

Weltanschauung, **From Concept to a Rough Guide Questionnaire on** **Personality**

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Abstract

This paper is focused on an interdisciplinary meeting between psychology and philosophy (*personality* and *Weltanschauung*), resulted in a synthetic investigative instrument – a questionnaire, also fast and key-oriented towards personality's resorts, values and motivation, showed in attitudes and behaviors. I consider it as a welcome *systemic rough guide concerning the subject's frame of reference*, at both discursive and latent levels.

The investigator (which may be psychological counselor, adviser on career, therapist or simply any enough self-interested person) can identify the dominant type of individual adaptation at some point in ontogenesis and may be also guided on adaptation's degree (the strength, the coherence and the flexibility of ego).

Keywords: Personality, Weltanschauung, Modern Psychodiagnosis, Inter/Trans-Disciplinary Questionnaire

1. Introduction

I came to write this paper (which is a piece of a piece of a larger puzzle) for several reasons, including the fact that I let myself in for studying a topic whose title, *Counseling and Weltanschauung*, instantly sent me in a relative familiar space, my mind sensing a deep correlation between the terms, but being powerless to translate it simultaneously, synthetically in clear words. Psychology and philosophy, specific differences between disciplines and yet the same man in the middle, "I see..." and the first thing I saw was the lack of references. Here I am forced to reflect, to improvise, to see...

...*Weltanschauung* is not a common term in the Romanian language, but it is a fundamental concept in German philosophy/epistemology, referring to the general perception/ the comprehensive understanding of the world; broadly it designates "a worldview", "a metaphysical belief" or "a metaphysical conception" which allow to everyone to understand and interpret the meaning of the world and life. In fact, any philosophical view

of the world (objective, subjective, holistic, relativistic etc.) contains in its core an axiom-criterion by which it filters and separates the “truth” from “error” (“a touchstone proposition”) – e.g. the millennial controversy between the materialistic and the idealistic view of the world.

In the way of religion, the Christian thinker James W. Sire estimates *Weltanschauung* as “a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic construction of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.” He suggests that “we should all think in terms of worldviews, that is, with a consciousness not only of our own way of thought but also that of other people, so that we can first understand and then genuinely communicate with others in our pluralistic society.” (Sire, J.W.2004)

In psychoanalysis, Freud designates *Weltanschauung* as “an intellectual construction which gives a unified solution of all the problems of our existence in virtue of a comprehensive hypothesis, a construction, therefore, in which no question is left open and in which everything in which we are interested finds a place.” (Freud, S., 1918)

Interdisciplinary and integrative, Leo Apostel considers that worldview means a coherent set of knowledge / belief on all aspects of our existence, our success to build (as an individual) a global representation of the world where through we understand/we interpret the elements of our experience. “A *worldview* is a map that we use to orient and explain, from which we evaluate and act, and put forward prognoses and visions of the future. Hence: *orient; explain; evaluate; act; predict are the basic aspects of a worldview.*” (Aerts D., D’hooghe B, Note N., 2005)

A review of this information does not yet tie a term by excellence philosophical to psychology, particularly counseling. Moreover, the connections can vary depending on the observer’s post. In the following lines I propose to analyze the most obvious connection that I see and the purpose of the paper is to explore this relation.

First of all I mention that in the context of the work I describe and interpret *Weltanschauung* as the subjective frame of reference (in English *worldview*), namely the key for *world’s typification by individual’s powers*. Sooner or later, more or less shattered by life events that raise the specter of existential questions, each of us adhere to/configure/adapt its explanatory-axiological model (essential for socialization, integration, performance) to the external and inner relationships. The choice of a specific worldview (is it really a choice?) becomes one’s personal *measure* for being, reflecting one’s personality, culture, self (how, how much and what kind of world “fits in”).

Although imperfect, singular, labile, dynamic, ephemeral and controversial, *this measure/frame of reference encodes the specific adaptation of the individual* - and through this remark I try to create a junction space, an equivalence/convergence between philosophy and psychology. Nowadays, when the media industry rains a “meteoric shower of facts” on people and it is hard to resist it, *Weltanschauung* configures the immaterial, psychological backbone of the human: it expresses and it symbolically compresses the dynamic identity, creating conditions for exploration and meantime securing the ego (it restricts movements to prevent dissolution), it distinguishes the human from fauna and, paradoxically, it probably save us from reification.

