

## PSYCHOSYNTHESIS: SYSTEMS PSYCHOLOGY

Every time science looks into an aspect of life on the planet, it discovers it is a component of a whole in which each part is related to the others. Every structure, every being is united with the planetary life and makes with it a whole. Seen in this light, the existence of each mineral, vegetable and animal entity depends on its relationships. In turn, the Earth is part of other systems. The universe is an infinite hierarchy of systems within which the sub-sub-sub(-etc.) human system is contained.

During his studies of the biosphere, V. Vernadskji noted the strong interconnection of all living beings. He came to the conclusion that any one system must be always considered as a sub-system of a larger system. The human being is nervous circuits, impulses, psychological functions, conditionings, spiritual aspects, but above all is a system, i.e., a structure inserted into the larger context of other structures and systems—a nesting doll inside countless other nesting dolls. This conception contradicts the Cartesian paradigm, which considers a being can be fully understood by studying an entity separate from the systems that contain it. Systems theory is not compatible with the analytical or reductionist approach that characterized earlier modus.

If we consider the aspects and operational procedures of a system, it is clear that it is a totality which, thanks to the interdependence and interaction of its parts (called sub-systems) functions to achieve a goal, a purpose. To achieve this goal, it includes a decision, i.e., it incorporates a principle that guides and monitors the sum of the processes taking place to reach that set goal. For an amoeba, the goal is survival and the reproduction of the species; for a human being it is this goal and, of course, something else each of us is to define.

Just as we can move down from the encephalon to the electron, so we can move up from the cell, ascending system by system to the level of the human being, the planet, the cosmos. One fish once said to another fish, “Above our sea is another sea, other creatures swim and live there as we do here”. The other fish replied, “That is total nonsense, just a figment of your imagination and

nothing else! You know very well that whatever came out from our sea, even if for an inch, it would die. What proof do you have of these other lives and seas?” And many other fish echoed him.

To an expert in systems, the universe appears to be an integrated hierarchy of causes and effects in which each upper level has a greater number of possibilities and a greater number of opportunities compared to the lower level and, therefore, greater potential for choice and self-determination. In addition, the upper level is more refined. At each system, including humans, it is a requisite of evolution to adapt to the principles and hierarchies of the upper-systems in which the system is inserted, to which it belongs and from which it depends. R.Harrison, a scholar in the field of organization, points out that one of the key elements of organization in living organisms is their hierarchical nature. Thus the cells combine to form tissues, the tissues to form organs, etc. It was clear to him that there are different levels of complexity and that at each level of complexity the observed phenomenon shows properties that do not exist at the lower level. In the early 1920s, one of the exponents of this line of thought was the philosopher C. D. Broad, who coined the term ‘Emerging Properties’ for this principle. We may say, therefore, that there are different planes with increasing complexity in relation to each other, each with their own principles and laws. The plane of matter, for example, is dominated by mechanical causality and the rigid laws of matter; in biological life determinism becomes less rigid and more flexible; in transpersonal planes the energies are more subtle and, in a sense, there is a greater number of possibilities. At each level corresponds an element with more structural features and greater functional capabilities than the one preceding it, so that it is much more complex, efficient and, in a general sense, ‘superior’ than the lower level.

In humans, psychological and biological identity is organized, ultimately, in a system ‘open’ to the environment, i.e., in constant exchange, evolution and growth. The more consciousness manifests and takes control of the subsystems of the personality and of the psychological functions, the more it can adjust them to the plan and purpose of the upper-systems that is in direct contact with and on which it depends. Consciousness is a subsystem of upper-systems that for now we can only intuit, placing it within an infinite long spectrum in which every stage is higher than the lower one. We glimpse here a unified science. The unified science of humanity is essentially a theory that includes the physical, psychological and superconscious levels, the lower and the upper systems, a science in which the rigid boundaries between biological, physiological, psychological, transpersonal, and stellar levels vanish. For simplicity and clarity of purpose researchers may define the levels of a single system within precise boundaries referring to nerve cells, psychological functioning, personality, consciousness, etc., and while they position each one separate from the

others, the reality is, however, very different—one resembling Chinese boxes where each system blends into another. The universe is but one.

