

Hitler: An Adlerian View

Paul Rom

For more than a decade, Adolph Hitler (1899-1945) was the Führer of Germany. When studying Adler's list of human complexes (Adler, 1964), one finds that Hitler had three outstanding mental deformities: redeemer, predestination, and leader complexes—special forms of a general superiority complex which, as Adler taught, is the other side of an inferiority complex.

Some people may ask: Wasn't Hitler a superior man? He freed the German people from Marxist and Jewish domination. With a certainty of being predestined to save the German people, he led them from conquest to conquest. Didn't all the world tremble with fear?

History has seen similar "great men." Before Hitler, there was Napoleon, who to encourage his soldiers for battle, said, "Each one of you carries a marshal's baton in his knapsack!" After his defeat and inglorious retreat from Moscow, Napoleon realized, however, that "from the sublime to the ridiculous, there is only one step." He ended his days as a prisoner in St. Helena.

There was also Wilhelm II, the German Kaiser. In 1914, at the beginning of the Great War, he told the German people: "I lead you into the glorious future!" Born with a short arm, he may have had a feeling of inferiority and tried to overcompensate by outshining all his fellow monarchs. Defeated in 1918, he escaped as a war criminal and settled in neutral Holland for the rest of his life.

After the reign of this monarch came Hitler. He knew that if he failed no country in the world would give him asylum to spend his days as a Sunday painter, so his end was suicide. His hidden neurotic idea may have been thus to accuse both the world who had misunderstood him and his people, who had betrayed their Führer. Considering his case in the framework of Adler's Individual Psychology, one can see that the complexes mentioned above fit into his lifestyle (Adler, 1956).

Paul Rom, PhD, has written numerous articles on Adlerian topics. He is the editor of the Newsletter of the International Association of Individual Psychology. Dr. Rom resides in London, England.

Physically, Hitler was anything but handsome. We do not know about any particular illnesses, and it cannot be ascertained that he was aware of having only one testicle. The Russians claim that they discovered this fact when examining his corpse (Brink, 1975). In some photographs he seems to have been left-sided.

About his family we know that his father had a powerful physique. The elder Hitler was born out of wedlock but had well compensated this social inferiority when he obtained the respectable, and in a way powerful, position of a customs official. He seems to have been a lonely man; beekeeping was his hobby, and his friendships were found in the tavern. When his duties did not keep him away from home, he was a rigid father who used to scold and punish his children for every misdemeanor. If he was guiding image for little Adolph, it was an image of an apparently powerful person, lonely yet dominating, and not enjoying much respect and love from his family.

Klara, Adolph's natural mother and Alois Hitler's third wife, kept the family together with housewifely efficiency. The burden of bringing up the children was left to her. This courageous woman, who had to raise all those stepchildren, lost several of her own children before Adolph was born. For the psychologically decisive first 5 years of his life, he was the only child that survived. This position and the idea that he alone of his mother's children was still alive may have given him a feeling of uniqueness and of being predestined for survival. Understandably, the mother pampered this child who was so precious to her. She protected him against his rude father, yet could not give him the experience of a happy family life. The boy never developed a sense of humor. He laughed mainly in depreciation of others.

As one may expect, at the *Realschule* (a kind of secondary school), Adolph did not make friends with teachers or classmates. His inclination to avoid warm relations is also discernible in the poor human relationships with his later political associates. He seems to have never really loved anyone but himself.

As an adolescent, Adolph had a friend named Kubizek. This submissive chap was hardly a real friend, but was used as the public for the grandiloquent monologues that were a portend of things to come.

Adolph's father had moved up socially, although he remained a frustrated human being. He would have liked his son to move higher in the hierarchy of civil servants. But could the isolated adolescent who believed himself to be someone special imagine himself modestly serving other citizens? And had not his father, who impressed the child as a powerful person, often humiliated him? It may have been an act of rebellion against the father's only apparent superiority in relation to the mother that the son went to Vienna and tried to be admitted to the art academy. "They" did not accept

him. At first, he did not speak about his failure to Kubizek; but, talking weeks afterwards about his mishap, Adolph blamed both his former teachers and the examiners of the academy. Denouncing the latter, he could feel he was a "misunderstood talent." The reality of his life was that for years he was an amateur painter whose poor products were refused by art dealers. So, he vegetated as a laborer, sometimes even a tramp. Fantastic scheming could not increase his value as a human being. Later, he was to compensate his inferiority feelings, formed as a candidate refused by the art academy, by making and carrying out grandiose plans of monumental edifices. So he reached the age of 25 with no real friendships, no good job. What about love?