From the perspective stated above, I correlatively make inquiries about: 1. Is *Weltanschauung* a significant, a symbolized indicator of individual adaptation? 2. Can it be

considered a factor of personality? (Can it be "measured"/identified and would it be proper to be measured through a questionnaire? Such an instrument can be considered as an initial guidance, a simple approach in personality's psychodiagnosis?) 3. How can practically be correlated and applied such an instrument to counseling?

Regarding these questions, I assume that *the identification of someone's worldview is a track to his self, to its functional and adaptive mechanisms - because Weltanschauung is the symbolic and concentrated representation of how the subject faces, reflects and attempts to harmonize or at least to establish a tolerable compromise between his interior and the outside world, reflecting struggles and peace treaties in a perpetual dynamic, even tectonic framework from time to time; Weltanschauung reflects symbolically the bond between the inner world and the outside world, woven into the web of psychological mechanisms whereof an individual is more or less aware while they impact his emotions, thoughts, behavior etc.*

From this perspective, I consider pertinent to set up an investigative instrument in the form of a questionnaire; its validity and efficiency can be verified by comparing / correlating the results from this test to the results of other psychological accepted instruments on the same experimental group.

2. Material and Method

Step 1 Construction of the questionnaire

1.1 The meaning/ definition of the term Weltanschauung was expounded above.

1.2 How the concept Weltanschauung could be operationalized in order to be measured by a personality questionnaire?

The explanatory model of the person quoted in the schema below, proposed by Costa & McCrae (McCrae 1990 cited by Minulescu 2007, p.140) inspired me a possible answer to this question:

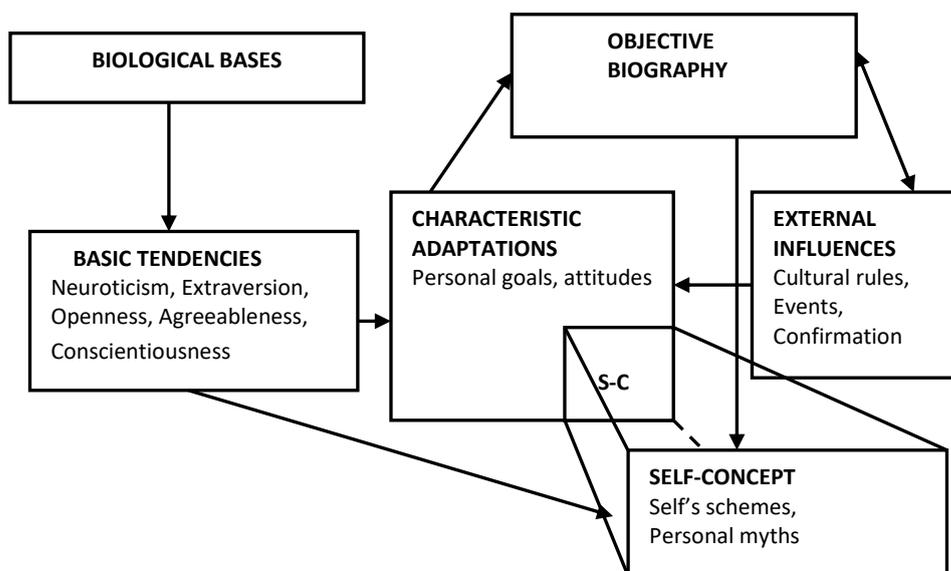


Figure 1. The explanatory model of the person

Within this theoretical framework, I propose and schematize in the table below an approximate equivalence between:

- the concept *Weltanschauung* in terms of Immanuel Kant' philosophical questioning;

- a linguistic bridge crossing from philosophy to psychology: subcategories for *Weltanschauung*, in terms of James W. Underhill (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_view);
- the concept *Weltanschauung* "translated" into psychological language, namely *the individual adaptation* resulted from the meeting of the basal endogenous factors (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness) with the exogenous influences (cultural norms, events, inputs), adaptation which is reflected in the (objective) biography of the subject as a result of shaping an image of itself and the adoption of more or less conscious attitude and setting for personal purposes;
- focus on the *openness to experience* feature as it is conceived and operationalized by the authors Costa&McCrae¹ in the context of NEO PI super-factors used in interpreting the structure and dynamics of personality.

