

DYNAMIC PSYCHOLOGY

Leonardo Ancona

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Rome, Italy

Keywords: Aesthetic experience, archetypes, art, attachment to transitional space, communication, conflict, culture, defense, family, field, Gestalt, group, interpersonal, intrapersonal, large group, medium, models, potential space, pre-symbol, religion, self myth, phenomenology, small group, superpersonal relations, symbol, system, transpersonal, unconscious

Contents

1. Introduction
2. History
3. The Main Concepts of Dynamic Psychology
 - 3.1. Models
 - 3.2. The Unconscious
 - 3.3. The Field
 - 3.4. Group Dynamics
 - 3.5. The Communication Process
 - 3.6. The Superpersonal
 - 3.7. Culture
- Acknowledgements
- Glossary
- Bibliography
- Biographical Sketch

Summary

The term dynamics defines that part of psychology that deals with drives, at the treatment level, and with motivations, at theoretical level. Already present as aspiration in general psychology before Freud, dynamic psychology formally originated from psychoanalysis, but then gradually differentiated from it, reaching its own theoretical and practical autonomy, albeit very indefinite.

Dynamic psychology is based on a concept of mind that is opposed to mechanism and the cause/effect relationship; indeed, it is essentially phenomenological and is founded on a system of principles articulated according to the mind/body itinerary. As such, dynamic psychology is based on the dynamics of the unconscious, the principle of field in terms of conflict and communication, the superficial and deep phenomenology of the group. Moreover, it operates in the world of the pre-symbolic and its relations with the symbol, paradigmatically the field of art, culture, and the sacred.

Therefore, the unconscious processes dynamic psychology deals with are not only those linked to the intrapersonal (psychoanalysis) and transpersonal (group analysis), but also the superpersonal typical of the collective unconscious as proposed by C.G. Jung, and it

is because of that that dynamic psychology leads to the dynamic concept of culture and religion.

The scientific elaboration of each of these fundamental principles represents the content of the various subjects on which the topic dealing with dynamic psychology is articulated, considering them as separate and specific aspects: psychoanalysis (S. Bordi), systemic psychology (M. Malagoli Togliatti), group analysis (P. Hare), art and aesthetics psychology (A. Di Benedetto), analytical psychology (C. Gullotta), and religion and culture psychology (V. Saroglou).

1. Introduction

Dynamic psychology (D.P.) is the scientific study of the human mind and behavior based on a dynamic concept of psyche. This definition may seem tautological, but it is the result of: a) an exhaustive elaboration of the content of psychology in its scientific version; b) the not necessarily simple overcoming of the limits psychology has set itself, with the aim of differentiating itself from philosophy and not being absorbed by biology; and c) a revolution in the psychological field, with a change from the causal and mechanistic determinism, thanks to which psychology was considered a “science of nature” founded on an epistemological principle, to the area of the synthetic and interpretative problematicism that turned it into a relational and hermeneutical science.

The dynamic concept of psychology postulates the principle that psychic functioning is a play of forces, sometimes synergetic but more frequently in reciprocal contrast (i.e. a play of tendencies typical of the inner self of individuals and simultaneously of the social context to which they belong).

In order to have access to this level of conceptualization and analysis, D.P. asked researchers to have the courage to leave the certainties of the objectivity of references to the solidity of physiological functions, which is peculiar to general and experimental psychology, to trust the unknown of what is ineffable and non-controllable. They were also required to be sufficiently open-minded to consider operational principles pertaining to different fields of psychology, ranging from phenomenology to anthropology, from familiar systematics to sociology, from art and religion to fetology and neonatology.

D.P. offered to all these fields an extraordinarily important episteme, which was in turn enriched with their contributions, in a virtuous circle of influences and cross-references that today offers a more exhaustive and satisfactory knowledge of human psychic life and the society of which people are part.

In this context, D.P. should be considered complementary to “objective” psychological research (i.e. the classical and traditional research that has established itself as psychophysiological and behaviorist). It is mainly based on the results of intuition and empathy, on mental models and their influence on the experience, and the behavior phenomenology, and recently also their influence on the dynamic functioning of cerebral neurotransmitters and neuromodulators.

