of behavior.

The more one intends to gain pleasure, the less he will obtain it. This is due to the fact that pleasure, rather than being a goal itself, is, and must remain, a side-effect, or by-product, of attaining a goal. Attaining a goal, as one could say as well, is the reason why I am happy. And if I have a reason to be happy, I need not care for pleasure and happiness, I need not pursue them — they ensue, automatically and spontaneously, as it were.

This is why it is not necessary to pursue happiness. But why is it not even possible to pursue it? Because to the extent to which one makes happiness the objective of his motivation and, thus, the object of his attention, he loses sight of the reason for happiness, and consequently happiness itself must fade away.

The accent which Freudian psychology places upon the pleasure principle is paralleled by the emphasis which Adlerian psychology places upon the status drive. However, this striving also proves to be self-defeating in so far as a person who displays and exhibits his status drive, will sooner or later be dismissed as a status-seeker.

In the final analyis, the status drive or the will to power, on one hand, and the pleasure principle (or, as one might term it, the will to pleasure) on the other hand, are mere derivatives of man's primary concern, i.e., his will to meaning, as I call the basic striving of man to find and fulfill meaning and purpose. It turns out that pleasure, rather than being an end of man's striving, actually is the effect of meaning fulfillment. And power, rather than being an end in itself, actually is the means to an end, inasmuch as, if man is to live out and exert his will to meaning, a certain amount of power — say, economic or financial power — by and large will be an indispensable prerequisite. Only if one's original concern with meaning fulfillment is frustrated, is one either content with power, or intent on pleasure.

The assumption of a will to meaning is quite compatible with Charlotte Buhler's four basic tendencies. For, also according to her theory, fulfillment is the final goal, and the four basic tendencies secure and serve the goal of fulfillment. However, I would like to clarify that what is meant by fulfillment, is the fulfillment of meaning rather than fulfillment of the self, or self-actualization. Self-actualization is not man's ultimate destination, not even his primary intention. Self-actualization, if made an end in itself, contradicts the self-transcending quality of human existence. Also self-actualization is, and must remain, an effect, namely, the effect of meaning fulfillment. Only to the extent to which man fulfills a meaning out there in the world, does he fulfill himself. Conversely, if he sets out to actualize himself rather than fulfill a meaning, self-actualization would immediately lose its justification.

This is perfectly in accordance with Maslow's (1965, p. 136) own view since he admits himself, e.g., that the "business of self-actualization" can best be carried out "via a commitment to an important job." Elsewhere, I have discussed this and some of the following issues in a more elaborate manner (Frankl, 1960). Here let me only add that excessive concern with self-actualization may be traced to a frustration of the will to meaning. As the boomerang comes back to the hunter who has thrown it only if it has missed its target, in the same way man also returns to himself, reflects upon himself, and is intent upon self-actualization only if he has missed his mission and if his search for meaning is frustrated (Frankl, 1963b).

If we take it for granted that fulfillment — more specifically, meaning fulfillment — is the final goal of human life, it may well be that various tendencies are not only simultaneously conducive to this goal, as is the case with Charlotte Buhler's four basic tendencies, but also successively, that is to say, in successive stages of development.[1] In the same vein, it would be justified to assume, as Aaron J. Ungersma (1961, p. 27 f.) does, that the Freudian pleasure principle is the guiding principle of the small child, the Adlerian power principle is that of the adolescent, and the will to meaning is the guiding principle of the mature adult. "Thus," he says, "the development of the three schools of Viennese psychotherapy may be seen to mirror the ontogenetic development of the individual from childhood to maturity." However, the main reason for stipulating such a sequence would be that in the earliest stages of development there is no indication of a will to meaning. But this fact is no longer embarrassing as soon as we recognize that life is a *Zeitgestalt*, a time gestalt, and as such becomes some-

[1] Speaking of the self-defeating quality of phenomena such as pleasure, happiness, self-actualization, and peak-experiences brings to my mind that story according to which Solomon was invited by God to utter a wish. After pondering for a while, Solomn said that he wished to become a wise judge for his people. Thereupon God said: "Well, Solomon, I will fulfill your wish, and make you the wisest man who ever existed. But precisely because you did not care for long life, health, wealth, and power, I will grant them to you in addition to what you wished for, and along with making you the wisest man, I will also make you the mightiest king who ever existed." Thus, Solomon received the very gifts which he had not intended.

thing whole only after the life course has been completed. A certain phenomenon may therefore form a constitutive aspect of humanness and yet manifest itself only in an advanced stage of development. Let us consider another definitely human capacity, that of creating and using symbols. There is no doubt that it is a characteristic of humanness although there is no one who has ever seen a newborn baby with a command of language.