Table 1. Openness to experience

| Weltanschauung from philosophy (I.Kant) | Weltanschauung subcategories (J.W.Underhill) | Weltanschauung in psychology | Features of the Openness factor- (Costa&McCrae²) |
|--|--|--|---|
| A questioning consciousness and systematic thought: <i>What do I know?</i> <i>What should I do?</i> <i>What am I allowed to hope?</i> <i>What is man?</i> ↓ ontology elements, gnoseology, axiology (ethics), praxiology, philosophical anthropology | <i>world perceiving, world conceiving, cultural mindset, personal world, perspective</i> | the interaction between the basal mental tendencies, the biological basis and the external influences ↓ the characteristic adaptation to the inner and outer world (personal goals, attitudes, behaviors) highlighted in <i>Weltanschauung</i> as explanatory, descriptive, normative axiological internalized model | O1: openness to fantasy O2: openness to the aesthetic dimension O3: openness to the personal modes of feeling O4: openness to action O5: openness to ideation, the "intellectual curiosity" O6: openness to values |

So I try an eclectic meeting between a philosophical and psychological approach, between two explanatory perspectives/private languages about a *common* content (psyche's dynamics and its motives) to articulate a questionnaire able to capture the representative

¹ There is mentioned a relatively disagreement on the features of the factor *openness to experience* (designation *openness* is agreed more than *intellectual factor*) because Costa & McCrae do not consider cognitive abilities as belonging to the sphere of personality itself - there may be intelligent individuals, but with limited thinking to reality and reversible, individuals open-minded, but with a modest intellectual capacity. "The traits that appear in Costa & McCrae's empirical research are active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, attention to inner life and feelings inside, preference for variety, intellectual curiosity, independence in the way of thinking" - issues not necessarily associated with education or with general intelligence (adapted from Minulescu 2007, p.150).

² apud Minulescu M., 2007, p.150-151

aspects for *Weltanschauung* according to Apostel: “a worldview is ontology, or a descriptive model of the world. It should comprise these six elements: 1. An explanation of the world; 2. A futurology, answering the question *Where are we heading?*; 3. Values, answers to ethical questions: *What should we do?*; 4. A praxeology, or methodology, or theory of action: *How should we attain our goals?*; 5. An epistemology, or theory of knowledge: *What is true and false?*; 6. An etiology. A constructed world-view should contain an account of its own *building blocks*, its origins and construction.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_view)

The human need for these questions, the human search for their answers and the answers themselves point out symbolically who/what is someone at one moment in time.

1.3 The construction of a set of items relevant to *Weltanschauung*

The strategy of building: intuitive (rational) method.

The questionnaire has two complementary scales, which I named “W” (*Weltanschauung* – from the philosophical perspective) and “E” (ego – from the psychological point of view), everyone investigating from a different angle the same trait in two facets: *Weltanschauung* as a feature of self-adaptation. Hence, there are distinctive peculiarities of form, content, interpretation for each scale; the two partial results will be reunited to compare/to complement information on the personality of the investigated subject:

- Scale W – investigated feature: the self (ego) in the expression of worldview;
- Scale E – investigated feature: the self (ego) in behavioral expression.

The problem of language:

The items (traits’ indicators) are expressed through parts of speech (adjectives, nouns, adverbs, verbs etc.) as common and accessible as possible; the language explores various categories of content: reviews, stable features, mental moods, activities, social roles, relationships and social effects, abilities and characteristics relating to physical presence.

Although avoiding the non-distinctive terms, it still remains the problem of words’ meaning (the subjective interpretation of the items, which remains an uncertain variable in the act of interpersonal communication); I included as a rough guide two repertory grid.

Item-trait relation:

By overlaying the interpretation filters of reality structured by Apostel, the questionnaire seeks to capture the peculiarities of the individual type of cognition and attitudes (namely how the subject perceives the existence), making guidance to identify the self-declared dominant of the subject’s worldview. I used the classical categories (Angleitner&Goldberg apud Minulescu 2007, p.29) to compose the items: descriptions of the reactions; attributes of the trait; desires and necessities; biographical facts; attitudes; reactions of others; bizarre items.

