

Post-Jungian Developmental Theory: Michael Fordham's Model of Development

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'... the self is always original' M. Fordham

Introduction

Michael Fordham's life (1905-1995) covered most of the twentieth century and, correspondingly, the first century of psychoanalysis. He was born the same year Freud first published his Three Essays in Sexuality, and while Jung was involved in the experiments that led to his discovery of complexes. Fordham entered psychiatry in 1932, the year Melanie Klein published her first volume, the Psychoanalysis of Children. He became a child psychiatrist in 1933, the same year he entered a Jungian analysis and soon after met Jung, with whom he remained in contact until Jung's death. After the war, Fordham, by now a colleague of Winnicott, became a consultant at the West End Hospital for Nervous Diseases. There, in parallel with studies being done by Tustin and Meltzer, he researched into autism. Throughout his prolific work life he continued with what is best described by the title of one of his last books, Explorations into the Self. Of Fordham's many contributions to Analytical Psychology, the most important in his own eyes was working out a model of development for Jungians.

Fordham's Model of Development

Fordham's discovery of the self in childhood

From his clinical experiences Fordham observed that even very young children had a fundamental organization that underlay their disintegrated states. Two small children under age two, a little girl and a little boy, caught his attention. The little boy had scribbled circles on the wall of his nursery until he started to use the word 'I', where upon the scribbling stopped. The little girl had been inhibited until she scribbled circles whereupon she became centered and self-confident. Fordham's Jungian background led him to understand that the circles, like the mandalas described by Jung, referred to the core unity of their personalities. The scribbled pre-symbol of this central unity was linked in important ways to ego development, conveyed in the boy's acquisition of 'I' and the girl's new confidence. In Jungian psychology this unity and wholeness is termed the 'self', out of which the ego develops.

Although Jung had concluded that the self did not become manifest until midlife, Fordham's discovery meant that the self was evident in infancy. In establishing this, Fordham made a contribution to analytical psychology equivalent to that of Klein to psychoanalysis; within their respective theoretical systems both endowed the infant with an internal world and object-relatedness.

The Primary Self, Deintegration and Reintegration

The primary self

Fordham viewed the infant as an individual person, a whole yet immature self, conceived as primary psychosomatic integrate termed the 'primary self'. The primary self is a concept that was meant to account for the fundamental unity of the infant and how the infant functions as a psychosomatic whole. The concept was also intended to account for a primary state, which we might imagine as a kind of state of embryonic unity. Drawing from Bion, Fordham described this state as 'a pregnant absence', 'a point that has position but no magnitude'. This refers to the potential of the primary self, out of which all development emerges. Hence, the primary self is the whole of the embodied personality and its potential; its source and sum and what it might become.

Deintegration and Reintegration

How does this primary unity relate to the environment and survive and grow? To address this question Fordham conceived the twin processes of deintegration and reintegration.

Deintegration is the term he used to describe a process whereby the primary integrate 'reaches out', so to speak, or unfolds, or unpacks, to relate to the outside world, and so to de-integrate. The term 'deintegrate' is at first difficult to understand because it sounds like a negative or destructive process. But Fordham was trying to distinguish de-integration, a natural unfolding of archetypal potential necessary for growth, whereby the experience remains part of the unity of the infant. Fordham's usual example of deintegration is how a baby awakens by hunger and signals this to the mother who then picks up the baby and feeds him. Deintegration is thus the baby's spontaneous engagement in and relating to various aspects of his emotional environment.

Fordham's concept of deintegration refers to a natural process of development necessary for psychic growth, and can be contrasted to splitting and disintegration. Dis-integration is what happens to the ego, which breaks up and fragments. Splitting refers to deintegrations that do not remain part of the self but are isolated or split off from the rest of the personality.

Reintegration is the process by which deintegrates (experiences that come with deintegration) are taken in and incorporated into the self as a whole. The baby's deintegration during a feed is followed by a process of absorbing the experience by, say, falling asleep and taking in the global combination of sensual and affective aspects of the feeding experience. Here the deintegrates are incorporated, or integrated, into the infant's personality as a whole. An analogy of deintegration and reintegration is the amoeba protozoan, which reaches out into the environment via its pseudopodium. The pseudopodium remains attached to the whole (as in deintegration) and then takes in food and incorporates it into the organism as whole (as in reintegration).

For Fordham deintegration and reintegration are shaped according to archetypal patterning. Archetypes in infancy are characteristic, typical, and universal patterns of responding, which are 'at once mental and physical'. This makes archetypes virtually equivalent to Klein's unconscious phantasies.

The Deintegration of Psyche, Ego Development and Self-Representations

The primary self is conceived as a psychosomatic unity, which must deintegrate in order for mind and body to become differentiated. By considering mind and body as deintegrates, Fordham includes the mind-body problem in his developmental model: 'In treating these twin concepts, psyche and soma, as deintegrates, their origin in the self is not lost sight of...' (Fordham 1985, p. 170).

The deintegration of psyche entails ego development. Fordham differed from Klein in considering that the ego is present from birth. Fordham held that 'bits' of what become ego (consciousness) accompany very early experience, but only through deintegration and reintegration do these 'bits' coalesce into a more-or-less consolidated ego. It is only when the ego forms that we experience the self, or, rather, infer it. This is because, in Fordham's model, the ego, although very important, is only a part of the whole of the self and so cannot directly experience the whole. The consolidation of ego fragments results in a new consciousness of a sense of self as a complex unity with an overall wholeness and individuality of being.

In Fordham's model the sense of self is comprised of self-representations. Self representations are early, preconscious, pre-symbolic representations of the primary self in the ego. The implication is that selfhood has a source from within the infant. Although, of course, development rests on the interrelating of the infant self and the selves of others, in this model, the sense of self is not simply a construct from, or integration of relationships with others but is inherently one's own.

Later Developments in the Deintegration of Psyche

In developmental terms, self representations, which are pre-symbolic (such as the small children's scribbled circles), lead on to self symbolization. In Jungian thinking, self symbolization refers to symbols and images of wholeness. Fordham described this kind of self-image from his own childhood, when he was around four. In his Memoirs, he recalled an experience that occurred as his family was moving from Surrey to Hampshire. Fordham's reflection here is of his sense of wholeness, of being 'at the center of the world', symbolized as a junction.

I do not remember arriving at Clapham Junction... My mother and I were together, I was sitting on her knee in a railway carriage looking out of the window. I thought we were at the center of the world and all trains came to Clapham Junction where our train had stopped. I felt important and secure. (Fordham 1993, p.27)

Jung wrote of similar experiences of self symbols, as he was recovering from his break-up with Freud. At that time, he found a sense of wholeness in sketching a series of mandalas. Reflecting on these drawings, Jung wrote; 'In them I saw the self - that is, my whole being - actively at work' (Memories, Dreams Reflections, 1971, p. 221).

Here we come full circle, from the self in infancy to the self in adulthood, and from Jung's idea of the self to Fordham's extension of that to infancy.

Suggested reading:

- Astor, J. (1995) Innovations in Analytical Psychology. London: Routledge.
- Fordham, M. (1976) The Self and Autism. London: Academic Press.

- (1985) Explorations into the Self. London: Academic Press.
- (1994) Children as Individuals. London: Free Association Books.