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The Increasing Recognition of Adler

by Heinz L. Ansbacher

In this introduction some of the evidence is reviewed for the significance which is today attributed to Alfred Adler. It covers the areas of personality theory in general, existential psychology and psychiatry, neo-Freudian psychoanalysis, Freudian psychoanalysis, personality diagnosis including dream interpretation, practice of psychotherapy, and theory of positive mental health. The recognition of the importance of Adler's concepts for anthropology is also discussed. But before presenting this review, a few historical statements would seem to be indicated for general orientation.

Adler was born in Vienna, February 7, 1870, and received his medical degree there in 1895. An early co-worker of Freud's, Adler was best known during the 1920's and 1930's. With Freud and Jung he was generally mentioned as one of the founders of "depth" psychology, a term which he rejected (A1927C, preface). Also, the term "inferiority complex" associated with his name was in fashion. Numerous popular books by him were available in inexpensive editions and in many languages. His school of psychology and psychotherapy, known as Individual Psychology, was organized internationally and had 34 local associations, mainly in Central Europe. There were some 30 Adlerian child guidance clinics in Vienna. A bimonthly journal of Individual Psychology was edited by Adler in German, and in 1935 an American quarterly was added. In 1931 an English periodical had also been started, by a group of medical men.

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Adler's impact was greatest in personal contact and general lectures. He was imbued with the conviction that basic psychological and mental health knowledge should be imparted to everyone. In his opinion, psychology had "for its proper goal the understanding of human nature by every human being" (Bottome, 1957, p. 255). Accordingly, he was indefatigable in lecturing before physicians, teachers, clergy, or any interested group, and in holding demonstration clinics and informal discussion meetings with small groups of students. On his last lecture tour, which he made from the United States to Europe and which was to have

lasted from April through July, 1937, his schedule called for over 100 lectures (Bottome, 1957, pp. 252 & 286; Orgler, 1963, pp. 200-201). He died on May 28, 1937, of a heart attack in Aberdeen, Scotland.

With the advent of Hitler nearby, all the Central European associations disappeared and a sizable number of Adlerians emigrated, many of them to the United States. With the death of Adler the German and American journals ceased publication, and the English periodical was also eventually discontinued.

The great many publications Adler left behind were essentially lectures; even his books were almost all collections of lectures. There is considerable overlap to be found in them. Furthermore, since Adler was largely concerned with basic principles on the one hand, and the individual case on the other hand, his theories never became as differentiated as one is accustomed to finding in other systems. Since he urgently wanted to stay close to real life and create a psychology which could be grasped, understood, and used by all, he also shunned technical jargon and avoided coining new technical terms. Thus he was accused by many professionals of popularization and oversimplification.

For all these reasons, after his death his name faded for a number of years, except within small circles of Adlerians. This, however, did not mean at all that Adler's ideas had become antiquated. Quite on the contrary, many were simply ahead of their time, and were subsequently rediscovered and restated from other quarters. Many others lived on as part of the "common sense," without Adler's name attached to them. As Ruth Munroe (1955, p. 335) so aptly phrased it: "Adler's fate is like that of Heine, whose little masterpiece *The*

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Lorelei attained such prompt popularity that when he himself asked a group of people singing it for the name of the author, he was told, 'why nobody wrote it—it's a folk song.'"

During the last several years, the trend has changed. In the words of Julian B. Rotter (1962, p. 3): "Recently there appears to be an increasing recognition of Adler's contribution to personality theory and to the practice of psychotherapy. . . . The nature of these shifts can be summarized quite briefly: (a) denial of the importance of instincts for the explanation of behavior, (b) denial of the primacy of the sexual drive in the explanation of all psychopathology, (c) greater emphasis on what is typically referred to as ego needs and ego defenses, (d) greater desire to look upon man from a moral or ethical point of view, (e) recognition that psychotherapeutic techniques should include an explicitly stated set of ethical values, since values play an implicit role in any case in all therapy. . . . Along with this increased recognition of Adler's contributions to the practice of psychotherapy there has been some but perhaps not as great, reawakened interest in teaching Adler's theory in university psychology departments."