Surface features of items:

The W scale joins 34 items, and the E scale 60.

The formulation of the items falls within the standard recommendations on length, complexity and format.

Response forms are mixed, each item having multiple choice answers (for general interpretation) and also one entirely free (ideographic, marked as “another option / comments”) in case that the subject don’t find himself in the suggested answers; this personal answers will be lately interpreted in context.

Most of the suggested answers rend the actual content of the main (possible) opinions, behaviors, attitudes etc. I also added among the suggested answers some variants for the trait: “I do not know”, “This question really doesn’t interest me”, “I do not answer”.

Semantic features of items:

Angleitner (1986, cited Minulescu 2007, p.33) point out and describes five semantic features which are significantly involved in hindered or simplifying workloads’ answer: *comprehensibility, ambiguity, generalization’s degree, personal referral degree* and *evaluation* (the last one with respect to the measure of the item’s social desirability).

The W scale’s terminology, often coming from philosophy, involving a higher level of abstraction and subjectivity, generates additional difficulty in understanding/interpreting its items - but these abstract items usually present attitudes, opinions, ask interpretation of general events and their integration across different situations, allow the comparison with unspecified standards and personal inferences).

Every item assumes the personal reference (“I usually...”) and the last one tries to determine the subject responsiveness’ degree at the time he fills in the questionnaire.

Steps 2 and 3 Experimentation. Preliminary statistical analysis

I formed the initial experimental group from 20 subjects, aged 18 up to 21, a mixed group referring to gender and also heterogeneous by origin (rural / urban) and previous education, all subjects attending the Faculty of Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development within the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine from Bucharest. Experimentation led to the identification of some error sources that negatively influenced fidelity, so I made changes to the form and the content of the items, including the introduction of repertory grids for key concepts, I opened up the space allotted for response to 10-20 words (150 characters), I rendered more accessible the vocabulary etc.

I sorted again the items by multiple criteria (because their ability to discriminate and their homogeneity condition the validity), restoring the questionnaire.

The preliminary statistical analysis approves the viability of the instrument.

Step 4: Standardization of interpretation by questionnaire’s standardization

The main differences between our frames of reference (*Weltanschauung*) come from their foundation, which in turn results from the conjugation of biological basis, external influences, biography – becoming an adaptive feature more or less manifest. Considering *Weltanschauung* the discursive adaptation form, the items are indicators for the internal dynamics and specific intra-and inter-relationship of the subject (deep internal needs).

- **W Scale** – investigated feature: *the self in conceptual expression (mind-set, mentality - verbally stated by subject)*, namely the *worldview*. This scale aims to identify subject’s conceptual framework, its *dominant tendency* from five major types of *Weltanschauung* by comparing weighted average for each type. The five categories are: *a) rational objective; b) holistic (reason and religious faith); c) irrational, subjective; d) relativistic (skeptical, agnostic); e) nihilist.*

- **E Scale**– investigated feature: *the self in behavioral, manifested expression (verbally stated by subject)* and this reunites items for every constituent of personality: biological

bases, basic tendencies (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness), objective biography, external influences, characteristic adaptations (including self-concept); the dominant tendency for every "ingredient" of personality results too from weighted average (*Emotional or calm? Sociable or reserved? Original or conventional? Good-natured or ruthless? Invalid or healthy? Phantasy or real world? Self-reliant or diffident?*).

The items are more concrete (descriptions of reactions, desires and needs, biographical facts, reactions of others etc.), and the interpretation mixes eclectically classical approaches in personality's psychology in order to gain an integrative framework, but risking to lose coherence, uniformity.

Note: the typologies up for interpretation does not assume any qualitative hierarchy (no one is "stronger than another", "better than another"), but try to notice the specific, stimulating and difficult to quantize difference between people, for everyone's identity and change should be first reported to his own constitution, alchemy, evolution (abysmal anyway) and then, relatively, to the "official" measure represented by investigative instruments and procedures, measure which is multi-way inter-mediate in the human evaluation process.

