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NORBERT FABIÁN ČAPEK (1870 – 1942) AS A PSYCHOLOGIST IN BRNO, NEWARK (N.J., USA) AND PRAGUE

Abstract

N. F. Čapek is a colourful, complex, fascinating personality. Our account will be focussed on his involvement in applied psychology however, it may be useful to first briefly note his religious development.

Key words: religious development, consciousness, applied psychology

Čapek's spiritual crises and development

In his life Čapek found himself three times on the crossroads.

He was 18 years old when he experienced a religious “rebirth”, the aim of which was the formation of a new Ego.. a genuine “conversion”. For some time he felt that something special is imminent. That he will become a “new person”. He experienced profound joy, typical of religious conversion.

At the time of the second crisis – he called it “baptism by the holy spirit” – he was 35 years old. He was fasting and spent whole nights in prayer. The process of a religious “rebirth” was significantly facilitated by participation, in England, in the Keswick revival meetings. For some five weeks he lived as in a trance.

The third time he was 50 years old. Just prior to his return to Czechoslovakia and involvement in the building of the Unitarian movement. By this time he had matured in all respects, he knew better himself and others. He was ready and capable to serve.

Čapek's views

Understandably Čapek was concerned with the matters of consciousness and of behavior. He was well aware of profound individual differences in all the as-

pects of man's psychological functioning and realized the importance of the subconscious realm and appreciated the contribution of psychoanalysis, without disregarding the importance of other approaches, such as hypnosis or Schutz's autogenic training.

Human conscience is viewed as the very foundation of justice and morality. According to Čapek good marriage is viewed as the very basis of human happiness, provided that it is based on profound mutual respect of the partners.

Important factor is also a correct choice of the occupation. It should correspond to an individual's innate abilities and his interests. Čapek refers to the study of individual differences as "typology".

Čapek's relation to psychology

The field attracted Čapek from his youth and on his own he studied psychology during some three years of his activity in Bratislava beginning in 1888 when he was active as a young baptist missionary. He intensified his studies of psychology during his studies at the Baptist seminary in Hamburg, beginning in 1891.

Čapek was deeply impressed by the thought "if you wish to get to know God, you first must learn to know man", a thought he encountered in the theosophical literature. That spurred his desire to learn more about psychology and anthropology. He was also attracted by what is called in German "die Menschenkunde", the "knowledge of human nature" or the knowledge of personality.

Having spent about four years in Lower Saxony, Čapek moved to Brno where he was publishing articles on psychological topics in journals. There he published in 1901 a small volume on how do we recognize man's attitudes and inclinations. The book was based on some eleven years of Čapek's involvement in the subject, with references to the German and English literature.

At the beginning of the 20th century Čapek is active as an applied psychologist and phrenologist. In his view, phreno-physiognomy is the knowledge and skills that enables us to recognize man's abilities, talents, inclinations and the very nature of man on the basis of his exterior, especially of the head and face. Taking into account both the permanent features and the changing expressions Čapek accorded to man's physique greater importance than we do today.

In March of 1904 Čapek published in Brno the first issue of a monthly journal, entitled "Prameny" (in English "Sources"), a revue for education, development of mental powers and practical assessment of people. The journal was followed by "Talent", a monthly for practical psychology. The last issue of the journal was published in March of 1914. Later in 1914 Čapek left for the United States. Returning in the spring of 1921.

After his arrival in the New world, he worked in Newark as a baptist preacher and, at the same time, was active as a psychological counselor of immigrants. In New York he studied part-time for some eight semesters psychotechnology. The students visited factories, the buildings, machines, manufacturing processes

as well as management. In particular he had close contact with three American applied psychologists: Drs. Merton, Blackford (a lady) and Fowler.

Richard Henry, in his volume on Norbert Fabián Čapek: A Spiritual Journey (Boston: Skinner House Book, 1999) on page 91 states, that Livia Dvořáková-Hašpl recalls that Čapek had enrolled in courses at the city college of New York (CCNY) and wrote a doctoral thesis, “Mensura Humanum.” To us the title sounds incorrect, but to continue, neither CCNY nor the university microfilm international archive in Arbor, Michigan, could locate a copy of the thesis.

