

Adler and the Others

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The School of Individual Psychology has now been in existence for nearly four decades. We may consider Adler's "Study of Organic Inferiorities," published in 1907,¹ as the physiological basis of his psychology. The system as a whole was fixed with his "Study of the Nervous Character"² and supplemented by "Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology."³

Let us consider the influence of Adler upon the attitude of general psychologists. For a considerable time few new books on psychology have failed to mention, criticize, appreciate, or depreciate, Individual Psychology—or make use of its findings without explicit reference to Adler and his School.

I

Let us review what different psychologists have considered as the *subject matter* of their science.

(i) *William James* (1842-1910) in his classical textbook defines psychology as "the science of *mental life*,"* both of its phenomena and of their conditions." In illustrating this, he goes on: "The phenomena are what we call feelings, desires, cognitions, reasonings, decisions and the like."⁴ (vol. 1, p. 1).

(ii) *Wilhelm Wundt* (1832-1920), father of experimental psychology, held that "psychology has to investigate what we call *internal experience*,"* i.e., our own sensations and feelings, our thought and volition, in contradistinction to the objects of external experience which form the matter of natural science."⁵

The last century, therefore, witnessing the emancipation of psychology from philosophy and physiology and its development as an independent discipline of human knowledge,⁶ considered *the mind in itself* and its *elements* as the subject of the new science.

(iii) *Woodworth*, the great American teacher of our own day, defines psychology as the "science of the *activities of the individual*"⁷ (p. 3). His British colleague, (iv) *Thouless*, says that psychology is "the positive science of *human experience and behaviour*."⁸ (p. 1). What a long way psychology has thus progressed from being the science of passive parts to that of active wholes!

(v) Before the first edition of Woodworth's textbook (1922), *Adler* had written: "Individual Psychology, a definite science with a limited sub-

*Italics by author.

ject matter, covers the *whole range of psychology in a survey*, and as a *result* it is able to mirror the *indivisible unity of the personality*.”³ (p. v).

Thus, the general trend shifted quite clearly from concern with the elements of the mind, from a kind of mental chemistry, toward consideration of the whole: the personality, the individual and his behavior. Adler doubtlessly had a strong influence upon this development; he could have written the following sentences penned by Woodworth: “The individual is a real unit. It is the individual that loves and hates, succeeds or fails. He has tasks to perform, problems to solve. He deals more or less effectively and happily with other persons and with things. There is a vast network of interaction between the individual, taken as a whole, and the world about him, and this interaction calls for scientific investigation.”⁷ (p. 314). . . . Though each individual is in a sense unique, each is not ‘a law unto himself.’ The same causal laws operate in all people, even in the most eccentric and abnormal. If there were no general laws of personality, the task of the psychological adviser would be hopeless. He must apply to one individual what he has learned from the study of other individuals and what he knows of the organism and its relations with the environment.” (p. 165).

We can see that Adler’s findings are now incorporated in general psychology as taught at British and American universities, and Woodworth’s textbook gives in an excellent manner the detailed material needed by the Individual Psychologist who wishes to cover “the whole range of psychology in a survey.”

(vi) It may seem paradoxical that in the development of psychology from studying the mind and its elements to studying the individual and his behaviour, *Watson’s* school which adopted the name of “Behaviourism” turned aside from the main trend of psychological thought, although Watson meant the subject matter of psychology to be: “The total behaviour of a man from infancy to death.”⁹ Woodworth says: “Behaviourism limits its observations to the visible actions of the individual in the environment and hopes thus to bring psychology more closely into line with biology, chemistry, and physics.”⁷ (p. 583). In this formulation Woodworth is careful to adopt a middle-of-the-road attitude, which McDougall would consider as an “expression of his inveterate tendency to sit on the fence.”¹⁰ (p. 454). Adler has pointed out that Watson’s “Behaviourism” is a mere reflexology, having as its basis the conception of reflexes, of stimuli and motor responses, which are being conditioned and can be unconditioned. There is, however, a creativeness in man, a capacity to *form* by trial and error, and to *correct* within certain limits, his *life-style*, for “the child is constantly confronted afresh with ever varying problems that cannot be solved either by trained (conditioned) reflexes or by innate psychical capacities.”¹¹ (p. 12).

(vii) *Gestalt Psychology* (configurationism) "holds that the individual's process of learning, of perceiving, of thinking, of acting, is always a working from the whole to the parts and not a building of parts together to make a whole."⁷ (p. 583). We agree and understand that Adler's formulation in the last restatement of his teaching has a slightly polemic flavour. He says: "The child's creative energy 'uses' all impressions and sensations in building up his lasting attitude to life, in developing his individual law of movement. This fact, brought into prominence by Individual Psychology, was afterwards denoted 'attitude' or 'configuration' (Gestalt) without reference to the individual as a whole and to his close connection with the three great problems of life."¹¹ (p. 170). . . . the 'Gestaltpsychologie' needs to be supplemented by Individual Psychology in order to be able to form any conclusion regarding the attitude of the individual in the life-process." (p. 39). A recent introduction to experimental psychology, by a Gestalt psychologist, with a preface by Prof. Koffka, one of the leaders of the "Gestalt School," is a confirmation of Adler's statement. We do not find the name of Adler in it, and that of Freud is merely mentioned incidentally.