Considering the items as indicators for characteristic adaptation to the external and inner world and despite the imminent idiosyncrasies, the test result reflects, somehow like a card, the personality of the subject in a certain moment of his personal history, aiming to reveal not "how strong are you?" but "how is your strength now?". *The subject gets clues/ data for a "SWOT analysis" of himself, and the research gets clues/ data especially on how personality (as dynamic system) and mentality (as part of this dynamic system) interfere.*

3. Results and discussion on the advantages and the limitations of this questionnaire

Through this questionnaire I tried to correlate, to meet two specific disciplines, psychology and philosophy, in order to search the human personality by helping each other. The questionnaire on *Weltanschauung* may be a synthetic and rough guide to personality springs (values and motivation reflected in attitudes and behaviors are actually manifestations of internal needs, they are a clue to one's internal dynamics). Being systematic/systemic, even artificial and limited, it may be welcome for saving time regarding the initial orientation in the subject's frame of reference, at both discursive and latent levels.

Using it, the investigator (who may be psychological counselor, professional counselor, psychotherapist or simply any self-interested man) can obtain information such as:

- can identify the dominant *type* of adaptation at some point in subject's ontogenesis;
- can have a clue on the adaptation's *degree*, namely the strength, stability, flexibility of ego as a mediator and regulator of the clash between the genetic basis and the external influences;
- can detect indicators for the subject's dominant type/types of intelligence;
- can get some clues predictors for behavior and possibly enhanced features;
- can easily get indicators for vulnerability, resistance, conflict when the subject chooses "I do not answer".

I think it would be welcome to investigate the same subjects after they live a significant event (from their point of view) in their lives and notice the changes in their worldview.

And now about limitations: the questionnaire (its form, content, interpretation) is questionable, the instrument itself is limited, rigid, reductionist, as it is, in a higher or lower

proportion, any diagnosis instrument which investigates one's mind (including me); this questionnaire is a reflection of my inner world, with an interpretative key restricted by my limited mind, by the place where I stand looking at the others and myself; one's key could or couldn't open someone else door. So, the questionnaire may become inoperable, useless concerning the scientific aim that I intended, but meanwhile everyone *reading its items*, these "heavy" or "unnecessary" questions, may bare them in his mind, even he is no more aware of it; words usually blindly still work our minds, stimulating the development's itinerary.

Then, however the subject's answers would be interpreted (and, generally, the collected data) and besides the fact that every psychodiagnosis method has its limits, another limitation of the questionnaire should be bare in mind: the uncertainty of genuine consent from the subject to be truly discovered by someone else through his answers, to reveal himself to someone else or even to himself (the formal results depend on the subject's willingness to take seriously the questions, to really live a reflective mood, to accept self-exposure). And there are many aspects of which a common human being is not aware concerning his self, being always in a state of flux.

4. Conclusions

The *Weltanschauung* questionnaire aims to detect if psychology and philosophy "joining forces" in a both theoretical and applied research could enrich the personality's study. I consider that this complementary approach may help as:

1. *Weltanschauung* is a significant symbolized indicator for individual's adaptation; it may be considered a personality factor;

2. The *Weltanschauung* questionnaire may be useful as a rough guide within the personality's psychodiagnosis, being rounded through ideographic investigation and other instruments;

3. The items stand on a common ground of philosophy and psychology and they can be exploited in various directions, depending on the interests of the investigator, from generating a truly philosophical reflection (a form of personal development) up to ... staffing etc.

4. ... let's always remember that we stay in the middle of a variable complex and also we are one, we alternate, even live the same time progress, regression, lifelessness, changing the observer's post, so who can *really* evaluate a human person?

I find exciting, sometimes risky and undoubtedly synonymous with life the consciousness' journey in the depths of the universe (self, society, nature) hoping to become aware of itself, to search itself, to build itself, to cherish itself, to curb itself and reconfigure while growing, connecting, communicating in a perpetual adaptive effort.

However, we use to scientifically evaluate and diagnose one another on questionable bases as long as everyone communicates, expresses and receives in his *own, unique* way. I think that the purpose of so many (self-) measurements cannot be out of the will to control and the will for power may displace the potential nourishing and creative richness of communication.

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