As to an empirical corroboration of the will to meaning concept, James C. Crumbaugh & Leonard T. Maholick (1963) state, "The trend of observational and experimental data is favorable to the existence of Frankl's hypothetical drive in man." This, however, brings up the question whether it is legitimate to speak of the will to meaning in terms of a "drive in man." As for myself, I should negate it. For, if we saw in the will to meaning just another drive, or need, man would again be seen as a being basically concerned with his inner equilibrium. Obviously, he would then fulfill meaning in order to satisfy a drive to meaning, or need for meaning — that is to say, in order to restore his inner equilibrium. In any event, he would then fulfill meaning not for its own sake but rather for his own sake.

But even apart from subscribing to the homeostatic principle, conceiving of man's primary concern in terms of a drive would be an inaccurate description of the actual state of affairs in that an unbiased observation of what goes on in man whenever he is oriented toward meaning, would reveal the fundamental difference between being driven to something, on the one hand, and striving for something, on the other hand. It is one of the immediate data of life experience that man is pushed by drives but pulled by meaning, and this implies that it is always up to him to decide whether or not he wishes to fulfill it. Thus, meaning fulfillment always implies decision-making.

From this it can be seen that the sole reason why I speak of a will to meaning is to preclude a misinterpretation of the concept in terms of a drive to meaning. By no means is a voluntaristic bias involved in the terminology. It is true that Rollo May (1961) has argued that "the existential approach puts decision and will back into the center of the picture," and after "the existential psychotherapists" are "concerned with the problems of will and decision as central to the process of therapy . . . the very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner." But I should like to add that we have also to take heed lest we relapse into preaching will power. Will cannot be demanded, commanded, or ordered. One cannot will to will. And if the will to meaning is to be elicited, meaning itself has to be elucidated.

What is true of pleasure and happiness also holds for peak-experiences in the sense of Maslow's concept. They, too, are, and must remain, effects. They, too, ensue and cannot be pursued. It is Maslow's contention (1962) that "hunting peaks is a little like hunting happiness." Even more, he concedes (1963) that "the word, peak-experiences, is a generalization." However, this is still an understatement on the part of Maslow because his concept is more than a generalization;

in a way it is even an oversimplification. And the same holds for another concept, the pleasure principle. After all, pleasure is the same irrespective of what causes it, and happiness is the same irrespective of the reason to experience it. Again, it is Maslow who admits (1962) that "our inner experiences of happiness are very similar no matter what stimulates them." And, as to the peak-experiences, he makes a parallel statement to the effect that they are uniform although "the stimuli are very different: we get them from rock-and-roll, drug addiction, and alcohol," yet "the subjective experience tends to be similar."

It is obvious that dealing with the uniform forms of experiences rather than with their different contents presupposes that the self-transcendent quality of human existence has been shut out in the first place. However, "at every moment," as Allport (1960, p. 60) puts it, "man's mind is directed by some intention." Also, Spiegelberg (1960, p. 719) refers to intention as the "property of an act which points to an object." He leans on Brentano's contention (1924, p. 125) that "every psychical phenomenon is characterized by the reference to a content, the directedness toward an object." But also Maslow is aware of this intentional quality of human experience, as is evidenced by his statement that "there is in the real world no such thing as blushing without something to blush about," in other words, blushing always means "blushing in a context" (Maslow, 1954, p. 60).

