A THEORETICAL and EMPIRICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE LEWINIAN AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, with respect to the history of the discipline of psychology, various authors have begun to recognize and pay attention to the possibility of fruitful dialogue between the Gestalt and phenomenological literatures. At present, we are about to take up and further this dialogue which has already been initiated by such diverse authors as Merleau-Ponty (1962 and 1963), Spiegelberg (1972), De Rivera (1976), and others. The particular direction in which we propose to move involves two paths which recurrently intertwine. The first leads us into an exposition and critique of Kurt Lewin's conception of psychology in dialogue with concerns emerging out of a phenomenological approach to psychology. The second involves reflecting upon the implications of the Lewinian and phenomenological approaches with respect to empirical research on 'anger' which was stimulated and guided by each.

Numerous questions reside in the domain which we will carve out. To enumerate just a few: "What is anger and how is it lived?"; "Does anger appear differently when it is approached from each of these perspectives?"; "What questions does each researcher, given the respective theoretical foundations, pose to
Our project opens up a tremendous area for exploration and our approach will allow us much freedom of movement: we shall be able to dialogue both on the theoretical and the concrete, empirical planes, and to move back and forth between them in order to enrich our perspective on each.

LEWIN'S APPROACH TO PSYCHOLOGY

Lewin's position asserts that whole, complex situations are most meaningful and thus most lucrative for psychological observation and description; the 'gestalt' with which he is concerned is comprised of the individual living and acting in a situation. To remove behavior from situations and isolate it, as most experimental psychologists have done, is, in Lewin's view, tantamount to bypassing the proper subject matter of psychology. The latter is to consist in the investigation of "dynamics," by which he means the "relation between person and environment . . . namely, that of the position of the actual individual . . . in the concrete, total situation" (Lewin, 1933, pp. 591-592). He stresses that the goal of research is not to arrive at a statistically "average" situation, because such an abstraction is not generalizable to the dynamics of any particular situation.

But what does Lewin mean by "situation?" A human situation refers necessarily to an "environment" which in turn encompasses all "psychological facts." All physical and social facts are considered to be equally "real" aspects of situations. Even biological predispositions participate in psychological situations, but not as mere deterministic givens. These also partake of dynamic and dialectical processes:

Hereditary dispositions . . . (have) reference to a specific environment, to an aggregate of specific environments . . . (and) . . . predispositions . . . cannot