

Karen Horney and Erich Fromm in Relation to Alfred Adler*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The greatness of a man may be estimated by the extent to which he blazes a trail which others may later follow, improve, and extend. It is this service that Alfred Adler has rendered to Karen Horney and Erich Fromm. Adler was a pioneer in the development of a socially oriented psychology, whose central conclusions remain intact and form an essential part of the more recent theories of Horney and Fromm. As a soberly optimistic humanist Adler avoided the pessimistic determinism of Freud by insisting that psychology, of all the sciences, ought not to and could not be isolated from the rest of life. He recognized the real influence of sociological, economic, and moral factors in human experience at a time when the social sciences were comparatively undeveloped. This vital insight, of the central importance of the interrelationship between personality and the total environment, has been reaffirmed by Horney and Fromm in the light of the development of the social sciences. They, as did Adler, have repudiated many of the limitations of the Freudian system in favor of a reinterpretation of the bases of human motivation which includes a wider range of causal factors than those primarily biological in nature. Horney, holding that psychoanalysis ought to outgrow the limitations of an instinctive and genetic psychology, has attempted to develop a psychoanalytical theory which is more definitely aware of cultural implications. Fromm, similarly a Freudian deviant, has applied certain parallel ideas to a penetrating analysis of the character and social structure of certain individuals and groups in order to formulate a social psychology having special relevance during the contemporary cultural crisis. That both Horney and Fromm owe much to Adler as well as to Freud is quite clear from a comparative study of their respective works.

*This is the first of a series of papers, comparing Alfred Adler's concept with those of others. Each paper is written from the personal point of view of the author and, therefore, reflects his own interpretation of Adlerian concepts.

II. SIMILARITIES IN THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGIES OF ADLER, HORNEY, AND FROMM

As early as 1911 Adler thought of human nature as a dynamic unity rather than as the sum total of various and separate drives. He could not, likewise, accept a theory which attempted to understand the individual apart from the web of social relationships. In his *History of the Psychoanalytic Movement*, Freud² points out that Adler was dissatisfied with the conventional Freudian explanation of cultural phenomena. (p. 969) He could see no way out of the Freudian antinomy which explains repression as a result of culture while at the same time describing culture as springing from repression. Adler therefore came to hold that psychological phenomena are teleological in nature. The goal which the individual sets before himself as a result of his personal comparison with his environment is all-important because it reflects the degree of adjustment of the individual. Adler's increasing awareness of what the term "environment" includes was the basis for a continuous and progressive development in his theory through four stages: the organic, the familial, the social, and the moral.* In his first period Adler stressed the influence of organic inferiorities in the individual's estimate of himself.³ He soon broadened this to include as well the role of the individual in the family situation.⁴ Since the family complex reflects to so great an extent the social relationships, Adler was led to consider them as well. From this stage Adler passed quite logically into a consideration of value judgments and into an attempt to define a kind of normative theory of social psychology.⁵ No one of these periods is exclusive of the influence of the others, but the term used for each simply reflects the chief emphasis. In the development of these classifications, however, the gradual broadening of Adler's definition of the "environment" may be traced.

Adler's tendency was to become more and more rationalistic in his psychological and social interpretations, a practice which when over-done resulted sometimes in mistaken generalizations. Yet it was this same tendency which led him to evaluate so highly the influence of the family and of society upon the character structure of the individual. The conscious relationship of the individual to the total environment is the key to Adler's social psychology and to his final promulgation of a social morality. It was Adler's genius to realize that no psychology could be complete which did not accept as a basic fact of individual life that intelligent "mutual awareness," to use MacIver's phrase,⁶ which is also the basis of social relations. While Adler may be criticized as over-emphasizing the exclusive importance

*This point has been more fully developed by the author in an unpublished essay.

of *ideas* in the interpretation of human behavior, his motivation in doing so may be understood as an over-compensation for Freud's undue emphasis on the influence of *drives* in the individual. The Adlerian break served, however, as a needed corrective upon the Freudian exaggerations and added greatly to the understanding of the interrelationships of social and psychological phenomena, especially in our own society.

