

Ego Dialectics, as Reflected in Culture, Literature and Psychotherapy: An Application of Szondi's Ego Dynamics

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Leopold Szondi, the genius author of FATE PSYCHOLOGY, identified eight needs that form the basic dynamic tendencies of every human behavior.

Two of these factor needs constitute the essential content of the basic dynamics of the Ego.

Because Szondi discovered these two needs in their most obvious form of "Paranoid psychotics" and Katatonic* patients, he called the need for expansion "factor p" and the need for restriction "k factor." [**Katatonic* is the German form for *Catatonic*; thus, *k* is used instead of *c* in Szondi's works.]

The first of these two human needs is Szondi's p factor, by which to expand, to transcend one's limitations to get OMNIPOTENCE, "to merge with the spiritual," "to dissolve," and to come into "ecstasy." This need can be activated in a positive therapeutic form. For example, I made use of Stanislaw Grof's "Holotropic therapy," a form of primal therapy.

The opposite is the Ego k factor's need "to structure, to limit, to discipline, to establish "order and rules" and "to stick to reality (matter)" and "to NUMB or freeze down." This need is therapeutically used in Al Pesso's technology, a kind of structured psychodrama. With his method we can make the invisible visible and thus can get the therapeutic potential to restructure the internal conditions.

The human Ego need of "Omnipotence" (p factor) wants "to exceed one's limits" and "to fly upwards, away from reality," and this is illustrated in many myths, legends and classical literature. For example, in the Icarus and Phaëthon Greek myths. Also by the "Lucifer" figure in the second part of Goethe's classic *Faust*.

Equally, one finds in mythology the opposite motif, which illustrates the need to maintain contact with the earth and reality. The mythological giant Antaeus figure could not be

overcome as long as he had his feet on the ground. Only when Hercules snatched him up from the earth (when he lost contact with reality) could he be defeated.

Studies of Leopold Szondi proved that these two basic needs ought to manifest themselves by interaction as dialectics in order that one could function as a normal healthy person.

Szondi describes in detail the need to expand (ego expansion, Szondi's p factor), and the need to limit one self (ego restriction, Szondi's k factor). Although these needs superficially have much in common with Eysenck's description of extraversion and introversion, Szondi succeeded in detail to describe the much deeper and central dynamics of the Self. This might be demonstrated most clearly by their pathological expression, in which they became more clearly heard and seen. Freud already indicated this in his article "Die Zersetzung der Persönlichkeit" ["The Disintegration of the Personality"] 1936.

The p factor is manifested in its extreme form by paranoid psychosis, either as MEGALOMANIA or PARANOIA.

In contrast, when it comes to extreme Ego restriction, the k factor can be seen in the form of CATATONIA, a psychosis characterized by extreme mental and physical overall rigidity.

Rudolf Steiner, the originator of anthroposophy, pointed out how these dynamic forces of the Ego could, for example, be seen in the dramatic and poetic design of the Mephistopheles figure in Goethe's *Faust*. Steiner also writes that these forces also are presented in a typical dual role.

First, in the role of Mephistopheles, LUCIFER, who encourages hubris (pride) that gives Faust a feeling of Omnipotence. In contrast is the k factor characterized in Mephistopheles' intention to get Faust down in the dirt (extreme materialism): "Er soll Staub Fresse" (In the Dust, he must Grovel!).

This last, anti-spiritual, restrictive and reductive countertendency, Rudolf Steiner called Mephistopheles' **Ahriman** aspect. Ahriman was a devil figure in the Persian religion. According to Steiner, Ahriman is marked by his tendency to make man a "robot."

Szondi's empirical studies indicate that one should not unilaterally select and refer to only one need. His insight into the dynamic interaction with the opposite trend is essential to an understanding of how needs compensate each other. Their tension and interplay is actually a necessary condition for one's mental balance and health.

The fact that these psychic powers also appear in a larger cultural and historical perspective can be illustrated by, for example, the observations of what the philosopher Nietzsche mentioned in his *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872). The mythology scholar Joseph Campbell commented in 1980 that:

Nietzsche was the first to discover the dynamic interaction between the two mythological currents that emerged in the Greek heritage. One a stream, which intended to bring about a dissolution of personality by ecstasy-inducing rituals. Another current which represented the classic Olympic tradition, characterized by moderation and the pursuit of humanistic self-knowledge and self-discipline, which still is reflected in the classical arts.

The meaning of the Greek tragedy, such as Nietzsche understood it, is in recognition of this interdependence of these two tendencies in humans. Neither of them can alone offer more than just a shared experience of the human totality.

This approach is also illustrated by Joseph L. Henderson when he writes of "old myths and modern humans" entitled "Transcendence-symbols." He writes:

The symbols that exert their effects on people have different purposes. Some people need to wake up (be brought up) and undergo their initiation into a violent Dionysian "thunderbolt" experience. Others need to be limited and brought into submission in accordance with the temple forecourt or kultgrottans fixed schedule, which alluded to the Apollo-religion in the late Greek period. A full initiation, with both those themes, we can see in the content of texts and grasp in the study of living people.