From this we may see how important it is in psychology to view phenomena "in a context." More specifically, to view phenomena such as pleasure, happiness, and peak-experiences in the context with their respective objects, that is to say, with the *reason* a person has to be happy, and the *reason* he has to experience peaks and pleasures, as the case may be. Conversely, cutting off the objects to which such experiences refer, must eventuate in an impoverishment of psychology. That is why human behavior cannot be fully understood along the lines of the hypothesis that man cares for pleasure and happiness irrespective of the reason to experience them. Such a motivational theory brackets the reasons which are different from each other, in favor of the effect which is the same in each and every case. Actually, man does not care for pleasure and happiness as such but rather for that which causes these effects, be it the fulfillment of a personal meaning, or the encounter with a human being.

This is most noticeable in the case of unhappiness. Let us imagine that an individual is mourning the death of a beloved person, and is offered some tablets of a tranquilizing drug in order to bring him relief from his depression. Except for the case of neurotic escapism we may be sure that he will refuse to tranquilize his grief away. For he will argue that this would not change anything, the beloved would not be revived this way. In other words, the reason for being depressed would remain. And, unless he is a neurotic individual, he will, in the first place, be concerned with the reason for his depression rather than the removal of this depression. He will be realistic enough to know that

closing one's eyes before an event does not do away with the event itself. And I think the scientist should be at least as realistic as man normally is and explore the behavior of man in the context of its intentional referent.

To reiterate a statement of mine, being human is directed to something other than itself. Under this "otherness," to quote Rudolf Allers (1962), also falls the "otherness" of the intentional referent to which human behavior is pointing. Thereby "the realm of the trans-subjective," again to quote Allers (1961), is constituted. However, it has become fashionable to dim this trans-subjectiveness. Under the impact of existentialism the emphasis has been placed upon the subjectiveness of being human. Really this is due to a misinterpretation of existentialism. Those authors who pretend to have overcome the split and dichotomy between object and subject are not aware that a truly phenomenological analysis would reveal no such thing as cognition outside of the polar field of tension established between object and subject. These authors are used to speaking of "being in the world." Yet, in order to properly understand this phrase, one would have to recognize that being human profoundly means being engaged and entangled in a situation, and confronted with a world whose objectivity and reality is in no way detracted from by the subjectivity of that "being" who is "in the world."

Preserving the "otherness," the objectiveness, of the object means preserving that tension which is established between object and subject. Contrary to the homeostasis theory, tension is not anything unconditionally to avoid, and peace of mind, or peace of soul, is not anything unconditionally to avow. A sound amount of tension such as that tension which is aroused by a meaning to fulfill, is inherent in being human and indispensable for mental well-being (Frankl, 1963a). People who are spared tension are likely to create it, be it in a healthy way or in an unhealthy way. As to the healthy way, it seems to me to be the function of sport to allow people to live out their need for tension by deliberately imposing a demand upon themselves. Even more, some sort of asceticism seems to me to be involved in sport. Thus, it is not justified to deplore, as the German sociologist Arnold Gehlen (1961, p. 66) does, that there is no secular equivalent substituting for the medieval virtue of asceticism.

As to the unhealthy way in which tension is created, particularly in young people, let us just think of the type of people who provoke policemen (as is the case in Vienna), or (as is the case on the American West Coast) are addicted to surf-riding and, to this end, skip school and cut classes; these people are risking their lives in the same fashion as those who "play chicken" (as is the case on the American East Coast).

Education which is still based on the homeostasis theory, avoids confronting young people with ideals and values so that as few demands as possible may be imposed on them. It is true that young people should not be overdemanded. However, we have also to consider the fact that

at least today, in the age of an affluent society, most people are underdemanded rather than overdemanded. What is even more important, this lack of tension is increased by that loss of meaning which I have described in terms of the existential vacuum or the frustration of the will to meaning (Frankl, 1961a).