Quite logically, a good many of the authors who will be quoted in this review are among those whom A. H. Maslow (1962) has designated as a presently emerging "third force" in psychology, this force representing a counterweight against the two comprehensive theories of human nature which have most influenced American psychology, namely, the Freudian and the experimental-positivistic-behavioristic theories. Maslow quite correctly lists Adlerians first among the "third force." The following review includes only statements from non-Adlerians.

PERSONALITY THEORY IN GENERAL

As a sign of the place in personality theory which is beginning to be attributed to Adler, we may perhaps take the introductory psychology textbook by Paul Swartz (1963). Here Adler's Individual Psychology is selected as one of three major viewpoints considered worthy of inclusion, the other two being those of Freud and G. W. Allport. The nucleus of Adler's personality theory is the concept of a

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unitary, goal-directed, creative self which in the healthy state is in a positive, constructive, i.e., ethical, relationship to his fellow men. The idea of the unitary self was formulated by Adler in the term "style of life," that of the normal positive social relationship in the term "social interest." Both concepts have within the last ten years come into prominence.

Life style. Regarding style of life, Allport (1961, pp. 565-566) writes in his new textbook on personality that "Many of the ideas we have surveyed in this [last] chapter can be viewed under the inclusive concept of *life-style*," that "Adlerian psychology . . . centers in the concept of the life-style," and that this concept, although difficult to define, "will have to be dealt with by psychology in the future." Frederick C. Thorne (1961, pp. 65-68) speaks of the "Adlerian *style of life*" as the principle of unification and the organizing factor in personality.

A reviewer of Adler's works in the *London Times* (Anonymous, 1958, pp. 665-666), although rather critical of him, summed up the situation: "There has been a marked tendency to distrust the more analytical approach to problems of personality and to stress once again the unitary, coherent, and purposeful character of human conduct. This outlook, well represented in the writings of Gordon Allport and Gardner Murphy, undoubtedly owes something to Adler's insistence upon the study of the whole individual and his characteristic 'life-style.' To this extent at least, Adler anticipated an influential standpoint in present-day psychology."

The life style, according to Adler, is ultimately the individual's own creation, the product of his creative power. Adler attributed this creative power to every individual, not only a chosen few. Hall and Lindzey (1957, p. 124) consider this concept of the creative power "Adler's crowning achievement as a personality theorist."

All psychological processes come under the influence of the individual's life style; not only his actions, motives and emotions, but particularly also his cognitive processes. In fact, the former are subordinated to the cognitive processes, the individual's schema of apperception, his picture of the world, his opinion of himself and the world. Thus Robert W. Leeper (1963, p. 369), presenting a modern "cognitive" approach to problems of personality and learning, acknowledges: "Among the important workers in the field of personality

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upon whom I have depended are, especially, Adler, Sullivan, Horney, Rogers, and Diamond."

Social interest. For Gladys L. Anderson (1961, p. 481), social interest—as realized by the creative self in social interaction—is the key phrase in Adlerian psychology. On account of this, she considers that "Alfred Adler's theories of thirty years ago are quite contemporary today . . . psychologists are catching up with Adler. ..."

As to the ethical factor implied in the concept of social interest, the psychiatrist Thomas S. Szasz (1961, pp. 266-267) has called attention to Adler: "The notions of democracy, equality, reciprocity, and cooperation were never discussed in Freud's writings. ... In contrast, Adler freely expressed his concept of the morally desirable or 'mentally healthy' human relationship. It was characterized to a high degree by *social interest* and *cooperativeness*. . . . The point that I wish to make is that I believe Adler was ahead of his time in openly acknowledging the role of values—and moral problems, generally—in human psychology and psychotherapy. At the beginning of this century, it was bad enough to study sexual behavior. The scientific study of ethical behavior was completely impossible. Only during the past several decades—and only because of the rapid growth of the social sciences—has it become possible to undertake a scientifically respectable study of moral problems as an integral part of human behavior."

Adler's concept of social interest is an integral part of his view of man as not confronted by, but firmly embedded in society. Adler refused "to recognize and examine an isolated human being" (A1956b, p. 2) and spoke of "the iron logic of communal life." Thus, in his survey of the history of modern psychology, Gardner Murphy (1949, p. 341) finds that "Adler's was the first psychological system in the history of psychology that was developed in what we should today call a social-science direction."

EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHIATRY

A significant development during the last years is the growing influence of the thinking of the existentialists on psychology and psychiatry. Existential psychology sees man as a unique being, funda-

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mentally concerned with the meaning of his existence and with plans and projects to solve his existential problems. In order to understand a person we must try to see his situation as much as possible from his own point of view. Existential psychology is a movement away from a mechanistic, deterministic, and analytical approach to man. All these basic points for which existential psychology stands were also very central in Adler's system. It is therefore not surprising that the existential psychologist Wilson M. Van Dusen (1959, p. 156) discovered that Adler's system "translates rather directly" into existential psychology.

One of the first to point out the similarity between existentialism and Adlerian psychology was the philosopher Alfred Stern, analyzing the work of Jean-Paul Sartre. Stern (1958, p. 38) states that "Sartre is much more Adlerian than he might know or want to admit," while many of the differences which Sartre stresses are only apparent.

The chief theorist behind the existentialist movement in psychiatry is Martin Heidegger. Pointing out his "abstruse, semi-poetic, nearly mystical metaphysics" the psychologist Joseph Lyons (1961, p. 149) maintains that instead of Heidegger, "On the basis of his lectures and writings, Adler ought to have been the first source rediscovered by adherents of the new existentialist emphasis in psychology and psychiatry."

But there are also direct personal lines of descent from Adlerian psychology to existential psychology. Viktor E. Frankl, one of the leading European existential psychiatrists, started out with Adler, and his main contribution has been described as an extension of Adler's views to human situations of suffering and aging (Birnbau, 1961). Rollo May, one of the outstanding existential psychologists in the United States, also started with Adler. Of one of May's early books, recently reprinted (1959), a reviewer said: "Alfred Adler is the book's *elan vital*" (Hall, 1959).

Henri F. Ellenberger (1955), coeditor with May and Angel of the current American standard work on existential psychology (May *et al.*, 1958), becomes quite explicit regarding the lineage from Adler. In the historical part of a paper on existential analysis Ellenberger discusses the various key concepts of Adler and finds that they "constitute in several respects an interesting prefiguration of those of

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existential analysis." He demonstrates this by drawing a number of parallels between the concepts of Adler and of Binswanger. In contrast, Freud is considered farthest removed from existentialism among the founders of modern psychotherapy. This, despite the fact that so many existential psychotherapists attempt to reconcile their position with that of Freud. According to Harold Kelman (1962, p. 120), a leader of the Homey group: "Of existentialism there is least in Freud, somewhat more in Jung and Rank, and the most in Adler and Ferenczi." "While for Freud, society was a fixed coordinate to which the individual should adjust, Adler focused on man as a social being. In defining the individual's life style and the movement from below to above and for completion, his ideas flow in the current of

phenomenology. If we speak of social beingness as the individual's unique way of being-in-this-world, his thinking is existentialistic" (p. 115)

May we conclude this part with the observation by Van Dusen (1958): "One almost wonders if the existential analytic movement is not a revolt against Freud which would not have been so imperative if the main analytic current in Europe had followed Adler instead of Freud."

NEO-FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS

The position of the neo-Freudians may be briefly described as stressing social relations rather than biological factors, the self rather than the id and the superego, the striving for self-actualization rather than the sex instinct, and the present situation rather than early experiences. A number of neo-Freudians have come very close to existential psychology.

The similarity of all these points of emphasis to those of Adler serves as another confirmation of—and helps explain the revived *I* interest in—his concepts. Actually, the question has frequently been raised whether these later deviators from Freud should not be called neo-Adlerians. In his textbook on psychological theories, Benjamin B. Wolman (1960, p. 298) remarks: "It has to be said that Adler's influence is much greater than is usually admitted. The entire neo-psychoanalytic school, including Horney, Fromm, and Sullivan, is

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no less neo-Adlerian than it is neo-Freudian. Adler's concepts of sociability, self-assertion, security, self, and creativeness permeated the theories of the neo-analysts."

Sundberg and Tyler (1962, p. 394) also point out the neo-Freudian—neo-Adlerian equation. They further observe: "It is an interesting fact that . . . the essential ideas of Adlerian psychology crop up again and again in the writings of other psychologists, often persons who begin with a Freudian psychoanalytic orientation. . . . It is as though other persons, when they reach a certain stage in their development, feel a need to break with Freud on essentially the same grounds that Adler originally did" (p. 360).

