PSYCHOTHERAPY AS CORRECTION OF
FAULTY SOCIAL VALUES[1]

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The value system on which the patient operates has always been a focal point for Adlerian psychotherapy. This has often been criticized because the introduction of "moralistic" elements into psychotherapy was considered improper. Not until the advent of group psychotherapy did it become obvious to many that psychotherapy involved the study and change of mistaken values. The group, utilized for the therapy of individual patients, became recognized as a value-forming agent, affecting the social orientation of each patient and his guiding lines in dealing with others. Every group requires norms to be respected by its members; and the therapeutic group apparently established norms different from those to which the patient had been exposed and accustomed, through its "unique social climate" of equality (6).

Regardless of the criteria which may be used to assess therapeutic results—be they the disappearance of symptoms, the resolution of problems, or the change in personality structure—successful psychotherapy always results in the patient becoming a better human being. Even psychoanalysis, originally most reluctant to consider moral or evaluative judgments, aimed to bring about emotional maturity, which certainly implies a form of moral judgment.

The consideration of values during the psychotherapeutic process poses new and difficult problems. Are we in any position to determine which values are good for the patient and which not? Do we simply accept the standards of the surrounding community, of society, and help the patient to become adjusted by learning to conform better? Or is there a yardstick by which we can measure the adequacy of value systems in various societies and come to a normative description of positive and negative, beneficial and detrimental values and standards?

The present confusion in psychiatry and psychology is largely due to the fact that no scientifically valid basis for evaluating human behavior has been evolved by the social sciences. In the absence of

scientifically established norms for social relationships, individuals and groups looking for a more reliable social and moral orientation, sought this in religion or assumed a transcendental origin of ethical systems (3). The individual, torn between the inclination to conform, in order to have social status, and to rebell against outdated auto-cratic social prescriptions, is likely to succumb to a state of anomy (Durkheim), of social disorganization. MacIver considers anomy "a state of mind in which the individual's sense of social cohesion—the mainspring of his morale—is broken or fatally weakened" (10). And Ansbacher is quoted by Merton (11) as stating that anomy is the equivalent to lack of social interest which latter, according to Adler, is the basis for cooperation, for harmonious social functioning.

Adler's concept of the "logic of social living" (2) suggests the ex-istence of basic laws for cooperation; it presents a normative formula-tion of social relationships. In this light, existing societies are not the final authority for the establishment of proper social values and standards. There is a yardstick by which they and their institutions can be measured, one which permits a scientific evaluation of social values from the standpoint of mental health, which means harmoni-ous social functioning. Adjustment, then, means not mere conformity to existing standards, but the movement toward an improved social organization which will better fulfill the requirement of the "ironclad logic of social living."

We may find normal reactions of normal people to abnormal con-ditions (12), or pathological reactions of people to either normal or abnormal conditions. We are concerned, therefore, with evaluating both the individual reactions *and* the conditions under which we live. In psychotherapy we try to improve the abnormal reactions to reality, which includes partly normal and partly abnormal living conditions.

Despite the fact that the individual is not the product of circum-stances, the environment does furnish probabilities for the indivi-dual's reactions. Thus, from the standpoint of the logic of social living, certain present-day social values are undesirable, because they are inimicable to cooperation, the requirement for coping with the prob-lems of life, which are all social problems.

Psychotherapy is concerned with establishing a psychological basis for cooperation. We find four attitudes essential for cooperation, with their counterparts disrupting it (5). These are : (1) social in-terest—hostility; (2) confidence in others—distrust and suspicion; (3) self-confidence—inferiority feelings, (4) courage—fear. Social

interest is an expression of a sense of belonging; lack of social interest limits or impedes cooperation and makes an opponent appear as an enemy. Fear seems to be the chief obstacle to adequate social functioning in a democratic atmosphere; it can be regarded as the sin of free man (7).

The fundamental underlying premise of social equality for everyone—which implies that each individual is entitled to respect and dignity, to full and equal status, regardless of any personal quality or deficiency—finds little realization in our competitive society. The climate of our communities is not too inducive for the development of courage and self-confidence. A variety of contemporary standards, norms and social prescriptions merit close scrutiny in their highly detrimental effects on cooperation, harmony, and mental health. They are the mistaken guiding principles, the faulty social values, from which we try to extricate our patients in psychotherapy. They all constitute a violation of the basic principle of human equality and of respect for each individual, as he is.

DESIRE FOR SELF-ELEVATION

A desire for self-elevation seems to be stimulated in every member of our society, from early childhood on. Nobody is ever told or given to understand that he is good enough as he is. On the contrary, such an assumption is considered as most unfortunate and detrimental; it would lead—so we are told—to contentment and apathy, blocking any progress, growth, or accomplishment. But such convictions are fallacious and reflect a misconception of human nature, revealing little faith in man.

Actually, the desire for self-elevation is not a basic human desire, but culturally and artificially induced. It is a compensatory striving, resulting from a sense of social inferiority. This has been instilled in each member of our civilized society, because since its beginning, seven to eight thousand years ago, it has been based on the assumption of the superiority of a few and the inferiority of the masses. The democratic evolution with its emphasis on human equality makes a more adequate evaluation of human nature mandatory.