The social psychologies of Horney and Fromm, which are more recent developments out of the same matrix, represent reconciliations of these two positions which contribute further original concepts.

*Horney*⁷ states that her criticism of Freud is grounded in her practical experience. After fifteen years of applying Freudian principles as a psychiatrist, she came to the conclusion that they were not all-inclusive nor necessarily final. While retaining much more that is distinctly Freudian in her point of view than Adler did, Horney substitutes an Adlerian sociological orientation for Freud's over-emphasis on biological motivation and insufficient cultural outlook. Horney ascribes Freud's abstention from any type of moral judgment and his adherence to a mechanistic view of evolution to the limitations inherent in the mentality of the nineteenth century. She maintains that the libido theory is not only unsubstantiated but leads to a distorted perspective on human relationships. It is an attempt to understand the whole out of what is only a part and to discover final limitations where they do not actually exist. Further than this, it is an instinct theory which does not make enough allowance for the dynamic individual and social factors which affect human judgments and behavior.

*Fromm*⁸ considers human nature to be essentially conditioned more by historical factors than by those which are purely biological. In contrast to Freud, and paralleling Adler, Fromm takes the point of view that man is primarily a social being who cannot be fully understood except with regard to his relationship to his fellows. The reality of ideals such as truth, justice, and freedom as genuine strivings, as dynamic influences on human behavior, is stressed by Fromm. Freud, on the other hand, reduced all such moral influences to the level of biological motivations, a point of view with which Adler also sharply disagreed. Fromm maintains that Freud's conception of the function of sexual drives is based upon what is in reality only a limited understanding of the phenomenon, the use of sex only in terms of physiological compulsion and not as spontaneous expression.

The similarity of the criticism of Freud by Horney and Fromm to that made much earlier by Adler is obvious even from this brief and inadequate review. There is the same stress on the unity, the free will, and the intelligence of the individual in all three. Each recognizes the fact that men are not isolated but are members of a society to which they stand in an almost organic relationship. Adler, Horney, and Fromm regard the relationship of the individual to his total environment as being, not an auxiliary,

but the central problem of psychology. They are alike, in short, in being social psychologists, utilizing an essentially rational criticism of Freud as their common point of departure.

Adler's defection from the Freudian ranks some twenty years previously was an anticipation of the same decisions Horney and Fromm were to make and of the grounds on which they made them. That they have profited from Adler's original insights, there can be little doubt, though any direct acknowledgment is lacking. Horney and Fromm have not gone so far as to transform social psychology into a social philosophy as Adler did, but it may be that they lack his deeper insight at this point or consider it irrelevant to a scientific theory. According to Adler's own view, not all of human behavior may be subsumed under scientific categories as we at present understand either. Both Horney and Fromm have stressed the fact that psychic and social phenomena are determined in multiple ways by multiple forces, rational and non-rational. On the other hand Adler used the concept of the "life style" to explain the actual and spontaneous integration of these forces in the individual as a unity. Horney and Fromm, committed to a more limited analytical and deterministic point of view, hold that this obscures the relevance of certain emotional factors. Both are rather inclined to depreciate the importance of Adler's theories for this reason, but his real influence upon them nonetheless cannot be denied.

Horney, for example, admits that it was Adler who first appreciated the prime importance, among what she terms "neurotic trends," of the striving for power, especially in the formation of the neurotic personality pattern most characteristic of our culture.⁷ (p. 186) Her criticism of Adler, that he too readily accepted these strivings as self-explanatory and did not fully understand the relevance of cultural conditioning, is only partially accurate. The difficulty here is rather bibliographical. Adler's most definitive works are generally considered to be *The Neurotic Constitution*¹ and *Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology*,⁹ both products of his earlier period of thought. His later books were more popularly written and more accurately translated. They do contain, however, more than enough evidence to show that Adler had a keen sense of the importance of social relations. This sentence from one of them is typical and sums up his often unappreciated point of view:

In order to know how a man thinks we have to examine his relationship to his fellowmen. The relation of man to man is determined on the one hand by the very nature of the cosmos, and is thus subject to change. On the other hand it is determined by fixed institutions, such as political traditions in the community or nation. We cannot comprehend the psychic activities without at the same time understanding these social relationships.⁴ (p. 26)

Adler was aware of the reciprocal relationship between personality and society; but he did not, it is true, investigate the possibilities of this relationship in the light of the social sciences as fully as Horney and Fromm have been able to do. The fact that a competitive society does tend to produce a striving for prestige, for power, and for possessions, which Horney explores at length, was originally an Adlerian insight. Horney, because of her knowledge of anthropology, has been able to point out the manner and the implied limitations of such culturally conditioned strivings far more completely.