(viii) The general development of psychology toward taking the "indivisible unity of the personality" as its subject matter has manifested itself also in the school of "Psychoanalysis," which set out to study the "*unconscious mind*." Adler pointed this out with the following words: ". . . if we use the right method, we shall always encounter the ego, the personality as a whole; while, if we start with the wrong conception (i.e., an elementaristic, atomic view—P.P.), we shall find what seems to be an antithesis of some kind, such as that between the conscious and the unconscious. Freud, the representative of this latter view, by a forced march approaches a better understanding of the problem, when he speaks, as he does today¹² of the *unconscious in the ego*. This, of course, gives the ego quite a different face—which Individual Psychology was first to recognize."¹¹ (p. 244).

To sum up this part of our considerations, we may say that Adler's discovery of the *individual*, i.e., the indivisible whole of the unique personality in motion, has been nearly generally accepted by modern psychologists. There is not, however, the same acceptance of Adler's finding that each individual constructs a life-style, or plan, in terms of a *goal* (the personality-ideal or guiding fiction), and that this goal is chosen, without awareness, as a plus to compensate the individual's feeling of a minus.

II

(i) Teleology in human behaviour, the conception with which Adler opened his book on the Nervous Character, is also an essential part of the "purposive psychology," which McDougall expounded as "hormic psychology." Strangely enough, McDougall as Social-Psychologist paid no attention to Adler's Individual Psychology. As it was he who developed in

greatest detail a theory of instincts (or *propensities*), he is in disagreement with Freud, especially with the latter's "unfortunate pan-sexual tendency."¹⁰

As to the notion of teleology, of goal-seeking, we find McDougall in a polemic with Woodworth, who, in "Psychologies of 1925," had discussed "Dynamic Psychology." Woodworth opened by saying: "Some authors, as especially McDougall, appear to teach that any thorough-going causal interpretation of human behaviour and experience implies shutting one's eyes to the facts of purpose and striving. There is certainly some confusion here. There can be no contradiction between the purposiveness of a sequence of action and its being a causal sequence. A purpose is certainly a cause: if it had no effect, it would be without significance . . . it is a link in a causal chain." We agree with Woodworth on the whole; Adler used the expression "causal-final," which has done much to clarify the process of compensation.

As McDougall sees a contradiction between causality and teleology in an absolutistic instead of a dialectic manner, it seems to me on this point he lags behind Adler and stays within the 19th century. He, as well as Thouless, who would like to supplement Adler by Freud⁸ (p. 196), are "Besitz"-psychologists in Adler's sense and not yet "Gebrauchs"-psychologists. It is true, Thouless is in search of more realistic dynamic conceptions than inborn instincts and goals and says: "If we decide that we cannot make much use of McDougall's conception of propensity because of the implication of innateness and the impossibility of knowing how much of what determines any human behaviour system is innate, we are left with the necessity of finding equivalent dynamic terms which have not that implication."⁸ (p. 131). But his "tendencies" and "drives" do not lead much farther than McDougall's propensities and sentiments.

The following solution, as first worked out in different forms by earlier members of Adler's school (Sperber, O. and A. Ruehle, Kuenkel), seems satisfactory:

(ii) The individual's body and his social and cosmic position (mainly dominated by the causal laws of natural sciences) are the general condition for his behaviour and constitute a thesis. The comparing of our own physical and social existence with the superior one of others is the immediate cause of our feeling of inferiority or insecurity, i.e., a projection of reality into our mind. This constitutes an antithesis. The antagonism of both (real inferiority and the feeling of it) may work out a synthesis: the feeling of inferiority having come to a certain strength (arriving at a certain quantity), becomes a new quality, namely a striving for compensation; and the attained goal of this striving is a synthesis of the dialectical process, in which both, the initial "minus" and the feeling of it, are overcome (on the "useful side of life").

In this antagonism of real inferiority and feeling of inferiority, also a growing quantity of inferiority can become a new quality. Then no

courageous striving for compensation follows; and no synthesis in the form of a compensation, i.e., a useful behaviour. We rather find the vegetating existence on the "useless side of life" (neuroses, psychoses, psychopathic states), which may be called "catathesis" or "psycho-sclerosis" (Kuenkel). However, this can lead the individual either into a crisis of his personality, where a critical attitude and, with it, a new compensation process may be gained; or a compensation once obtained can transform itself anew into a position of inferiority, bringing about new strivings for superiority. This process is for each individual life itself and ends only with his death.

