

ADLER'S REACH BEYOND PSYCHOLOGY

by Clarence Senior, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology
Graduate Program of Brooklyn College and the
City University of New York

It is ironic that the one Viennese psychologist who called his discipline individual psychology, was the one who indubitably was one of the greatest of social psychologists!

An M.D., trained in a psychology which still placed great stress on the four "temperaments" known to the ancient Greeks, he broke from what he called this "honorable and sacred relic." He began to investigate the social situation in which an individual developed. Although he is best known by the catch-phrase "feeling of inferiority," his explanation of the family constellation seems to this sociologist one of his most important contributions.

My own contacts with Dr. Adler arose from my dissatisfaction with psychologists in the United States whose purpose seemed set on the "adjustment" of people to a "realistic" life situation. I was not at all satisfied with a society in which the ethos seemed to be summarized in the creed, "Everyone for himself and the Devil take the hindmost." I heard of a psychologist in Vienna who had been involved in attempts to reconstruct the school system along lines of respect for the personality of the child and the human need for mutual aid and cooperation. I participated in two summer sessions of Dr. Adler's circle in Vienna and came to have a feeling of deep personal affection for him. Later, I was privileged to be his host on several of his visits to Cleveland, Ohio, on his speaking tours. He was one of dozens of famous figures brought to Cleveland by the Adult Education Association--but by all odds the most stimulating in his intense personal interest in what was happening in schools, in civic life, in intellectual circles and even in popular forms of entertainment. We attended a Clara Bow movie one afternoon and an incident on the screen provided him with a theme for his lecture that evening!

When, some years later I was fortunate enough to know Otto and Alice Rühle during their exile in Mexico, I learned from them how Dr. Adler's ideas had been helpful to the social-democratic movements of both Austria and Germany in their attempts to substitute a humane, empathetic approach to education for the authoritarian approach which had made such a horrendous contribution to the holocausts of World Wars I and II.

More recently, I have benefited tremendously by knowing Drs. Helene and Ernst Papanek. From the latter's book, The Austrian School Reform, I got a fuller view of the times during which Adler and his colleagues operated.

It was on the Caribbean island of Jamaica that I encountered in a dramatic manner another instance of the far reach of Dr. Adler's influence. As I discussed matters with a local physician, I noted a sizeable collection of works on Individual Psychology and its author. I asked whether the physician had known Dr. Adler and was puzzled by an enigmatic "yes--and no." It developed that as an interne in a

Scottish hospital the physician had been intrigued by the title of a speech to be made at the local medical society by Dr. Adler. The evening of the event, he had changed into his street clothes several minutes before he was off duty in the emergency receiving room so that he could arrive at the lecture hall on time. Impatiently he heard the wail of an ambulance siren arriving just five minutes before his turn was over. Hastily he donned a white hospital coat and prepared to check in a case. The ambulance driver told him it was a man who had dropped dead on the main street of the city. Tragically, the interne recognized Dr. Adler from the announcement which attracted his attention to the meeting.

Adler's untimely death thirty years ago deprived the world of one of its most productive citizens. Fortunately, his ideas, ideals and methods for "Understanding Human Nature" continue to be carried forward by those who seized the torch he lighted. Unfortunately, there is still a long way to go in both education and clinical work to the time foreseen by Adler when he wrote, "The new positional or contextual psychology founded upon the experiences of Individual Psychology will prove its rightness . . . and will force the present dispositional or constitutional psychology to strike its colors."

We must persist, even as Dr. Adler persisted, in spite of all difficulties.

ADLER'S SENSE OF PERSONAL COMMITMENT

by Nahum E. Shoobs, New York, N. Y.

Alfred Adler was an ethical descendant of the prophets of old. His wisdom was at once farsighted and immediately practical. He was as preoccupied with helping man make his community a good place in which to live as he was devoted to helping the individual patient. And he was a pragmatist in the sense that he tested behavior as to whether it helped or hindered others.

For example: At Dr. Adler's suggestion, I would at times submit to him my initial interview with a patient. One such patient was suffering from both depression and a thyroid imbalance.

I can still see Dr. Adler taking off his pince-nez to read my report on this young woman. Finishing his reading, he replaced his pince-nez and said quietly, "Shoobs, you are qualified to treat her, but since she requires medication, I believe a psychiatrist should take care of her." I observed, "But she hasn't much money." Adler remained quiet. "I can't ask a psychiatrist to treat her for nothing," I continued. Then Adler in his own gentle way said, "Well then send her to me."