Hitler had no pleasant intimate relationships with women and was probably a masturbator rather than a homosexual. To conserve his image as a man, he would claim that he remained a bachelor because of his "mission" to "redeem the German people." His vehement outbursts against syphilis in his *Mein Kampf* may have been a mask for his fear of women (Rom, 1957).

Perceiving an apparently strong father, the boy had really experienced the mother as superior to her partner. Her overprotection prevented the boy from developing solid male self-esteem. As an adolescent, Hitler once had a romance with a girl, but it was one-sided. He never approached his beloved one; rather, he built imaginary villas for her from a distance.

His love for the German people was also frigid and barren. He did not think of their happiness as human beings, he just planned a new Reich for them which was to last a thousand years. When he had become the almighty Fuhrer, some neurotic women wooed him, tried to catch him with tricks, and even committed suicide because he would not respond to their "love." In 1931, when Eva Braun entered his private life, he had not fallen in love with her; she had won him by amusing him.

So it seems likely that Hitler's self-ideal was that of a cold-hearted builder of fantastic edifices and realms, which were not destined for people to live and love in, but were monuments to his own glory.

His dreams had in no way been realized, when in 1914 World War I broke out. Hitler was 25 years old. Would this social upheaval change his basic dynamism, his movement from an extreme nadir to a not less extreme zenith? Could new circumstances change his dynamism, his abstract behavior patterns, his lifestyle? The assumption is that the lifestyle will remain constant.

The young nobody from little Austria, whose achievements so far had been dream castles, without a personal effort became a soldier in the mighty German army. He had a new uniform, was well-fed, and like other soldiers was respected, even admired, by the patriotic populace. Fulfilling simple duties in this new position, his real self-esteem would increase. For the soldier

Hitler there was no one to pamper or pity him, no one to whom he could complain. As a *ex-Realschüler* he was better schooled than most of the soldiers around him. Having trained himself, with the admiring Kubizek, to talk fluently and imaginatively, he may have impressed his comrades, which would reinforce his feeling of uniqueness. He later volunteered for dangerous missions—what could happen to him? He was twice decorated, i.e., nearly a superman. He later said he was happy in those war years and felt that army life strengthens the personality—a meaningless generalization.

During the war years, the immature dreamer of greatness, feeling predestined to achieve great things, experienced that with force and brutality one can win power and superiority—but for how long? When, in 1918, after 4½ years of war, Germany capitulated, he fantastically proclaimed (like many others of his kind) that the army had been stabbed in the back by pacifists, liberals, democrats, Marxists, and Jews.

After the breakdown of the monarch, the new Weimer Republic, in spite of great cultural achievements, could not possibly bring about a satisfactory democratic life for all. The peace treaty of Versailles was an unbearable burden for the Republic. Those workers who had dreamed of “socialism in our time” had neither the political power nor the skill to realize their ideal. Many had been demoralized during the war. Those who had the economic power were looking sadly back to the Kaiserreich. They were guided by the old profit motive. They would let millions of workers, who were for them only “hands,” become depraved by long unemployment. Many of the latter were now ready to listen to a fanatic speaker who, in Munich, had joined an originally small group of malcontents who misleadingly called themselves the “National Socialist Worker’s Party.” The cunning demagogue, Hitler, used popular prejudices like anti-Semitism and made false claims and promises in order to recommend himself as the savior of the German people.