Charlotte Buhler (1962) believes that "the healthy organism's functioning depends on an alternation of discharging and of upholding tensions." I think that such an ontogenetic alternation is paralleled by a phylogenetic one. There are periods of increasing and decreasing tension which may also be observed in the history of humanity. Freud's age, e.g., was a period of tension. More specifically, this tension was brought about by the repression of sex on a mass scale. Now we live in an age of relief, i.e., of the release of sex. It was in particular people living in Anglo-Saxon countries who, due to their Puritanism, had suffered for too long a period of time from the mass repression of sex. Small wonder that the service done for them by Freud causes them to feel indebted to him for a lifetime, and this life-long indebtedness and thankfullness may well account for much of the irrational and emotional resistance against new approaches in psychiatry which go beyond psychoanalysis.

There is another feature in American culture, a feature which is no less striking in the eyes of the European, and it, too, may be traced to Puritanism. I refer to the obsession not to be authoritarian, not even to be directive. The sound spirit of democracy is one-sidedly conceived of in terms of being free rather than in terms of being responsible. The collective obsessive fear that meaning and purpose might be imposed upon ourselves has resulted in an idiosyncrasy against ideals and values. Thus, the baby has been dumped out along with the bathwater, and ideals and values have been dismissed altogether.

However, a sober scientist such as the Head of the Department of Psychiatry, Neurology, and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Oklahoma School of Medicine, L. J. West (1964), only recently made the following statement: "Our youth can afford idealism because they are the first generation of the affluent society. Yet they cannot afford materialism — dialectical *or* capitalistic — because they are the first generation that might truly see the end of the world. Our young men and women are educated enough to know that only an ideal of human brotherhood can save their world and them." Apparently they are. Let me just quote the Austrian trade union which conducted a public opinion poll. It turned out that 87% of 1,500 young people who had been screened, expressed their conviction that, indeed, it is worthwhile to have ideals.

Freud (1940, p. 113) once said that "men are strong as long as they stand for a strong idea." In fact, this has been put to the test both in Japanese (Nardini, 1952) and North Korean (Lifton, 1954) prisoner of war camps, as well as concentration camps (Frankl, in press). Even under normal conditions, a strong meaning orientation is a life-prolonging, if not a life-preserving agent. It not only makes for physical

but also for mental health (Kotchen, 1960). Even on a mass scale, "ideals are the very stuff of survival," to quote, for a change, instead of more depth psychologists, a "height psychologist" as it were, namely, John H. Glenn (1963).

If a sound amount of tension such as the tension between reality and ideal, between the "I am" and the "I ought" (Frankl, 1961b), is to be preserved, meaning has to be prevented from coinciding with being. I should say that it is the meaning of meaning to set the pace of being. And if being is to keep abreast of meaning, meaning has to be ahead of being.

In this light one may see a risk in "the fusion of facts and values" as it takes place "in the peak-experiences and in self-actualizing people" (Maslow, 1965, p. 42) since in the peak-experiences "the 'is' and the 'ought' merge with each other" (Maslow, 1962). However, being human means being in the face of meaning to fulfill and values to realize. It means living in the polar field of tension established between reality and ideals to materialize. Man lives by ideals and values. Human existence is not authentic unless it is lived in terms of self-transcendence. Self-actualization is an unintentional effect of the intentionality of life.

Self-transcendence is the essence of existence. Existence collapses and falters unless there is "a strong idea," again to quote Freud, or a strong ideal to hold on to. As Einstein once said, "The man who regards his life as meaningless is not merely unhappy but hardly fit for life."

Today, however, boredom and apathy are spreading. So does the feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness. What I have called the existential vacuum may be termed the mass neurosis of today. In contradistinction to the peak-experiences so aptly described by Maslow one could conceive of the existential vacuum in terms of "abyss-experiences" (Frankl, 1965c).

Unfortunately, the existential vacuum is reinforced by the predominant and prevalent reductionism so pervasive in present academic life. How can young people find life worthwhile and meaningful if they are indoctrinated along the lines of reductionism? How can they care for ideals and values interpreted as nothing but defense mechanisms? One would assume that a sound philosophy of life is what is needed to overcome the existential vacuum. But, alas, philosophy, too, is dismissed as a mere sublimation of repressed sex (Binswanger, 1956, p. 19). I suspect that in our days rather the contrary is true. All too often sex functions as a cheap escape from those philosophical and existential problems and challenges by which we are besieged in an age like ours.

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