Who is in charge?

Commands are transmitted downwardly. The guiding principle of the upper-system controls the immediate lower subsystem. However, there is a non insignificant detail to take into account: the upper-system may fail in its endeavor. Generally, in the hierarchy of living systems, each of them has its own degree of autonomy and therefore a ‘working contract’ is essential to the parts. Freedom of choice is present in every system of the universe. Freedom in the human system can neither be absorbed nor replaced by the laws found in the super-systems; individual laws and those of the upper-systems are complementary to each other. Remember that freedom in every system comes together with the law of cause and effect, and so each choice we make has a consequence the system must take responsibility for.

The upper-system must be skillful and strong, i.e., a ‘master’ that knows how to have an influence on the decisions of the lower system so as to obtain agreement. The lower system, in turn, must be willing to cooperate. The personality can be ‘master’ of psychological functions just as it can be powerless to an instinct or a rebel subpersonality that does not accept impositions. In this case, the function of the subsystem, designed to obey, turns into a ‘master’ with decision-making power: the revolt of the slaves is successful and the emperor is taken prisoner, put out of the way. The systems can be integrated or segregated. In an integrated system, the upper decisional commands are respected and executed. A ‘segregated’ system aims to have total control of all the components of the system. It is the case of a subpersonality or an instinct that seeks to impose itself upon the I and fights to take over the bio-psychological organization of the individual.

The solution to Life riddles, including the enigma of human life, lies then beyond human space and time; it lies in the upper-systems that contains the individual and for which we exist. Even if science had an answer to all possible questions about the meaning of life and the existence of the human being by looking into the human-system itself, a complete answer could not even be approximated. To know something about the individual, we must first exit the individual level and search for information in the upper-systems that contain and guide the individual according to their intentions.

At any level of the hierarchy, systems have ‘two faces.’ If we consider the face looking downwards, its function is to react, so to speak, as a ‘whole,’ sending commands and imperatives towards the lower components. The face turned upwards, towards the upper-systems, must, or should, listen in obedience and be subject to who is in charge. Materialistic psychologies place the individual at the apex of a pyramid above which there is Nothing. They give the individual the title of king not subject to

upper-systems to depend on and obey. They only consider the individual in rapport with the lower levels, with its body parts, physical and psychological, and with the other, subaltern, kingdoms of nature. These psychologies use in this case over generalizing parameters, interpreting and explaining human life without reference to any upper, containing ‘higher functioning’. On the other hand, transpersonal psychologies only research the face turned upwards the upper-systems, to the Above, overlooking the functional and material subsystems and their significance. Systems theory, as mentioned, undermines these foundations revealing the a-scientific character of these assumptions. It posits instead the existence of a ladder leading to the stars, a ladder each being climbs up. In psychology, the term ‘systems theory’ refers to a complex set of assumptions and psychological research with a perspective beyond the limitations of the individual-centered tradition in psychology. Systems theory psychology refers to the general theory of systems elaborated by writers such as L. von Bertalanffy.

And Psychosynthesis? This theory states that any assumption about the human phenomenon is to be placed within the broader context of systems connected to and from which the individual emerges. It examines both matter and I-Self as the upper and lower systems of reality to which we are related. The psychosynthetic model examines and integrates the two faces: the one looking towards the biological level and the one projected into the transpersonal level. The individual becomes the link, the point of synthesis between the systems of Earth and Heaven. In humans come together the energy of matter and energy, the transpersonal energy of Eros and the energy of the Logos. In psychosynthesis constant attention is given to the ‘two faces,’ in a constant search for the expansion of consciousness and knowledge of the fascinating and mysterious upper and sub-systems. Psychosynthesis is aware that, like any other science, it cannot offer certainties. It is now clear to everyone: the more we search for the truth about the human phenomenon, the more it becomes slippery, fading into our ocean of relations between the atom and the galaxies.