

# THE PERSONALITY OF MELANCHOLICS (*TYPUS MELANCHOLICUS*) SEEN FROM AN IDENTITY-THEORETICAL POINT OF VIEW

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The psychopathological and empirical research on the personality of melancholics with respect to the concept of the *typus melancholicus*<sup>1</sup> has led to widely concurrent results in at least six research groups (we mention only Sauer *et al.*; von Zerssen; Marneros *et al.*; Mundt *et al.* 1993 and 1997). These results are mainly related to particular personality traits of patients with “major depression with melancholia”, in former times called endogenous depression, but not to structural aspects of their personality, which have mostly not been considered. We point to the often not respected difference between psychological personality traits or characterological qualities and the psychological structure of a certain type of personality. These two concepts often were identified in a misleading promiscuous way. Tellenbach himself on one hand speaks of an accelerated orderliness, accuracy, overscientiousness, and extraordinary diligence as the personality traits of the *typus melancholicus*, on the other hand of a being fixed up on a being determined by commitment to orderliness as a “basic trait of the structure of the *typus melancholicus*” (p. 66). This commitment (*festgelegt sein auf*) to

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<sup>1</sup> We prefer the Latin expression “*Typus melancholicus*” instead of “melancholic type”, so as not to mix up this description of personality with “major depression with melancholia”, i.e. with melancholic features.

order – he continues – may be missing in one or the other dimension of life (*Daseinsbereich*) but is always conspicuous at least in one essential dimension of life. However, as long as this commitment to order is not clarified as a structural feature of the personality, it can only be understood just as one of the other traits of the personality of the t.m. So, in empirical research this commitment to order was treated as “rigidity” of the t.m., with particularly high scores in self-rating tests carried out in t.m. patients. It is our main aim here, starting from the traits of the t.m., to determine the structural aspects of the melancholic personality from an identity theoretical point of view. If orderliness in Tellenbach’s view should be the common structural feature of all other traits of t.m., so first let us ask for the motive of melancholics for being bound to such a high degree to order or orderliness.

Tellenbach sees this pronounced orderliness as the expression of very high self-imposed demands of achievements. Particularly psychoanalytic authors, like Bibring for instance, in a similar way consider the achievement motive of these patients under the aspect of narcissistic needs.

However, what is not taken into consideration here is that the melancholic derives all these demands of achievement from outer social conditions, particularly from the expectancies of his respective social role, regulated by the social norms of the society he lives in. For this reason we (Kraus, 1977, 2007) summarize the mentioned traits of the t.m. as a hypernomic behaviour (nomos = norm, rule). Hypernomic behaviour points to his exaggerated performance of his duty, his fulfilling of all often contradicting normative expectations of his respective social roles.

With this notion should also be shown that this kind of behaviour of melancholics is not identical with an anankastic behaviour. Misleadingly, DSM-IV as well as ICD-10 mention some of the criteria of the t.m. under the category of an anankastic personality disorder. In our view, all of these traits of the t.m. are syntonic characterological features. This does not exclude the possibility of a transition of hypernomic behaviour to an anankastic one and the appearance of obsessive-compulsive symptoms in melancholic phases as well as outside of these. The problem is that in both glossaries they do not differentiate between dystonic and syntonic criteria regarding the category of anankastic personality disorder. To call syntonic criteria anankastic would be a terminological contradiction. The particular behaviour of melancholics in relation to social norms was confirmed by empirical studies of von Zerksen and Hecht *et al.* and others. In a study of Mundt *et al.* (1997) the subscales rigidity and orientation to norms applying

MPT differentiated significantly between patients of the t.m. and those without showing this type. In a study of Heerlein *et al.* obsessive patients were more introverted than melancholics, whereas the last ones were more rigid and showed more intolerance of ambiguity. Similar features as the hypernomic behaviour were already pointed out by Cohen *et al.*, Arieti, Haase and others as well as a readiness to overadapt by Matussek & Feil and others.

The denoting the behaviour of the t.m. as hypernomic does not like t.m. describe certain concrete behaviour and is also not restricted to certain norms of a particular society or culture, but defines a certain relationship to any norms of any culture and society. In this way this definition provides a greater openness for empirical studies, particularly for sociocultural studies.

In all cultures and every society particularly the behaviour in the respective role is regulated by norms. In the fulfilling of the normative expectations of the respective role certain identities found in these roles are established. We speak of so-called role-identities. With respect to the formation of identity there normally exists not only a relationship of completion, but also of distance and tension between the respective roles and the person of an individual. As a person we are not only this and that role, but at least potentially much more than this. In social role-theory this distance between person and role, that is distance to pre-given expectancies of the respective role, is expressed by the notion of role-distance. Because of this distance we have a certain possibility of forming our roles, giving them our personal sense. That means: the implementation of ego-achievements is possible. These ego-achievements as well as the role-distance, which is itself an ego-achievement, require a sufficient ego-identity. This implementation of a certain creative ego-achievement in front of pre-given prescriptions of role-behaviour is necessary as a condition for successful role-behaviour. Role-distance so far is a certain essential part of role-behaviour and not a rejection of the role itself. Because of an insufficient development of ego-identity melancholic patients have apparently only few ego-achievements at their disposal. Hypernomic behaviour in our view serves the compensation of a lack of ego-achievements. So far the behaviour of the t.m. is secondary in relation to the primary lack of ego-achievements. The same is true for the relationship of the respective role-identity and ego-identity, which have to compensate the lacking ego-identity. Because hypernomic behaviour above all serves to maintain the identity found in the respective role and to guard oneself against its loss or damage, there exists a certain urgency for hypernomic behaviour, which Tellenbach in his concept described under the

aspect of a strong commitment to this kind of behaviour of the t.m. This particular dependence of the t.m. on his respective role-identities leads to a certain shift of the normally given balance between the role-identities of a person and the ego-identity in direction to the first ones. For this reason we speak of an overidentification with the role-identity (-ies) in melancholics.

We cannot here go into the consequences of this particular identity formation in the sense of an overidentification of identity in general for a better understanding of the precipitation of melancholic phases and a better understanding of their clinical phenomena as well as its importance for the psychotherapeutic guidance of these patients which we treated elsewhere (Kraus 1977, 1982, 1995, 1996, 2008).

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