

ADLERIAN THOUGHT IN ASCH'S SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Some day historians of science may understand the reasons for the great influence of two biologically reductive psychological systems, i.e., psychoanalysis and behaviorism. Piling construct upon construct, hypothesis upon hypothesis, these two systems have abstracted so far from the lived world (*Lebenswelt*, Husserl), that a reflex arc has become the unit of behavior from which all other behavior has been "explained." Wedded by this which they hold in common, psychoanalysis and behaviorism have had a happy marriage. The children have been Sears, Miller, Dollard, etc. But there have been other investigators who have not been willing to exalt reified constructs, and have tried to remain as close to the original data as possible.

Early in the course of psychoanalytic thought, one of his ablest associates could no longer accept Freud's teaching. Alfred Adler defected from the movement and founded his Individual Psychology, not because of personal prejudices but because he found the data to be out of line with Freudian theory. Similarly, in the development of experimental psychology, there were those who found the elementaristic doctrines of the structuralists and the behaviorists inadequate for explaining many phenomena. Stimulus patterns had qualities other and greater than the sum of the individual stimuli. And so Gestalt psychology emerged.

It has been unfortunate that the personality theories of Adler have been neglected by the Gestalt psychologists; there are so many close relationships. When the Gestalt laws of perception were applied to the behavior of man, naive observation of the facts led to findings similar to those of Adler. Many, upon reading Solomon Asch's *Social Psychology* would declare him an Adlerian, though Adler had no direct influence on Asch. A great deal of Adler's thought has striking parallels in the Gestalt social psychology of Asch as we shall now see. That the two were independently arrived at, may attest to the validity of each.

PROTEST AGAINST BIOLOGICAL REDUCTIONISM

The first point of similarity is the protest against Freudian and behavioristic, biological reductionism. Freud thought that in man

biology was "bedrock" (see 1, pp. 51-52). Adler, in contrast, placed primary importance on social goals. Asch likewise distrusts the view "that we are doomed to pursue solely the satisfaction of our tissue-needs, to be perpetually concerned with ourselves" (2, p. 23). For Adler it was the neurotic who is self-bounded (*Ichgebundenheit*).

Adler rejected the biological reductionism of the behaviorists, as well as of Freud.

Educational influences are likely to be accepted only when they seem to hold a promise of success for the individual's style of life. This fact must be accepted as an objection to behaviorism and reflexology. It will probably never be possible to produce conditioned reflexes which would lead to a feeling of defeat (1, p. 212).

The Gestaltists likewise reject the conditioned reflex as the key to understanding human behavior. Asch feels, "Neither the classical doctrine of instinct nor that of habit, nor any combination of these, is capable of providing a foundation for a human psychology" (2, p. 76). Adler claimed man's ever-varying problems "can be solved neither by conditioned reflexes nor by innate abilities; it would be extremely hazardous to expose a child who was equipped only with conditioned reflexes or with innate abilities to the tests of a world which is continuously raising new problems" (1, p. 174). Asch agrees with Adler:

Traditional instinct-habit psychologies have little of relevance to say about the specific properties of human orientation; they give the appearance of having solved the problems of social life when they have simply by-passed them . . . They do not face seriously the problems of order in individual and social action when they describe men as a sum of instincts and habits. A psychology of drives and habits can hardly find a conceptual place for the psychological structures most characteristic of man—for the reality of a self, of kinship relation, or a sense of values (2, p. 78).

But this is not to mean that either Adler or Asch neglected the biological foundation for behavior. Asch holds, "Without exception psychological processes are a function of organic events; perceptions and impulses, as well as thoughts and aspirations, have their counterpart in particular processes that occur in the individual and his nervous system" (2, p. 9). We know how the roots of Adler's theory were in the psychological compensations for biologically inferior organs. Biology was always important for Adler, not in determining behavior, but as furnishing building blocks from which the individual creates his behavior (1, pp. 206-207).

But a biological foundation for behavior is not synonymous with drive reduction, or, more correctly, tissue need. Adler, when talking of the confluence of drives, spoke of drive to see, hear, smell, etc.

(1, p. 30). Woodworth takes the same position (5). And so does one of his pupils—Asch. “We observe in people a desire to know, to find an appropriate orientation to the world. . . . Because we can hear, touch, throw, climb, we have a need and an interest to do these things. . . . We crave to be in touch with the surroundings in which our capacities have scope” (2, pp. 299-301). Thus for Adler and Asch the organism strives to do what it can, and it can do other things besides reduce drives. Compare Goldstein’s concept of the “pleasure of tension” versus the “lust of release” (3, p. 333).

SUBJECTIVE FRAME OF REFERENCE

According to Adler, “The individual sees all his problems from a perspective which is his own creation” (1, p. 212). Thus Adler placed great importance on the subjective frame of reference. This is also a basic principle of Gestalt psychology. Asch says,

We possess a unique and intimate access to the psychological subject matter—our inner experiences (2, p. 6). To limit investigation to the observation of action alone would be to violate the paramount fact that the actor is constantly registering in awareness what is happening to him and that this alters his subsequent acts. . . . Phenomenal facts are a source of problems and insight in psychology, and theory, to be valid, must be consistent with them (2, pp. 68-69).