Fromm, in analyzing what he terms the "mechanisms of escape," similarly relies on this Adlerian emphasis, particularly in his discussion of authoritarianism. This masochistic and sadistic striving for submission and domination appears as a feeling of inferiority and insignificance in our culture, says Fromm. He points out that these feelings, both rational and irrational, produce an urge to lose the self through submergence in a greater power, perhaps the state or the church. Here Fromm is reiterating, with greater historical insight, an extremely Adlerian position. There can be little doubt that in their common repudiation of certain Freudian principles both Horney and Fromm have produced a kind of mediatorial psychological theory which is intermediate between those of Freud and Adler and rooted in both.

III. THE MEDIATORIAL POSITION OF HORNEY AND FROMM

That Horney and Fromm have derived essential parts of their own social psychologies from the psychologies of Adler as well as of Freud may be further seen in their treatment of certain other problems. In each case Horney and Fromm follow in the general Adlerian direction of a broader and more rational interpretation of certain Freudian concepts together with a somewhat socially broadened interpretation of the effect of non-rational forces. Freud, for example, obscured the effect of conflict in general upon the formation of the character structure by his emphasis on a particular type of conflict, that between the ego and the instincts, to the exclusion of all other types. Adler, in rejecting the instinctivistic orientation of Freud, substituted, as all-important, the conflict between the ego and the environment as he variously interpreted it. Horney and Fromm rather stress the central role of conflict itself, whether engendered by emotional factors or by external environmental conditions. They accept neither Freud's insistence on the key importance of sexual drives nor Adler's concept of the striving for power, exclusively, but maintain that both are examples of conflict, an inevitable aspect of character structure. Adler's deviation from Freud was, to some extent, a rational over-correction which developed out of a keen appreciation of the dynamic effect which the environment has upon per-

sonality. Horney and Fromm, a generation later, have made a similar deviation toward a social psychology but in their reinterpretation have attempted to retain more of the significant psychoanalytical insights. Their work may be thought of as correcting, reconciling, and extending that of their predecessors.

The difference between, and yet the similarity of, Adler's mature theory of the individual and social sources of neuroses to those of Horney and Fromm illustrates this mediatorial position and one of their contributions. In this particular instance they have attempted to develop a theory to account for the origin of neuroses on social-psychological grounds which harmonize Adler's interpretation with certain re-evaluated Freudian concepts. Their explanations, while oriented socially in the best Adlerian fashion, are perhaps more adequate in dealing with the non-rational psychological phenomena.

According to the mature Adler, the neurotic character is the result of feelings of inferiority which motivate strivings for power, having as their aim the separation of the individual "at a distance" from the demands of normal life. It involves a definite comparison of physical, familiar, and social-economic status by the individual with that of others round about him or in different groups. While the feeling of inferiority exists, for the individual, in the realm of the non-understood, it is rooted essentially in a rational comparison, an attempt to secure the goal by the use of some expedient. It may be dissipated by the same means of rational perception. In such a view, according to Horney and Fromm, there is insufficient regard for other rational and non-rational types of conflict between the ego and the total environment.