My wife Gunnel and I worked for many years with a therapeutic application of these two basic forces in the context of our "group therapy" courses. The purpose of the first part of our course (the primal therapy part) was to activate in the participants a thorough emotional process of liberation (loosing their defense mechanisms). This was brought about by a therapy form that corresponded to the above description of the initialization as a "violent Dionysian thunderbolt."

This activated the blocked healthy need to expand, to assert themselves, to realize themselves. The main objective was to solve the "character-muscular armor" so that the vital drive force again could freely flow through the body, with all what this implies in

terms of positive therapeutic results. After we had reached this total liberation state (Dionysus effect), we continued to apply what Henderson described by the following statement:

Certain is that the deepest purpose of initiation is to tame the young human nature's original, childish, irresponsible wildness. It is thus a civilizing purpose, despite the violence of the rituals needed to launch this process.

(In our case the first part of our therapy was to apply the primal scream therapy.)

Freud might have expressed himself less poetically. Presumably, he would refer to the fact that the primitive "polymorph-perverse" human animal in the development of humanity's history has had to learn to adapt to reality and needed to be "tamed" to become a socially well-adapted adult.

From this point of view, neurotic disorders might be related to humankind's historic development history because society no longer accepted humankind's primitive needs.

In the second part of our one week course the deepest purpose of our therapy, after all these evoked primal experiences, was to develop the patients' ability to get these: Structure, Integration, Awareness and Insights, Autonomy and Self-control.

We applied different "Bioenergetic Control techniques," for example "grounding" exercises, to the disturbances that were characterized by lack of control, (for example, disruptive behavior), which manifest themselves in neurosis by unrealistic grandeur trends respectively, and that were characterized by identity problems and a lack of definition.

However, the main instrument to absorb and to process by induced primal therapy experiences was Pessó's PSYCHO MOTOR THERAPY. This can be described as a body-oriented psychoanalytic psychodrama with an emphasis on structure.

To conclude this general overview, we can point to the fact that the two basic psychological forces that we described manifest themselves in many areas. This can in particular be illustrated by comparing Leo Moreno, the creator of psychodrama, with Sigmund Freud, who developed psychoanalysis.

L. MORENO was an artistic type with a strong desire to transcend his limitations. It's not a coincidence that Moreno's autobiography begins with describing how painful it was for him to discover in his childhood that he could not "play God" (Lucifer tendency). He fell

off a table he had climbed on when he tried to play God! The essence of his psychodrama method is that during the time the session is in progress to "dissolve" by play-acting to some extent our ordinary reality limits. Psychodrama creates intentionally a fantasy world with a so-called "Surplus-reality."

In contrast was Sigmund Freud, a scientist and a typical representative of a more reductive materialistic way of thinking. It was no surprise that Freud precisely mentions, as one of his most important childhood memories, how his mother one day explained to him what death really means. She rubbed her palms facing each other and showed him the skin particles that emerged. Then she pointed out that these were, when one died, what was left over when one left this world. She quoted the Bible: "From dust to ashes, for earth shalt thou return." (Ahriman).

Freud was also the author of a hypothesis that in every organism there is a Death drive, working actively to force the organism into a state of dead matter. Clearer one could not express the Ahriman's petrification trend better. (See Freud's theory of "repetition compulsion" (1920).)

As for integration of the two Ego drives, one can take as an example: WILLIAM BLAKE (1757 - 1827), visionary, artist, mystic, writer, and philosopher. He clearly demonstrated during his life the interaction and integration of the two needs. Blake's visions were compensated, balanced, controlled and restrained by his pronounced tendency to structure his needs. He clearly demonstrated this in his everyday work as a graphic artist. With the help of the engraver's tools he managed to bring his visions "onto earth" and thus maintained his mental balance and health. It was this internal battle, in order to offset the powerful contradictions in his soul, that is reflected there and led to Blake's work: "Songs of Innocence and of Experience." The content and the images provide a wonderful demonstration of how Blake found a solution to fuse these strong internal contradictions at many levels simultaneously: intellectual, philosophical-religious and mental-emotional. (See footnote.)

As another example one can take C. G. JUNG's fascinating autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1962) that reveal how he managed to contain and integrate his internal conflicting forces. (From this perspective, one could almost say that Jung's autobiography reflects a life of "continuous integration of primal experiences.")

Footnote:

Blake: "Songs of Innocence and of Experience," With an introduction and commentary by Geoffrey Keynes. Oxford Paperbacks, London, 1970.

See also Jungian psychologist June Singer's book: *The Marriage Between Heaven and Hell*.

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I originally wrote this article in Swedish sometime in the seventies when I was working as a psychodrama Director.

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