These are two contradictory aspects of human research, which H.F. Ellenberg defined respectively as “illuminist” and “romantic.” The first, based on reason, is divisive, as it postulates a separation between observer and observed and is founded on controllable data that can be expressed in figures, logarithms, and diagrams. The second is unifying, its aim to eliminate barriers and distances and establish a communication between subject and object in search of results that can be formalized only in a statistical way. For these principles, D.P. can be applied independently of the factual verification of the events it studies, being satisfied with the internal consistency among its own models and the phenomenology it analyses. However, it neither undervalues nor is averse to referring for confirmation, whenever possible, to the instruments and methods of research peculiar to non-D.P., to which it lends more color and taste.

In a word, D.P. represents the salt that adds spice to the field of psychology as a whole.

2. History

Even before asserting itself with its own individuality, D.P. always represented a goal, usually implicit but also denied, in scientific explorations of psychology. A few examples will prove this assumption.

- When W. Wundt, having dedicated many years to the study of elementary sensations (see *Laboratory Experimentation*), decided to carry out more exhaustive research to find a more appropriate human psychology, from 1911 to 1920 he undertook the study of the history of people. He hoped to find some ideas complying with his desire, even if with this study he completely left the laboratory work he had tirelessly carried out up to then and broadened the field of scientific psychology, therefore paving the way, without being fully aware of it, to the conceptual space that would be peculiar of D.P.
- When research on perception abandoned the neurophysiological assumption on which it had been rigidly based right from the start (see *Cognitive Psychology and Attention, Perception, and Memory*) and started to explore the new Gestalt field, it adopted an exclusively and merely phenomenological reference (i.e. a substantially dynamic principle). The experiment Wertheimer used to establish first the Gestalt doctrine of perception and then the whole Gestalt school is well known: if two parallel lines are projected in sequence on a screen, at a certain frequency of succession they will produce a perceptive motion that does not exist in reality that a line has moved into the space between the two parallels, leading to Wertheimer calling this process being called *phi* (phenomenal).
- Research on perception has actually moved towards the dynamic dimension, as it results from the study carried out by this author (*Dinamica della Percezione*). But the field of behaviorism has also followed this trend. Indeed one of the founders of behaviorism, Tolman, carried out a patent transgression of his beliefs with the concept of “purposive behaviorism”: the non-marginal demonstration of a clear dissatisfaction with the rigidity of behaviorism.
- In reality this purposive behavior, which according to A. Gemelli “keeps the substantive but empties it of the adjective,” is articulated on a “cognitive expectation” that generates an insight that affects the behavior by representing an incentive, a “horme” (vital energy directed to an active purpose): once again a Gestalt process that makes use of substantially dynamic variables. It is not by chance that the Gestalt theory

applied to the field of social motivation led K. Lewin to publish, in 1935, his book *Dynamic Theory of Personality* (see *The Social Psychology of Personality*).

- Among other things, the whole chapter on learning was carried out in a dynamic frame, especially if one does not consider conditioning in terms of imprinting, imitation, habituation, and learning transference, but rather the set of processes concerning environmental and social adaptation, the emotional maladjustment in the dimension of inter- and intra-subjectivity, as proposed by this author in his book *Dinamica dell'Apprendimento*.

- Last but not least, similar considerations could be made regarding motivation psychology, as it is paradigmatic of Murray's theory of needs.

Now, if perception, learning, and motivation follow an indisputably dynamic line, a real D.P. was not created until Sigmund Freud and the analytical schools of psychology.

Freud had clearly expressed the dynamic concept of mind in his *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, maintaining that his “non observable phenomena should be considered as signs of a play of forces that are generally in contrast and only sometimes in agreement.” On the other hand, Freud had started the study that would lead him to psychoanalysis working within the field of dynamic psychiatry, which developed in Europe in the late nineteenth century in terms of magnetism and hypnosis, with the experiences of F.A. Mesmer, A.M. Jacques de Chastenet, J.M. Charcot, and H. Bernheim (see *Branches of Psychology*). Since 1909 Freud had been characterizing the trend of his work according to these theories, in contrast with Janet's hypothesis on psychic dissociation: “We do not infer psychological dissociation from a congenital inability of the psychic system to make synthesis, but we explain it dynamically, through the conflict of contrasting psychic forces, thus considering dissociation as the result of an active opposition between the two psychic groups.”