In Horney's view the basic anxiety or insecurity requires a rigid pursuit of certain culturally determined strivings for safety and satisfaction which are contradictory in nature. This produces hostility which must be repressed because of the danger of retaliation, either as a result of parental disapproval or the structure of the social system. The repressed hostility induces anxiety of a basic nature, and the neurotic acquires a feeling of helplessness against a hostile world, to oppose which he summons his various neurotic trends as safeguards. Horney utilizes Adler's insight regarding the comparative evaluation of individual status against that of those in the familiar group or in other groups, but she attempts to interpret the results in terms of conventional Freudian terminology and usage. Freed from the limited sexual connotation, the concept of repression may be applied to anxiety which is induced socially as well as physiologically, according to Horney. In such a view all sorts of individual and cultural conflicts may be accepted rationally, without recourse to interpretations involving sexual symbolism and with due consideration of non-rational behavior. Adler's original insight, which he seems at times to have over-stressed and perhaps over-rationalized,

has been conserved by Horney through an interpretation which brings the whole idea back to what she considers the essential principles of Freudian interpretation.

Fromm, who deals with neurotic tendencies in "normal" persons,⁸ emphasizes as the source of neuroses the isolation of the individual from those values, symbols, and patterns of group life which give the sense of "belonging." The child, Fromm maintains in Adlerian fashion, acquires this intimate sense of the group relationship chiefly from the life of the family circle. The gradual loss of security and the growing sense of aloneness produce an emotional drive to escape from the responsibilities of freedom through relentless striving, largely unconscious in origin and expression. Essentially Fromm's conception differs from that of Horney only in that he is dealing with more or less normal individuals on a broad scale. Culturally expressed masochistic and sadistic strivings are thus the irrational attempts to escape from the various types of conflict inevitably associated with freedom. As Horney, Fromm utilizes in broadened Adler's insistence on the key importance of the relationship of the individual to his physical and social surroundings together with a broadened interpretation of the Freudian concept of repression. Fromm attempts by this means to explain the aggressive and submissive tendencies which men display in certain historical movements, among them the Reformation, National Socialism, and Industrial Capitalism. Aside from his formulation of the concept of "social character," his original contribution lies in the application of these ideas to our contemporary situation.

Horney and Fromm are both indebted to Adler's previous insistence upon the reality of motivations which arise out of environmental situations. They correct, however, his tendency to limit conflicts to a single source, the striving for power, and his overly rational interpretation of such phenomena. The sources of neurotic behavior lie in the results of the impact of the total environment upon the rational and non-rational aspects of human personality. Their main emphasis at this point seems to be an attempt from a neo-Freudian viewpoint to modify Adler's rather extreme position. Further than this, it is also original since in presenting the causes of neurosis they attempt to explain more clearly the relationship of rational and irrational motivations to external conditions, one of the basic aims of social psychology. Their greater acquaintanceship with the social sciences leads to a more definite appreciation of the fact that the prevailing social system is subject to modification in favor of the enhancement of conditions favoring the development of the possibilities of personality.

If in this re-examination of the social and psychological origins of neuroses Horney and Fromm seem thus far to have assumed a position closer to that of Freud than to that of Adler, exactly the opposite is true in regard to their treatment of the relationship between individual char-

acter and social structure. Horney and Fromm, in explaining the former problem, utilize the terminology and essential concepts of psychoanalysis under some degree of Adlerian influence. Their treatment of this other problem rather makes them seem to be conventional Adlerians under some degree of Freudian influence. Their essentially mediatorial position accounts for this reversal of emphasis and results in a rather productive synthesis.

According to Adler's theory, the feeling of inferiority results in the formation of a number of guiding principles, or typical social relationships, having for their compensatory purpose the maintenance of the subjectively held idea of superiority. The entire constellation of these relationships Adler termed the "style of life." It represents the basic character structure of the individual as it is influenced by the social structure and as it, in turn, influences the social structure. Both Horney and Fromm make use of similar ideas in explaining the same problem. According to Horney, the neurotic trends in behavior which result from the feeling of basic anxiety are grouped together and find expression as a "facade," a kind of psychological mask which hides the real self from the world and from the individual himself. This fictional self is formed by, and enters into, social relationships and is like Adler's "style of life" in its general function. Fromm's conception of the "social character" is also similar but refers to an attribute of society rather than of an individual. It is, however, nothing more than a kind of summary of the individual characters, an extraction of the basic experiences which are shared by all. As conditions differ, so do the individual characters as, by the mechanisms of escape, the attempt is made to avoid isolation. The relation of the individual character to social character is thus the basis for social change and for conformity to social necessity.