Earlier, Munroe (1955, p. 334) had made the same point. She finds that, although Horney, Sullivan, and Fromm owe no direct allegiance to Adler and, historically, represent new revolts from Freud, nevertheless their theoretical additions seem to belong in the section with Adler rather than in the Freudian section. This pattern is followed by Hall and Lindzey (1957, pp. 114-156) who regard Adler as the ancestral figure of the "new social psychological look" in psychoanalytic theory, by which they mean Horney, Fromm, and Sullivan.

The late Clara Thompson (1950, pp. 160-161), who is herself counted among the neo-Freudians, says about Adler that "he anticipated by several years a more general acceptance of several similar ideas. He was a pioneer in applying psychoanalysis to the total personality. . . . He was the first person to describe a part of the role of the Ego in producing neurosis and to

show that the direction in which a person is going, that is, his goals, significantly contribute to his neurotic difficulties."

FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS

The recent developments in Freudian circles proper also point toward Adler. Since the death of Freud, even his closest followers have tended to place more emphasis on the role of the ego in the total personality. It is exactly this emphasis which Adler placed on the self and the unity of personality which was one of the issues that in 1911 led to his parting from Freud, who accused him of being interested merely in ego psychology. In this and certain other connections

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Robert W. White (1957a) stated: "In certain respects it is indeed legitimate to say that Freudian psychology is in process of catching up with Adler." Elsewhere, White (1957b, p. 114) agrees with Munroe in affirming that "the first pioneering steps toward an ego psychology within psychoanalysis were taken by Alfred Adler." This is also the judgment of Martin Hoffman (1962, p. 231) who goes further, to point out that Adler's pioneering development of ego psychology was "later taken up by Freud and his disciples."

Recalling that Adler's theory was at first denounced by Freud and his followers for being essentially an ego psychology, O. H. Mowrer (1959) asks, "What is the New Look in psychoanalysis itself?" and gives the answer, "Ego psychology!"

The behavioristically oriented psychologist, John Dollard (1956), who believes that Freud's system is mainly right, at the same time holds that to perfect and complete it "there is most to be gained by reviewing the work of Alfred Adler."

COMPARISON WITH OTHER PERSONALITY THEORIES

Adler's theory has come out well in two studies comparing current personality theories through cluster analysis and factor analysis. The studies used quite different sets of data: the first, purely theoretical; the second, more applied.

Hall and Lindzey (1957, pp. 539-550) rated 17 personality theories on 18 dimensions. These ratings were subjected by Taft (1958) to a cluster analysis. He found, among other interesting results, that with regard to "most similarity in factors to the 16 other theories," Adler's came first among the top three, which included Freud's and H. A. Murray's. From this Taft concludes that these three theories "are either very eclectic ... or have had a major influence on other theories. Let the reader decide for himself."

Farberow and Shneidman (1961, pp. 306-313) asked theoreticians of six different orientations to appraise one case of attempted suicide, in a "blind" analysis, by the Q-sort technique. The

well the flavor of the feelings for mankind expressed by self-actualizing subjects. They have for human beings in general a deep feeling of identification, sympathy, and affection in spite of occasional anger, impatience, or disgust. . . . They have a genuine desire to help the human race. It is as if they were all members of a single family."

Being close to Maslow in his views, Sidney M. Jourard (1963, p. 21) has incorporated the idea of social interest in his definition of mental health: "[The mentally healthy individual] can take himself more or less for granted and devote his energies and thoughts to socially meaningful interests and problems beyond security, or lovability, or status." Jourard appreciates that "Adler's writings have been influential in psychiatry and in education, though perhaps less widely recognized than those of Freud. The concept of social feeling accords with the highest precepts of ethics and religion and represents a wholesome corrective to the more pathology-oriented psychoanalytic writings" (p. 8).