Given the importance of this origin, for a long time D.P. was made to coincide with psychoanalysis, and still today this attribution is frequent; however, it is generally believed that D.P. largely exceeds the boundaries of psychoanalysis, even though it includes it as a privileged component. In fact, it deals with a variety of other interests that are beyond Freudian theories, that is, all those that are not exclusively included in the field of conscience or the objective behavior. Paradigmatically, as underlined by G. Jervis, these are the building up of affective ties, the emotional components of interpersonal relationships, defense of self-regard, and the relation between conscious and unconscious. D.P. has gradually differentiated itself from psychoanalysis, becoming an “open and non-doctrinarian theory that is mainly linked to the ideas of psychoanalysis but does not depend on it as an organized institution, connected with the other sectors of modern psychology and not directly linked to clinics, nor to specific treatment procedures.”

D.P. does not even correspond with clinical psychology, even in its more individualistic or mental versions such as applied psychotherapy (see *Clinical Psychology: A National Perspective on Origins, Contemporary Practice, and Future Prospects*). On the contrary, it maintains close ties and significant exchange relationships with the theoretical dimension of the various psychotherapeutic procedures. This program developed in a generative mode as D.P. abandoned the “energetic” and linear model to follow an “information,” systemic, non-individualistic but inter-individual and contextual model, to finally come to the open sea of groupality, at epiphenomenal,

institutional, and familial level, and the deep group-analytical level. Indeed, it is based on those terms of primary object relationships, of self, of dynamic groupal matrix and attachment processes that are peculiar to contemporary research (see *Branches of Psychology*).

As a result, it is possible to say that today D.P. is a broad group of schools, inspired by psychoanalysis but not linked to it, programmatically open to the field of Jung's individual analysis, of systemic and anthropological psychology, and of art and the sacred. Last but not least, it is in agreement with the needs and requirements of group analytical dynamics.

It can be said that D.P. aims to analyze and explicate the superficial and deep dimensions of human and interpersonal relationships, and it carries out this task by considering the psyche as a "system" with its own forces and energies, whose study makes it necessary for observers to establish an interaction or, better, a transaction with the objects they are observing.

3. The Main Concepts of Dynamic Psychology

3.1. Models

The theoretical base of D.P. lies in the fact of recognizing the distinction, in scientific psychology, between two opposite modes of knowledge and operation, with a marked preference for the second one.

The first mode is general or experimental psychology. In this version, the psyche is a medium on which external forces are exerted; mental functions are conceived as reactions to proprioceptive stimulations, almost as objects, and laws are expressed according to the experimental mode based on the use of psychological instruments such as electrophysiological monitoring and psychometric tests. This is a purely academic psychology that is considered "scientific" according to the Aristotelian–Galilean standard, and that could be enunciated as the study of what goes "from body to mind," a mechanistic and medical model. Indeed, it is typical of medicine going from the periphery, the "signs," to the center, the bodily illness, and this way of doing psychology is completely isomorphic to it. In fact, scientific psychology was born within medicine.

The second way of conceiving of and doing psychology, which is alternative and opposite to the first, is to start from mental processes, problems, states of mind, and conflicts to manage to understand how they affect each other, and how they can determine disorders and bodily diseases. These influences cannot be directly observed but can only be inferred and "communicable," and thus they cannot be formalized in measurements, calculations, and cause/effect relations, so that they appear "less scientific" than the data collected according to the other research prospect. However, unlike the other influences, they seize the reality of superficial and deep human relationships. This is the real field of D.P.

In this second version, psyche is considered not a medium but rather a “system” with its own forces and energies that can be analyzed by establishing an interaction or a transaction with it. Being heteromorphic with respect to the medical model previously described, this kind of psychology continues to have some difficulty in being accepted by the medical academy. In fact, this method developed outside the university, it is derived from psychoanalysis, and it uses inaccurate but effective instruments for research such as the transference and counter-transference experience as well as projective tests, thus establishing itself as an informational model that goes “from mind to body.”

With respect to the first method, the second version represents a radical change that was carried out by Freud when he discovered the unexpected importance of fantasy as the motive power of all normal and pathological psychic processes, an importance even greater than the historical facts. It is well known that the paradigm of this revolution was the fact of reconsidering the sexual trauma that Freud originally brought back to a concrete historical fact that took place in the subject’s childhood and that he then brought back to his imagination, seeing that it was fully operational even when only represented.