The desire for self-elevation is by no means a prerequisite for growth and accomplishment. Another motivation, so far less recognized, is much more reliable and less costly. It is the desire to be useful, without regard for personal compensation, be it material or social. Such desire is natural, the result of social interest, of a feeling

of belonging, of a genuine interest in the welfare of others. The "drive" behind such movement is enthusiasm, love, interest and the enjoyment of living, in contrast to the other motivation which is lust for glory, power and self-aggrandisement.

Desire for self-elevation versus desire for usefulness may be understood to lead to movement on the "vertical plane" versus movement on the "horizontal plane," to use the terms which were introduced by Sicher (13). Although many beneficial contributions to mankind have resulted from vertical movement which also affords growth and accomplishment, its effect on the individual is fundamentally different from the effect of horizontal movement. The vertical movement of self-elevation, regardless of the height it leads to, both in status and accomplishments, can never bring lasting satisfaction and inner peace. There is a constant danger of falling and failing; the gnawing feeling of real or possible inferiority is never eradicated, regardless of success. There is no sense of security possible on the vertical plane; one remains highly vulnerable. The competitive individual can stand competition only when he wins.

Quite different is the function of horizontal movement. The desire to be useful can never be frustrated. Whatever life may have in store, something can be done about it. There may be no perfect solution to a predicament, but there is always a way to improve the situation. It becomes less important what one receives in return, because the satisfaction in doing is deeper than any reward can provide. Self-fulfillment no longer depends on what others think or do, but on what one can contribute. Concern with status is unnecessary, since one can be sure of one's place in the group as an equal.

This basic distinction between self-elevation and usefulness has far-reaching consequences for the evaluation of other social values. Once the assumption that everybody is good enough as he is can be accepted without the fear of disastrous results, both for the individual and society, a new orientation in social living is possible—and mandatory.

PERFECTIONISM

The idea of perfectionism, which seems to be more pronounced today than at previous times, is another faulty social value. Women, in particular, seem to succumb to the mirage of perfectionism. And who can quarrel with them? Is it not highly desirable to try to be as good and right as possible? Most people would be inclined to answer this question positively. However, such determination to be good and

right may merely serve as a means for personal superiority or self-elevation. The desire to be good is in most cases a desire to be better than others. Goodness and righteousness as well as accomplishments do not always express a sincere interest in the welfare of others.

A related mistaken value, fostered in our society and requiring therapeutic consideration, is the idea of masculinity and feminity. Many men suffer from the assumption that they are not very much of a man, and many women are striving desperately to live up to a feminine ideal, established in their childhood, often emulating a superior mother figure. While actually the functions of men and women have changed greatly with the increasing social equality of women, the traditional ideals of a man and a woman are still widely maintained. But we can no longer permit ourselves to stress characteristics which provide superiority, and bemoan deficiencies which deprive us of it. It is more important that we stress the humaneness, rather than the sex. Instead of trying to be a strong man and a good woman, we need to become better human beings. In therapy, the freedom from sex-oriented behavior patterns is part of the necessary reorientation.

FEAR OF MISTAKES

Behind perfectionism there usually lies a fear of mistakes. Our whole culture is mistake-centered. This is reflected in our educational systems, dedicated as they are to the prevention and correction of mistakes as a means of developing knowledge and skills. This concern with possible future or past mistakes, universal as it is, is based on two fallacious suppositions.

Firstly, making a mistake is considered dangerous. But actually, dangerous mistakes are rare, the exception rather than the rule. For example, even in driving an automobile only very few mistakes lead to accidents; and only very few accidents result in injury or death. The fatal mistakes form a minute fraction of the vast number which the average driver makes, almost daily.

The second erroneous assumption is that one must consider all possible mistakes in order to avoid them; otherwise one would become careless and make more mistakes. The opposite is true; the more concerned one is with the possibility of making a mistake, the more one is prone to make one. One can be cautious without fear of making a mistake. Many people devote much time and effort to preventing mistakes, thereby creating a side show which diminishes their efficiency in dealing with the real problems at hand.

Actually, making mistakes in unavoidable, and the mistake is less important in most cases, than what the individual does, after he has made the mistake. If he is discouraged, demoralized and beset with guilt feelings, he cannot face the situation as it is. But if he is a courageous person, the predicament may often lead to benefits which would never have been possible without the original mistake. What is needed is not concern with what we have done wrong, but the determination to meet the demands of the moment.

In view of these obvious consequences of a mistake-centered orientation, why is it then maintained? Two possible reasons seem evident. One is a vestige from an outgrown autocratic society. In such a a society doing wrong means, not doing what one is supposed to do, and this is intolerable, as a defiance of authority. The person in power can not make mistakes, because whatever he does is right; there is no one to tell him differently. Only subordinates can make mistakes. A second cause for our preoccupation with mistakes lies in the competitive strife on the vertical plane. Making a mistake implies humiliation; it lowers one's social status, as being right increases it.

