



Sensus Privatus versus Sensus Communis

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From 1772 to 1796 Kant gave lectures at the University of Königsberg on anthropology which were actually concerned with normal and abnormal psychology. The lectures were published as *Anthropology from the Pragmatic Viewpoint*, after Kant's retirement in 1798, and are included in his collected works.

Recently the section of 20 pages on mental disorders, entitled "On the Weaknesses and Illnesses of the Soul in Regard to its Cognitive Ability," appeared in a new translation and under a new title (6). It was made from the original edition, whereas one earlier translation which appeared in 1881-1882 serially in a philosophy journal was made from modified later editions. The purpose of the new translation is "to preserve the light which Kant shed upon the disorders of the mind, and to facilitate the reader's access to this illumination" (6, p. xii).

To the reader familiar with Adler some of the present material is indeed enormously illuminating. In the systematic presentation of Adler's writings there is a section entitled "Private Sense versus Common Sense" (3, pp. 253-254) which opens with, "We must distinguish between 'private intelligence' and 'common sense,' and must understand reason as being connected with common sense—sense that can be shared." Private intelligence is for Adler one of the basic characteristics of all failures in life, i.e., the mentally disturbed. In psychotherapy the patient would have to learn "to re-see the world and alter his old private view in order to bring it

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more into harmony with a 'common view' of the world" (3, p. 254). The mentally healthy individual "feels at home in a conception of the world as near as possible to the real world, and he has courage and common sense, social functions which are frustrated among all failures" (3, p. 156).

It should be noted that when Adler wrote in this manner in German about "common sense" he found it convenient to use the English expression instead of any possible German counterpart (4, p. 44n).

Subsequently H. S. Sullivan made a similar distinction when he introduced the terms parataxic and syntactic modes of experience, the latter being characterized by consensual validation (7, pp. 28-29n).

The great surprise for the Adlerian in the new translation from Kant is to discover that he had made the same distinction between private sense and common sense well over 100 years before Adler. The noteworthy passage from Kant is: "The only feature common to all mental disorders is the loss of common sense (*sensus communis*), and the compensatory development of a unique, private sense (*sensus privatus*) of reasoning. . . . For it is a subjectively necessary indicator of the correctness of our overall judgments, and hence of the soundness of our minds, that we compare our judgment with the judgment of others; that we do not isolate ourselves with our own judgment, but, on the contrary, act with our private judgment as if the matter were being judged publicly. . . . He who pays no attention to such an indicator, but maintains this unique, private sense in his mind . . . without acknowledging common sense as valid, is given over to a play of thoughts whereby he perceives, decides, and acts, not in a world shared with others, but (as in a dream) in a world of his own" (6, pp. 19-20).

With our curiosity immensely aroused we went to the German original and found that the crucial passage reads: "Das einzige all-gemeine Merkmal der Verrücktheit ist der Verlust des Gemeinnes (*sensus communis*) und der dagegen eintretende logische Eigensinn (*sensus privatus*)" (5, p. 219).

Kant then used *Gemeinnes* as the equivalent of *sensus communis*, and one of the dictionary translations of *Gemeinnes* is "common sense," the others being "public spirit" and "esprit de corps."

In view of this similarity between Adler and Kant it would seem indeed significant that Adler was apparently well acquainted with Kant. Adler made repeated references to Kant, was strongly influenced by Vaihinger who was a celebrated commentator of Kant, and we learn from Furtmüller's biographical essay that the early Adlerian circle actually included Kant scholars (4, p. 355). In an important paper entitled "Brief Comments on Reason, Intelligence, and Feeble-Mindedness" in which Adler discusses in fact the cognitive aspects of social interest, he develops the point that social interest changes intelligence from "private intelligence" to reason or "common sense" (4, pp. 41-49). In this paper Adler refers to Kant with the

words, "Thus we arrive at Kant's conclusion: Reason has general validity" (4, p. 44). Reasonable behavior is characterized by "a goal of superiority in which the common welfare finds expression" (4, p. 44).

But there is still another relationship. Although in the above paper Adler uses the English phrase "common sense" as mentioned before, without any German equivalent, he did use Kant's term *Gemeinsinn* some fourteen years earlier and before he had introduced his own term *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*. Adler used *Gemeinsinn*, its meaning, after all, being common sense and public spirit, in very much the same sense as the later term. Vercruyse (8) found two papers in which Adler speaks of *Gemeinsinn* (1, 2), the term even appearing in the title of one (2). Adler thought that the ordinary family with its narrow prejudices and its conception of life as one of struggle and dangers, was not well suited to "advance the *Gemeinsinn*" (1, p. 481). Yet it is needed for fitness and readiness for real life. Such rigid one-sidedness "causes the *Gemeinsinn* to wither" (2, p. 45). Apparently Adler understood *Gemeinsinn* as an innate cognitive aptitude, just as he later understood *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*.

To the present writer it is comforting to know that when he uses the Adlerian pair of opposites, "private sense" and "common sense," he actually goes back to Kant, and that there is most likely a direct line from Kant to Adler. This last knowledge should remove all doubt, if some people still had any, that Adler belongs among the phenomenological, cognitive, understanding, Gestalt and field psychologists such as Spranger, Stern, Wertheimer, Lewin, all of whom can be said to have developed under the influence of Kant. On the other hand, "Freud was never influenced by Kant" (9, p. 395).

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