This change also implies a shift from the Aristotelian position, which until then had been the most widespread in philosophy and in psychology, especially in perception processes. According to that, *nihil est in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu (nisi intellectus)* (“there is nothing in the mind that was not previously in the body [sensitivity]”), where *intellectu* indicated the set of conscience processes, the only objects considered worth a scientific psychology. The revolution lay in the opposite statement, attributable to Plato, according to which *nihil est in sensu quod prius non fuerit in intellectu* (“there is nothing in the body [sensitivity] that was not previously in the mind”); here *intellectu* designates the play of emotions, and thus of fantasy, imagination, and the unconscious ghosts. In this Platonic version, the variables previously mentioned become the protagonists, the subject’s main reference points on normality and mental pathology; they determine the facts and misdeeds that take place in the sphere of mind and body.

The immediate corollary of this double way of seeing things showed itself as a relapse in psychotherapy. The latter, even though deriving directly from psychoanalysis, was activated in two streams. The first accorded with the Aristotelian, or psychophysiological method, where psyche is a medium sensible to messages, interventions, external influences, and even cognitive restructuring. This way substantially depends upon outer monitoring, through which one tries to repair something that has been lost, distorted, or damaged, going from body to mind. The second way, which is peculiar to psychoanalysis and the psychotherapies it inspired, occurred according to the psychological-clinical model that has just been called Platonic and that is focused on the primary importance of patients’ emotions.

In order to pursue its own path, D.P. is articulated in terms of models, those mental constructions that C. Musatti defined in this way: “images constructed by us that are supposed to be able to represent those phenomena that do not belong to the field of what is a direct object of our perceptive skills; and that are supposed to be handled as

reproductions of reality, taking care of the fact that we can consider them as real, and only use them as far as data from direct observation of elements with their appendages can be described by them. Always ready to modify those models, to change them by replacing them with new ones, when they should turn out to be useless, i.e. in contrast with some phenomena linked to them that can be directly observed” (see *Methods in Psychological Research*).

It should be underlined that non-dynamic psychology does not need any models in the meaningful way that is peculiar to D.P. At first, one uses them only in the form of “experimental hypotheses” to be verified or rejected according to a request that can in any case be brought back to the axiom Galileo Galilei attributed to science: “Gentlemen, if you do not believe in sunspots, as you believe that the sun, as a pure and perfect object, cannot have any spots, please look through my telescope. Everyone must be able to see what I see and saw.”

On the contrary, D.P. is entirely based on “models,” and thus behaves exactly like modern physics in that it cannot do without the contents and phenomena of the subatomic and sub-nuclear world that cannot be directly observed or controlled. In fact, the standards of classical research could not be used to understand them. Indeed, the atom had to be represented as it is shown by the new detection instruments with the modes according to which the atomic particles interacted, but this obliged physicists to carry out completely indirect research, without ever having the possibility of observing those phenomena with their own eyes, since their dimensions are such (less than the size of light waves) that no instruments are able to detect them.

It was the same with psychoanalysts and with those psychologists who had accepted the unconscious nature of psychic life. They were obliged like the physicists to “reconstruct” in the imagination the dynamisms of the phenomena they analyzed, creating a perfect isomorphism between these two areas of research, the psychological and physical science, which had previously been counterposed.

From here arose the necessity of models, which are provisional constructs, falsifiable and continually falsified, however indispensable for scientific research, since they are the only way for scientists to analyze scientifically the two highly complex fields of physics and psychology. In fact, if there had not been the atom model of Niels Bohr, there would have been no subsequent theory born from the inadequacy of its predecessor; if there had not been the Freudian model of drive or articulation of mind into the three phases of id, ego, and superego, there would not have been the model of narcissism, the relationships in the inner world of psychic space and self.

The opportunity to work with models is therefore linked to the fact that through them it was possible to reach a fascinating scientific progress that seems wholly shared by physics and psychology and is the direct cause of the necessity for reinterpretation promoted by D.P.

The content of D.P. has developed from these points, even in fields that are far removed from psychotherapy. This content certainly does not neglect the consideration of body but considers it a goal subordinated to the dynamics of the mind seen as a psychological

and corporeal function, as well as a driving force of the body's experiences during its evolution.

With these statements D.P. has reached areas that are also very far from psychotherapy. As Jervis said, it “is useful not only to understand the patients, the ‘objects’ of the clinic, but it is also the most important instrument used to analyze what happens within that particular psychological relationship made of powers and expectations, calculations and irrationality, that arises from the dialogue between a psychologist and everybody who turns to him for assistance.”