III

We have seen (I) that one of the main *general view-points* of Adler, namely that of seeing the *totality of the personality* as the relevant subject matter of psychology, has largely been accepted; and (II) that another one, namely that the *compensation process* underlying and determining uniformly all human behaviour, is still far from being generally understood and appreciated. Let us see what Woodworth says about Adler, when treating special points of general psychology, in the chapters on (i) Personality, (ii) Imagination, and (iii) Personal application.⁷

(i) Discussing the general theme of "individual differences," Woodworth deals with the concept of "personality" which is, we agree, "potentially the most interesting part of psychology."⁷ (p. 135). He distinguishes "personality" as "behavior towards others" from "character" as "right or wrong conduct" and says then: "Any little act may 'reveal the personality' by showing the individual's characteristic style of action." (p. 134).

Woodworth's illustrations for "describing, testing and measuring" personality seem to be a fair indication of what is going on in this field of psychological endeavor. But, after treating the admittedly unsatisfactory "profile," he fails to show a method of determining the "style of action" comparable to Adler's method of revealing the life style through early recollections.

(ii) In his chapter on "imagination," Woodworth speaks about *dreams*. After a short account of Freud's theory of "wish-fulfillment" he gives the following summary: "According to Adler, the dream is not a revival of the distant past, but a rehearsal for some impending action which the individual has to perform, and the dream, properly analyzed, reveals the individual's characteristic mode of attack on his problems." (p. 568).

(iii) It is under "personal applications," in the sub-chapter on "adjustment and maladjustment," that we find another reference to Adler: "In exploring a new situation, his observations may be superficial. Too little analysis, too much assimilation of the new to the old, may occur. For one reason or another, the situation is misunderstood and bungled. Or, the individual sees the facts clearly enough but has no liking for the part he

is expected to play. Or again, he is torn by a conflict of desires. He wants to do all that is expected of him, but finds it impossible to please everybody. He may feel very badly about it, and have a disturbing sense of guilt over what he is doing or failing to do." (p. 591).

Woodworth refuses to introduce the subject of *abnormal* psychology in his general text-book. One may accept that as a matter of teaching convenience; we should, however, not consider normal and abnormal psychology as two different psychologies. Neither does McDougall who wants us to take his two outlines of normal and of abnormal psychology as two parts of one whole¹³ (preface). The common basis for these two view-points of study is given for us in Adler's statement: "What distinguishes the nervous from the healthy individual is the stronger safeguarding tendency with which the former's life-plan is filled. With regard to the 'positing of a goal' and the life-plan adjusted to it, there are no fundamental differences" (between the nervous and the healthy individual).³ (p. 7). Woodworth touches, however, upon the subject of psychopathology in saying that "according to Freud's theory, maladjustments result from *frustration* of the more childish forms of sex desire which he believed to be present quite actively in the young child . . . (who) finds his desire for unlimited pleasure blocked and is thrown into a conflict situation which contains the germs of all life's future maladjustments." (p. 592).

Then, Woodworth speaks about Adler's theory: "The child's fundamental desire is conceived to be a demand for superiority and for overcoming the inferiority inherent in his status as a little child. His demand for superiority is subject to continual frustration and makes it difficult for him to adopt the give-and-take of a socialized human being. Unless the socializing process is tactfully managed by the parents, the child devises for himself a peculiar 'style of life' which gives him some sense of superiority though it is unsuited for real achievement. According to Adler, then, maladjustment arises from *frustration* of the individual's demand for achievement." (p. 592). Fair enough, although instead of "frustration," I should prefer to read "*discouragement*."

So, on the whole, we find that Individual Psychology is justly referred to in the text-book of Woodworth; this is to be expected, as he is also the author of "Contemporary Schools of Psychology"¹⁴ in which he devotes seven pages to Individual Psychology under the heading . . . "Modifications of Psycho-analysis."

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This survey indicates the difficulties in writing a modern general text-book of psychology. We may ask: Is the theory of Individual Psychology on a broad enough basis for a satisfactory outline of general psychology as a whole? The future will answer this question for us.

A less ambitious question is one concerning text-books for Individual Psychology.

Everyone will think of two works of Adler, "Understanding Human Nature" (Menschenkenntnis, 1924) and "Social Interest" (Sinn des Lebens, 1932-3), which may be considered as general text-books. Although written at different times and in different circumstances, they are surely the most authoritative statements of Individual Psychology for the general reader.

Besides smaller, more introductory works published since 1924 by Kuenkel, Ruehle, Dreikurs, Alexandra Adler, Moraitis, Ganz, Bottome, and others, Wexberg's work¹⁵ is, to my knowledge, still the most complete and systematic text-book.

It occurs to the writer that the "Handbuch der Individual Psychologie" might be re-edited and translated. Also a new handbook of Individual Psychology published in several languages might provide a distinct service to the whole field.

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