The mental health aspect of Adler's theory is also brought out by Hall and Lindzey (1957, p. 125): "Adler fashioned a humanistic theory of personality which was the antithesis of Freud's conception of man. By endowing man with altruism, humanitarianism, cooperation, creativity, uniqueness, and awareness, he restored to man a sense of dignity and worth that psychoanalysis had pretty largely destroyed. In place of the dreary materialistic picture which horrified and repelled many readers of Freud, Adler offered a portrait of man which was more satisfying, more hopeful, and far more complimentary to man. Adler's conception of the nature of personality coincided with the popular idea that man can be the master, and not the victim, of his fate."

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The reviewer in the *London Times* (Anonymous, 1958), mentioned before, concludes: "This more optimistic view of organized society is undoubtedly the real reason for the present revival of interest in Adler. Both he and our modern neo-Freudians share a belief not only in the therapeutic function of the group but in the ultimate betterment of society itself. Neurosis, they seem to say, is the price paid not for civilization but for its lack."

ANTHROPOLOGY

The anthropologist Ashley Montagu has for some time been explicit in his regard for Adler's concept of social interest. Montagu (1955, p. 185) applies this concept to the mother-child relationship, to education, and to man's relatedness in general, in support of his own view that "life is social and man is born to be social, that is cooperative—an interdependent part of a whole."

A recent development is the central significance attributed to Adler by another anthropologist, Ernest Becker (1962). He holds that the need for self-esteem, for overcoming inferiority

feelings, for establishing and maintaining his worth in his own eyes, is the most specific characteristic of man, which becomes evident throughout the diversity of cultures.

Becker accuses Freud of having retarded the development of the social sciences by his instinct theory, and by his contentions of innate aggression and of essential individual-society antagonism. Becker speaks of "the straight jacket in which Freud has held social scientists" (p. 133) for a half-century. Today, "Freud's physiological-drive invariants have been all but wholly discredited by researchers in a variety of disciplines. . . . Most of the major invariants which Freud derived from his theory of human development are spurious" (p. 162).

Becker then makes the astoundingly forceful statement: "We shall make no real progress in social science until we accept the symbolic nature of human striving upon which Adler—who early abandoned the concept of aggression—insisted long ago" (p. 134). And finally he adds his own protest to the growing number of protests by others, over the temporary historical eclipse of Adler: "It is incredible that human

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behavior can be discussed from a psychoanalytic point of view Without mentioning Adler's name. Or that some so-called 'neo-Freudians' can deliver ostensibly 'fresh' ideas with an air of discovery, when many of these ideas were adumbrated by Adler over a half-century ago. Freud set a precedent for ignoring Adler's dangerously competitive brilliance, which has been continued ever since their formal split" (p. 200).

ACTIVITIES OF ADLERIANS

The period which marks the low point of Adlerian psychology in the United States, as well as elsewhere, was around 1940, according to Rudolf Dreikurs (1956), one of the leaders in Individual Psychology today. It was in this year that he founded the *Individual Psychology Bulletin*, which eventually evolved into the current *Journal of Individual Psychology*, and which he edited until 1956. The purpose of the present journal, published by the American Society of Adlerian Psychology, is to be the scientific medium of all those concerned with the study of the individual person, conceived as being unique, self-consistent, active, and creative; always oriented and motivated toward a goal of success which lies ahead of him; and endowed with an innate potentiality for social living and contribution. In this sense the journal endeavours to continue the tradition of Adler.

Since the low point, Adlerian psychologists and psychiatrists have reconstituted themselves in a number of places. Today there are regional associations in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles which maintain training institutes and mental hygiene centers. There are also several clinics and groups elsewhere. The central organization is the American Society of Adlerian Psychology which conducts annual meetings and publishes the above-mentioned journal.

In addition there are Adlerian groups in Austria, England, France, fjolland, Israel, and Switzerland. Together with the American Society, they form the International Association of Individual Psychology which publishes the *Individual Psychology News Letter*, Paul Rom, rditor, and has been holding international congresses every three years.

The present-day work of Adlerians is best reflected in two publications. R. Dreikurs, R. Corsini, R. Lowe, and M. Sonstegard (1959)

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have edited a manual for counseling centers to which fourteen individuals have contributed.⁴ The second publication is a volume edited by Kurt A. Adler and Danica Deutsch (1959), to which 48 Adlerians, mostly from the New York City area, have contributed. Finally, for a recent survey of the contributions of Adlerians since 1955 the reader is referred to a paper by Helene and Ernst Papanek (1961).

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