The five theoretical statements Westen indicated as describing D.P. sum up what has been said until now:

1. Most mental activities are unconscious, and thus people are often unaware of their own thoughts, feelings, and intentions.
2. The mental processes, including emotions and motivations, operate in parallel, causing conflicts and generating compromise solutions.
3. Children's experiences have a primary role in the development of personality, particularly in shaping people's relationship styles.
4. Interactions between people are led by the subjective representations of oneself, others, and the interpersonal relations everyone has.
5. The development of personality not only implies learning to regulate affections, but also evolution from an immature state of social dependence to a mature state of interdependence.

-
-
-

TO ACCESS ALL THE 28 PAGES OF THIS CHAPTER,

Visit: <http://www.eolss.net/Eolss-sampleAllChapter.aspx>

Bibliography

Ancona L. (1970). *Dinamica della Percezione*. Milano: Mondadori Est. [in Italian.] [This book introduces and deepens the concepts of dynamics regarding a basic process of general psychology.]

Di Benedetto A. (2000). *Prima della parola*. Roma: F. Angeli. [in Italian.] [An important contribution on the power of the pre-symbolic processes, specific both to art and to psychoanalysis.]

Bowlby J. (1969). *Attachment and Loss*, 3 vols. London: Hogarth. [The classical observations on the attachment dimension, considered basic with the sexual and conservation ones.]

Lewin K. (1936). *Principles of Topological Psychology*, 231 pp. New York: McGraw-Hill. [The dynamic concept of the mind and of the social in terms of field.]

Foulkes S.H. (1967). The concept of group matrix. *Group Analysis* **1**, 31. [The proposal of the group as network, where the components are the crossing point of the threads, both protagonists of communication.]

Gaddini E. (1981). Note sul problema mente-corpo. *Rivista di Psicoanalisi* **XVII**, 3–29. [in Italian.] [How the human brain begins and develops in a world of external stimuli.]

Jung C.G. (1961–1967). *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, 20 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press. [Jungian theory.]

Winnicott D.W. (1958). Transitional objects and transitional phenomena. *Collected Papers*, 350 pp. London: Hogarth. [The condition through which newborn babies are introduced to play, to fantasy, to culture, and to religion.]

Segal H. (1957). Notes on symbol formation. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* **38**, 391–397. [How the pre-symbolic prepares and introduces the symbolization and the thought.]

Freud S. (1947). *Gesammelte Werke*, 18 vols. [in German.] London: Imago Publishing. [Freudian theory.]

Watzlawick P., Beavin J.H., and Jackson D.D. (1967). *Pragmatics of Human Communication*, 296 pp. New York: Norton. [Proposes the principle that everything is communication and it is not possible not to communicate.]

Biographical Sketch

Leonardo Ancona, born in Milan (May 5, 1922), gained his M.D. in 1946, his Ph.D. in neurology in 1951, and became full professor of psychology in 1965 (School of Medicine, Catholic University of Milan). He was awarded the Rockefeller Foundation scholarship for social psychology in the Group Dynamics Center (Ann Arbor, Michigan) in 1952/53, the Aquinas Foundation scholarship for clinical psychology in the Montréal University in 1956/57. He has been a psychoanalyst since 1975 and from 1978 to 1992 was director of the Institute of Psychiatry and Psychology and full professor in psychiatry at the Catholic University in Roma.

Professor Ancona was editor of *Archivio Psicologia, Neurologia e Psichiatria* until 1998 and of *Medicina e Morale*. He is past president of the Società Italiana di Psicoterapia Analitica dei Gruppi (SIPAG), of the Confederazione Organizzazioni Italiane Analisi Gruppale (COIRAG), of the Centro Italiano in Gruppoanalisi (CIGA), and of the Società Italiana per la Formazione in Psichiatria (SIFIP), president of the group-analytic society CERCHIO, and president elect of the Società Italiana di Psicologia (SIPs). His publications include *La Psicologia Sociale negli Stati Uniti d'America* (1954), *La Psicoanalisi* (1962), *Dinamica della Percezione* (1970), *Dinamica dell'Apprendimento* (1975), *I Processi Biologici dell'Apprendimento* (1978), *Introduzione alla Psichiatria* (1984), and *Schizofrenia e Depressione: Biopsicodinamica* (1991); he has edited more ten other volumes.

Professor Ancona is a member of SIPs, Società Italiana di Psicoterapia (SIP), Società Italiana di Psicoanalisi (SIP), International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA), Group Analytic Society (GAS), and International Association Group-Psychotherapy (IAGP), and is a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and group analyst.