

## On Being an Adlerian

PAUL ROM

*London, England*

### I

An Adlerian is not an isolated specialist of a particular natural science, but a social scientist with a personal responsibility.

We expect of a representative of any branch of the natural sciences only the mastery of a particular body of knowledge. A mathematician, for instance, may reveal quite primitive notions in the fields of economics or education and may exhibit naiveté in these and other fields without losing any prestige as an expert in his special science. Adlerians are in a more difficult position.

Psychology, when it existed as a branch of philosophy, was quite formalistic: A soul was a soul. In adopting the methods of the natural sciences and in studying mental life with its individual differences, it became an independent discipline. (cf. 1) However, nineteenth century psychology was concerned with mental elements and the methods of their association rather than with the total personality. The whole individual and his behavior had been best understood by poets and criminologists. With Alfred Adler, finally, psychology developed into a social and quite concrete science concerned with the behavior of man. In his system both the social embeddedness and the personal dynamism of the individual have place. Individual Psychology, a definite science with a limited subject matter, covers the whole range of psychology and as a result is able to mirror the "indivisible unity of the personality." (2, p. v).

In the realms of chemistry, physics, physiology, i.e., sciences which investigate natural phenomena, we find more or less uniform, and generally agreed upon, bodies of knowledge; but this can hardly be the case in the social or historical (cf. 3) sciences (history, sociology, economics) the subject matter of which is individuals or groups of men in their strife. Psychology had to become the social science of hu-

man behavior because we are not limited merely to the laws of cause and effect, the only ones that count in the exact sciences. We are in a certain measure free to choose and to follow goals of our own. Our actions and purposes most often tend to oppose, to overcome the normal effects of natural causes, and to build up civilizations and cultures. But while nature and culture, the base and the superstructure, form two distinct worlds, we also find in most cultures groups of men with distinctly different purposes; and even science, its scope, methods, and practical application, can be dominated or frustrated by the selfishness of a section of a given society. Science is not a thing in itself, but a thing for men and their interests. It may be that we consider savants like Le Bon, Freud, or Adler as men who are sincere and serious scientific workers in their respective fields; yet we will find Le Bon's unfavorable analysis of the masses acceptable only if we count ourselves among the "elite," and we will find him reactionary and possessed by a blind hatred for the masses if we consider the emancipation of the working class as a good thing for the higher development of human culture and happiness. Whereas we are as Adlerians neutral in political matters which in themselves are not the subject matter of our science, we do not believe in science as such. "Our aim is to gain a reinforced sense of reality, the development of a feeling of responsibility and a substitution for latent hatred of a feeling of mutual good will, all of which can be gained only by the conscious destruction of the will to power." (2, p. 15)

## II

An Adlerian understands man dialectically in his compensation-striving and proposes, with the goal of the greatest possible usefulness, certain norms of behavior which do not rest upon moral or religious dogmas. The aims and activities of an Adlerian are of this world, which is to be ameliorated, so as to allow a higher evolution of mankind.

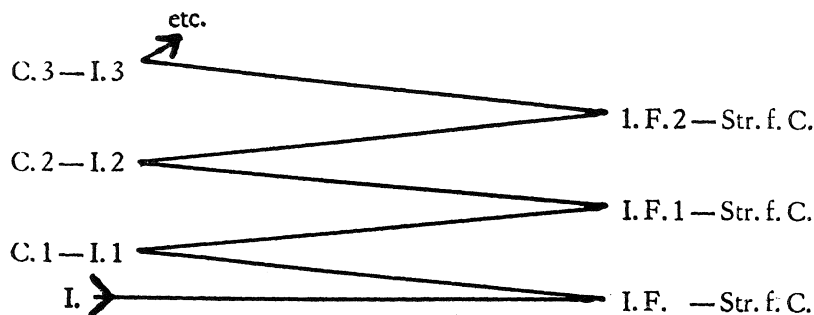
"The *feeling of inferiority* developing from the impressions of *reality* incites the patient continuously in his childhood to fix some *goal* for his striving." (2, p. 37) That is to say, an inferiority feeling is not a thing in itself; it may become something else, i.e., a striving for superiority. A certain quantity of something transforms itself into a new quality. Adler also pointed out that different ways of behaving

may mean the same thing, and the very same behavior of two persons can serve two perfectly different purposes.

This way of understanding human behavior is far from the chemical viewpoint of searching for mental elements and associating them mechanically; it is far from the Gestalt theory which emphasizes the form and overlooks the "former," i.e., the creator of these forms (Birnbaum); it is far from all typologies which are idealistic abstractions. Our viewpoint is certainly dynamic, but not in the sense of Freud or McDougall who see libido or instinct or propensities pushing us forward. It is dialectical. This term is surely often abused by people who have the sole purpose of being personally right; it indicates properly, however, our scientific method.

The antagonism between "reality" (inferior body or social condition) and "feeling of inferiority" is dialectic, for it results in its "Aufhebung" (Hegel's term and sense) in the compensating goal. Social behavior is the synthesis and the behavior on the useless side of life we can call, with Künkel, "catathesis." (4)

Dr. Fritz Künkel left out the excellent historical chapter on dialectics in his book *Grundrisse der Politischen Charakterkunde* when he published in 1934 the Second (Third Reich) Edition of what had previously been a valuable book. Manes Sperber, a little later in Paris at the *Freie Deutsche Hochschule* gave a course on "Sozialcharakterologie," in which he developed the following diagram which incorporates Adler's dialectics:



Ada Beil (5) used a similar diagram in her paper "Zur Psychologie von Welt- und Lebensanschauung." This way of presenting the dynamism of human behavior indicates that while an I.F. (inferiority feeling) becomes a Str. f. C. (striving for compensation), each C. (compensa-

tion) obtained transforms itself sooner or later anew into an inferiority (I. 1, I. 2, I. 3, etc). Thus, the compensation process continues throughout life. No permanent security, superiority, perfection can ever be obtained by an individual or a group as long as they exist.

To be an Adlerian, then, means to the writer:

(1) to gain insight into human behavior by understanding it as a process of compensating inferiority-feelings; and

(2) to direct one's own striving and that of others toward the goal of social usefulness.

#### REFERENCES

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- (4) Künkel, Fritz, *Vitale Dialektik, Theoretische Grundlagen der Individualpsychologischen Charakterkunde*, Leipzig, 1929.
- (5) Beil, Ada, *Zur Psychologie von Welt- und Lebensanschauung, Handbuch der Individualpsychologie*, 1926.