Henry still on p. 91 indicates that Čapek’s calling card specified his title as “vocational counselor and psychologist” and gave his address as 26 Tappan Ave., Belleville, New Jersey. His office address is given as 800 Broad Street, Newark, New Jersey.

Unique and infomative is Čapek’s listing of the “forms of analysis”, that he was ready to offer to his clients, on p. 92:

1. A Verbal Statement of Character, Talents, Vocation, and Health with your Vocational chart, with your Character-analysis chart, with both charts.
2. A special Examination of physical and mental Qualities in relation to your Health with typewritten Suggestions.
3. Consultation on Marital relations and difficulties with helpful suggestions.
4. A complete typewritten Character-Analysis with charts, including answers to questions on Special Talents, Dominant Possibilities, Handicaps, Change of Occupation, Business Partnership, Health, Marital Relations or Life Mate.
5. Analysis from Photographs.
6. Analysis from Handwriting.
7. A short interview on any subject mentioned.

In his book on Czechoslovak philosophy (Československá filosofie, Praha - Melantrich, 1937, p. 121) Josef Král in section V, Psychology, registers Čapek’s book on “Typology” (Typologie), which appeared in print in five editions, from 1901 to 1935. The author notes that to Čapek “typology” was a part of applied psychology and is critical of Čapek’s approach. Král cites also Čapek’s volume “Mood and its Conscious Formation” (nálada a její vědomé tvoření) published in 1925 and two shorter accounts dealing with “The Management of Pain” (ovládnutí bolesti) 1928, and “Relaxation” (relaxace) of the same year.

But let us return to Čapek’s activities in the United States.

In 1916 he initiated the publication of a journal, in Czech, entitled “Mysl a srdce” (Mind and Heart) and two years later he became editor of the Slovak journal “Besedy L’udu (Popular Conversations).

When the United States entered the First World War, Čapek joined the personnel division of a military school. Later he served as applied psychologist in the division for army morale attached to the general staff. As an officer he was active in military camps and served as psychological expert in different military settings.

After the war he returned to psychodiagnostic counseling and psychotherapeutic practice in Newark, at Broad Street no. 800.

Following his return to Europe, in Prague he continued his activities in the area of counselling psychology. His office in Prague, in the district of Letná, at Ove-necká 24, was referred to as “Čapek’s Counselling Service” (Čapkova poradna).

Postscript: N. F. Čapek as a heroic figure

One of us, Josef Brožek, met Čapek in Prague in his office in the distressing days of fall 1939. The Second World War had broken out on 2 September, freezing all German transatlantic travel. Thus it became impossible for Brožek to leave the port of Bremen for America, where he was scheduled to study at the post-doctoral level psychology.

Čapek told his guest: “the times are bad and they are likely only to get worse, but I must stay. I cannot leave, my congregation will need me.” Brožek was deeply impressed by Čapek’s courageous decision. In a lay sermon, given at the Unitarian Church of St. Paul, Minnesota, on 8 July, 2001 entitled “Are there Unitarian Saints” he referred to Čapek as a “martyr”. And a martyr he was. As his biographer R. Henry (p. 294, 1999) documents, Čapek was deported by the German GESTAPO to a concentration camp in Dachau in 1942, where he was killed. His heritage is with us.

NORBERT FABIÁN ČAPEK (1870 – 1942) PSYCHOLOG V BRNĚ, NEWARKU (N.J., USA) A PRAZE

Souhrn

N. F. Čapek je pestrou, složitou, fascinující osobností. Náš příspěvek je zaměřen na jeho působení v oblasti aplikované psychologie. Za zmínku však jistě stojí i stručné nastínění jeho religiózního vývoje.

Klíčová slova: religiózní vývoj, vědomí, aplikovaná psychologie