This is at the root of our concern with goodness and righteousness: We are interested in it primarily because we are interested in our own prestige and status. Once we free ourselves from our fear of being inferior and recognize our worth and dignity, we no longer fear making mistakes—and, therefore, make fewer. This is learned in psychotherapy. Our educational institutions are not yet prepared to teach this new social value of the courage to be imperfect (9). The ability to make mistakes graciously and to accept the ensuing predicament in the same spirit as if it had occurred without our fault, is essential for functioning as a free man, as an equal amongst equals.

Personal Success

Similar to the desire to be right and correct is our concern with being a success. Personal success is highly valued in our society, as failure is condemned. In this way the vertical movement is strongly encouraged. The ambition to succeed is perhaps the most outstanding social stimulation of our times. Few realize the tremendous costs which we have to pay for this mistaken social value. We install in each child the conviction that he has to become better, be more, achieve more—otherwise he will be no good, a failure. But for every one child who can satisfy his over-ambition in a useful way — socially, academically, athletically—there are literally thousands who have no chance

to feel important and be significant. They either give up altogether, or switch to the useless side. Most failures are the result of the inevitable discouragement which results if the confidence in one's ability does not keep in line with the self-ideal, with what one thinks one ought to be or do. Most criminals and juvenile delinquents are the victims of a perverted ambition instilled in them in a prestige-hungry society. They can only feel important by breaking the law and waging a "heroic "battle against society and its representatives.

Moving on the horizontal line does neither provide the sensation of personal success nor the torture of failure. Doing one's best does not require comparing oneself with others, nor depending on the opinions of others, their approval or disapproval. Everybody likes approval; but the free man, sure of his own value, does not depend on it. Our patients need to learn this inner freedom, of which Adler constantly spoke when he advised his students not to have a personal stake in whatever they may be doing. If it turns out well, so much the better; but if it does not, we must go on. If we *feel* defeated, our ability to go on becomes greatly impaired; but nobody can make us feel defeated except we ourselves. The failure to accomplish what we wanted can be an important experience and part of a learning process. But this requires that we do not take it as an expression of our lack of personal worth or ability. We need to distinguish between the deed and the doer. What we do may be wrong, stupid or mistaken; but this does not mean that *we are* stupid or a failure. Society does not teach us this lesson yet; psychotherapy cannot proceed without teaching it.

Reason and Objectivity

Therapeutic theories and practices have generally supported the cultural tradition of establishing yardsticks to measure superior and inferior, good or bad. In addition to moral concepts which served such purposes came psychological value-judgments. Reason appeared as good, emotion as bad, objectivity as desirable, subjectivity as deplorable. According to Adlerian psychology, however, reason and emotion are not in conflict with each other. A holistic picture of man does not permit the fallacious separation of various functions into pairs of contrasting forces. Behind the individual's emotion there lies his "private logic" (1). Consequently, emotions, which are presently held in considerable disdain, are not irrational; they do not dominate man, but are his toools. He uses them for his purposes, just as he uses his ability to reason. And objectivity is by no means always prefer-

able to subjectivity; we need to be subjective, to have preferences and dislikes, in order to participate actively in the social evolution (8). Besides, a "biased apperception" (1) is an intrinsic human feature. Subjectivity and objectivity are a continuum, are complementary modes of functioning; together they permit apperception and movement on the social plane.

The same continuum exists between conscious and unconscious processes. There is a varying degree of awareness, but no such entity of an "unconscious" as Freud postulated it. The unconscious was the source of all evil which only the conscious could overcome. But it is questionable whether conscious or unconscious processes are more responsible for detrimental behavior. Since the individual is unaware of the vast majority of mental and physical processes within him, only few unconscious motivations have detrimental consequences; but his conscious thoughts may more frequently interfere with his well-being and functioning.

Contrary to the assumption to which the patient is exposed in his environment, he learns in psychotherapy to trust his emotions, his unconscious processes, to accept his inevitable subjectivity, and to enjoy both the freedom and the obligation to choose and to prefer. He stops trying to "control himself," as he has been advised to do since early childhood, by realizing that he is going to do what he decides anyhow, regardless of how much he may pretend to object to his actions.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious now that all the mistaken social values which prevail today, and are responsible for the neurotic inclination of most contemporaries, particularly those in metropolitan areas, are characterized by an over-emphasis of good and bad, right and wrong, up and down. This is what Adler has called the "antithetical mode of apperception" which he found characteristic of the neurotically disposed individual (4, p. 248).

Conversely, the therapeutic effect on the patient emphasizes the horizontal move toward usefulness. In this direction, good and bad, up and down, are part of a normal pattern, like light and dark, harmony and discord. They belong together as alternating phases of a meaningful process. The absolute values disappear with the vanishing authority, on the judgment of which they depend. Instead of such value judgments, the relative significance of each act of behavior in the total situation must be seen and understood.

A new concept of man emerges, fortified by our psychological observations in therapy. New types of motivations result from different social orientations. Group psychotherapy, particularly, has opened the way to an exploration of human relationships where deficiencies no longer imply inferiority, and people can respect each other fully, despite their intimate awareness of each others' faults. We can, therefore, conclude that changing the value system on which patients operate, constitutes an essential part of psychotherapy.

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