In the first years after World War I, “redeemers” traveled around in Germany, trying to find followers, without success. Hitler, however, obtained the help of powerful industrialists and financiers. These tycoons thought Hitler and his ignorant masses would defend them against the organized workers whose goal it was, by reform or revolution, “to expropriate the expropriators.” With this slogan, Marx had encouraged them to work for a change in their miserable lot. So a number of tycoons financed Hitler’s new party. They helped to create the private army of the brown shirts. Many politically uneducated workers felt their self-esteem increase when donning the Nazi uniform. Many found the mysterious swastika attractive. Hitler’s fanatical, ruthless fight for personal power over all others and for his own glory finally got him the role of Fuhrer. In the spirit of an almighty autocrat, he once said, “Nothing happens in my party without my willing it.” He took his megalomania for his predestination to “redeem” Germany and finally the world.

He degraded the originally religious character of the concept "redeemer." With the false ideal of *Volksgemeinschaft* (community of the people), he prostituted the concept of *Gemeinschaft* (human solidarity). People who did not shout, "Heil, Hitler," were excluded. Hitler's self-chosen title *Führer* expressed a pathological complex that veiled a bloody dictator. One may ask, must every leader be an autocrat?

As far back as the sixth century, Leotzu said:

A leader is best
When people hardly know that he exists;
Not so good, when people obey and acclaim him;
Worst when they despise him.
Fail to honor people,
They fail to honor you.
But of the good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They will all say "We did this ourselves."

We may compare this poetically expressed ancient wisdom with the insight of modern Individual Psychology. In 1925, Alfred Adler spoke about leaders in these terms:

The craving for power is in masses as in individuals an expression of the sense of inferiority, of inadequacy. Therefore, mass movements can be properly understood only from a perspective which shows how this striving upwards, which permeates all humanity, originates in the individual.

If the life tendencies of an individual coincide completely or almost completely with the direction of a mass movement, if the yearning of the masses is incarnated in him, if he can lend his voice and his arm to express and defend the dumb and obscure striving of his people or his group, he is a chosen leader of Man. All great achievements of humanity originate in the social genius of individuals.

The questions of an age demand an answer and find it in a man. They cramp him and he tries to work them. In order to adjust himself to existence, he has to reorganize it. But he can succeed only if his endeavor coincides with a mass current and serves to promote and elevate the group. The power of the individual leader, of the "Great Man," is limited by the degree to which the masses are prepared to follow, by their capacity to fall in line with him. So the personal requirements of leadership are first of all a strongly developed *sense of solidarity*. An *optimistic outlook* and *sufficient self-confidence* come next. The leader must be endowed with *capacity for quick action*; he must not belong to

the type of dreamer or onlooker. He must have *ease in his contact with people* and must possess *tact*, so as not to frustrate the ascent of others. His preparation, his training must be above the average. He must, in a word, be a “real” human being who possesses *courage* and equipment. In him lives the dreams of others. (italics added) (Adler, 1925)

In Individual Psychology, *courage* is a total attitude toward life, characterized by activity and social interest or human solidarity. Hitler made certain brave and colorful single decisions, but he was, however, in disaccord with mankind as a whole, was negative, and was not courageous in the Adlerian meaning of the word.

Hitler’s Führer dream was that of his personal greatness; Germany was a means to this end. He succeeded in deceiving and fanaticizing those thoughtless masses who had given up mankind “striving upward” toward a democratic life in human dignity. They were alienated and confused since they were living like “have-nots” in a society based on making profit and not on producing goods to satisfy the real needs of the people.

Hitler’s goal to win uniqueness and superiority over human beings by any means was extremely high and strong. It compensated the feeling of the child who felt himself to be nothing, although the protection of his mother allowed him to retain a minimum of self-esteem. His “striving upwards” was neurotic, for its goal was devoid of human solidarity. The complex Fuhrer was bound to end miserably, having cruelly misled people away from the goal of evolution: mankind living in human solidarity.

References

- Adler, A. Interview with Eugene Bragger. *New York Times*, November 20, 1925.
- Adler, A. Complex compulsion as part of personality and neurosis (1935). In *Superiority and social interest: A collection of later writings*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964.
- Adler, A. The style of life. In H. L. Ansbacher & R. R. Ansbacher (Eds.), *The individual psychology of Alfred Adler*. New York: Basic Books, 1956.
- Brink, T. L. The case of Hitler: An Adlerian perspective in psychohistory. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 31:1, 1975.
- Rom, P. The problem of “distance” in sex behaviour. *Int. Journal Soc. Psychiatry*, 3 (2). 1957.