It is to be noted that, since they are both simply the sum total of various tendencies, Horney's "facade" and Fromm's "social character" are both secondary and derivative concepts. Neither one represents, as is the case of Adler's "life style," a primary organizational "set" of the personality. Through the use of his concept of the "life style" Adler was able to provide a more adequate explanation for the actual spontaneity of the individual as a whole. Adler never thought of the individual as simply the product of various "drives," however described, but as a functional bodily, emotional, intellectual, social, and moral unity. Hence the name of his system, "Individual Psychology."

This resemblance among Horney's conception of the "facade," Fromm's idea of "social character," and Adler's "style of life" suggests that perhaps Adler's social psychology was most sound in its description of the dynamic inter-relation of the individual character to the social structure. It was Adler's genius to recognize the importance for both of the striving for power, from the very beginning of his work. Both Horney and Fromm

admit to the essential soundness of this Adlerian observation and adopt it as a basic part of their social psychologies.

As early as the year 1912, Adler was aware of the relationship between the striving for power and the competitive ethos of our culture. At that time it also entered into his interpretation of the "masculine protest." In his mature social psychology, Adler developed, as we have seen, its implications for the class structure, the family, the school, and the economic system to a limited extent. It became, in his social philosophy, the chief obstacle to the realization of the ideals of social feeling. As he progressively developed his social psychology, this concept was enlarged and reinterpreted by Adler. Each time it gained in importance as the means whereby the psychological structure of the individual is related to the social structure of the group; and, in turn, the means by which the social structure acquires the characteristics of the dominant type of individual psychological structure. As a generally applicable law of social psychology it may be stated thus: *all human actions, individually, by classes, or by nations, have as their objective the attainment of a position of power, as a compensation for relative inferiority.* Adler realized the influence of systems of values which stressed the attainment of individual prestige and power as final goals in shaping such ideals and validating them. His therapeutic techniques, individual and social, were directed to the systematic elimination of the power drive. Though its sources may have been questioned or modified by later investigators, among them Horney and Fromm, Adler's chief contribution to social psychology—the compensatory striving for power and its effects—is still valid. Horney and Fromm follow Adler very closely at this point and the concept is of great importance to their systems of social psychology. While using some Freudian insights, it is to Adler that they must here turn for their basic theory.

It has been pointed out previously that in Horney's analysis of the prevailing character structure of the average individual in our contemporary culture, the striving for power is accounted the most important neurotic trend. Her emphasis upon the destructive possibilities of competition, while more fully developed, is much the same. The chief modification which Horney adds, out of her study of the anthropological idea of "culture," is the fact that the striving for power need not necessarily be the foremost trend in social psychology. She cites studies, by Margaret Mead and others, of various cultures in which competition does not occur and in which other neurotic trends come to the fore. To this extent she corrects what may be a tendency to over-generalization but also accepts the validity of Adler's observation so far as it affects the present situation.

Adler's emphasis on the striving for power is also an important element in Fromm's theory. The isolation of the individual from the primary ties of the family, the church, and the group results, according to Fromm, in

the various attempts to achieve security on a secondary level. Fromm acknowledges the essential accuracy of Adler's stress on the striving for power in the post-Reformation era and uses it, as both cause and effect, to explain the behavior of "normal" individuals in mass historical movements. Fromm enlarges the original Adlerian idea regarding the reciprocal effect of psychological and social phenomena in the systematic development of what he terms the "social character." The "social self," the self in the interest of which modern man acts, and not the real self, may be considered to resemble Adler's emphasis on the "masculine protest," a kind of character structure which is molded according to the culturally approved and transmitted masculine pattern. With greater knowledge of the social sciences Fromm is also able to make effective use of them in avoiding some of the pitfalls of cultural relativities.

In the fundamental emphasis on the real influence of social phenomena upon psychological structures and the psychological interpretation of social structures, Adler was a real pioneer. His analysis of the role of social factors in the causation and expression of character structure preceded that of Horney and Fromm. Adler's insistence upon accepting social facts as such and not as sexual symbols makes possible a more rational interpretation of the relationship of character structure and social structure, such as Horney and Fromm have each attempted. Though they may accord a larger role to irrational motivations, their mediatorial psychologies are Adlerian in their treatment of this central problem.

IV. THE ROLE OF VALUES

The question as to the validity of value systems is one which is bound to arise from any consideration of a systematic social psychology. Even Freud wrote a volume on *The Future of an Illusion*,¹⁰ the title of which indicates his estimation of the problem of religion and of value. It is not surprising, therefore, to find a considerable discussion of the role of values in the social psychologies of Adler, Horney, and Fromm and to find also that their relative estimates fit into the general pattern already sketched. Adler, especially in his later stages of development, considered values to be of the utmost and decisive importance in an almost deliberate contrast to the total repudiation of them as genuine motivating factors by Freud. Horney and Fromm adopt a somewhat intermediate position which, while not as emphatic as that of Adler, stresses their reality. Adler worked out a social philosophy the supreme affirmation of which was the tenet "love thy neighbor." Horney and Fromm are more tentative in their expositions, limiting themselves to an appreciation of the possibilities of ethical considerations but offering no system or central principle.

As Horney points out, there have always been, in the history of psychiatry, two concepts of psychic disturbances, the medical and the moral.

Freud, it is clear, was content to repudiate the latter entirely. Adler, as firmly grounded medically, could not, however, see the necessity for such a total abandonment. Indeed he insisted on the pertinence of ethical considerations, not merely out of a wholesome respect for the traditions of the race or something similar, but because he found them to be functionally indispensable.

Adler frankly admitted that his was eventually not only a social psychology but a psychology of values. The final stage of his development was indeed a social philosophy intended to offer a way of life, grounded in the truths of both psychology and ethics, which might alleviate and avoid both personal and social problems. Horney takes as one of her chief criticisms of Freud the fact that he refused to deal with moral problems as an integral part of the illness. She acknowledges the fact that many persons are concerned with ethical problems which are unreal, psychologically and morally, but takes it to be a part of the analyst's task to correct such mistakes and to reveal the genuine moral issues which are always present. The idea of the moral responsibility of the individual is an integral part, also, of Fromm's thesis that the future of modern man lies in the full realization of the possibilities of individual freedom. He stresses but does not develop the importance of moral problems for the understanding of personality problems. Likewise he cites the importance of "true" ideals as indispensable both to the full development of personality and of the social structure. Neither Horney nor Fromm offer any attempt at a guiding principle of social morality other than to endorse whatever facilitates human welfare. It is interesting to note that neither applies the concept of social and psychological relativity to this portion of their discussion though it forms an indispensable part of other portions of their work. Adler, especially in his later years, seemed to have much of the crusading spirit and to strike a much more positive note of affirmation. The mediatorial position of Horney and Fromm leads them to appreciate the real influence of values but does not impel them to become partisans of moral reform. There are some, among them the author of this paper, who would maintain that Adler is still ahead of the times in holding this view. The further psychological study of values may prove him to have been most sound at this point.

V. CONCLUSION

This brief study of the social psychologies of Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, and Erich Fromm indicates that Adler must be considered as one of the two most important intellectual antecedents of Horney and Fromm. That in his initial break with Freud and in his progressive exploitation of the consequences Adler was their forerunner in achieving many important conclusions, it has been the attempt of this paper to show. Most of all Horney and Fromm are indebted to Adler for his keen awareness of the

reality of the influence of the total environment upon personality. Freud's persistent adherence to a biological etiology made any real "social" psychology an impossibility except on the grounds of sexual symbolism. Certainly he was unable to attribute any dynamic role in the formation of personality to the effects of environment other than to serve as the vehicle of expression for a biologically determined drive. To Adler must be given credit for the progressive development of the implications of his insight regarding organic compensation to the level of a social psychology that became finally a social philosophy. It has been suggested that certain of Adler's conclusions are indispensable parts of the social psychologies of Horney and Fromm. They may therefore be considered to have derived their theories from the biological social psychology of Freud and from the rational social psychology of Adler as well. Their relatively greater acquaintance with, and application of, the social sciences has enabled them to make further original contributions of their own.

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