For Adler, to understand another person meant to see the world as he does. Everyone has a certain “apperceptive schema” (1, pp. 181 ff.), a certain way of looking at things. The neurotic’s way is mistaken; he has a faulty frame of reference.

The behaviorists emphasized the response to a stimulus—they have not placed much importance on the stimulus conditions themselves. (In fairness it should be admitted that Hull included a factor for the stimulus in his system, but primarily in terms of size and intensity, not configuration.) As far as the stimulus is concerned, Asch says, “What matters is not solely the energy or amplitude of the stimulus but its relation to the organic condition and tendency of the organism” (2, p. 45).

Like the behaviorists, the Freudians de-emphasized subjective opinion, although Freud admitted that when children had phantasied the stories they told of childhood seductions, “psychic reality” was of greater importance than physical reality. For Adler, who always stressed “psychic reality,” it did not matter if a story was imagined (1, p. 231)—that itself, and the imagined story were very revealing. Personality is “not built upon objective reality, but upon the sub-

jective view the individual takes of the facts of life. A conception, a view of a fact, is never the fact itself, and it is for this reason that . . . each one organizes himself according to his personal view of things" (1, p. 183). Koffka, the Gestaltist, made a similar distinction between the "geographical" and the "psychological" environment (4, pp. 27-28). The environment is always as the individual sees it.

EGO PSYCHOLOGY AND UNITY OF PERSONALITY

Adler, who was called an ego psychologist by Freud himself, considered rational thought as being more than a mere epiphenomenon of irrational unconscious processes. Freud minimized the role of the ego; the ego was a mere outgrowth of the id. Watson went so far as to deny the very existence of consciousness; the self was the sum total of conditioned reflexes. Asch cannot accept either concept. To Asch's theory, even though the ego is not fully conscious, the self, the conscious manifestations of the ego, is of extreme importance. For behaviorists and Freudians, irrational, unconscious emotions are the prime movers of behavior (love, anger, fear—Watson; sex, hostility, anxiety—Freud). Adler and Asch see man as more rational, more intelligent. His ego is the controlling agent. Did not Freud in his latest years place more emphasis on the ego? Are contemporary psychoanalysts not ego-analysts? (Adlerians?)

It is erroneously claimed that Adler neglected unconscious processes. For him they were the goals of which the subject was unaware (1, pp. 232-234). Likewise, the Gestalt approach admits that all mind processes may not be conscious. There is a factor of silent organization, of which the person is unaware, but which organizes his perceptual field and behavior. "We speak of the ego because it is in certain respects a unitary system" (2, p. 277). Remembering that Asch claims the self is the conscious representation of the ego, let us note that Adler remarked, "The so-called conscious and unconscious are not contradictory, but form a single unity" (1, p. 358). Neither Adler nor Asch neglect the role of the unconscious—but it cannot be supreme because it is not separate from the human as a whole.

One of the most important facts for Asch's social psychology is that the perceptual field is an organized whole. A central point in Adler's theory was the unity of the personality. He had no use for a divided psyche (Freud) or a sum of character traits (Cattell). A therapist was supposed to show the patient how all aspects of himself—his walk, talk, actions, reactions—formed a structural whole.

GOAL STRIVING

For Adler the basic motivating factor of human existence was the striving for overcoming, success, perfection, achieving goals (1, pp. 103-108). Even though Asch's interest is not primarily personality motivation, he arrives at a similar opinion.

The need for achievement is one of the strongest tendencies in men; all experience the necessity for some success in their lives. It grows directly out of the need for acting upon the surroundings . . . Only by doing so does the person feel himself to be a productive agent. Because of these needs, men are challenged; and in their behalf they are ready to put forth effort, to struggle, and to undergo privation (2, p. 301).

At this point we could argue about terminology. What shall we call this? Striving for power, superiority, self-actualization, self-realization? But Adler could not stand to reify a single construct. Regardless of what term we prefer, there is an innate striving for a human being to become a more competent, efficient, unified, integrated, productive, creative, spontaneous organism.

Adler placed great emphasis on teleology. Man was seen as goal directed. Adler was the first to replace instinctual drives with values (1, pp. 64-69). (Today most therapists realize the importance of values in psychopathology.) Asch, too, realizes that humans have, and must have, values and goals.

Men discover a need to explain their existence and to give their work significance. They conceive a scheme of life, an ordered view of nature and of the place of human affairs within it. They enter a realm of purpose that links them to those who have preceded and those who will follow them; they want their work to outlast them . . . To be deprived of these purposes is to lose the ends of existence itself. The ends of life are no longer merely to live, but to live a proper and full life (2, pp. 135-136).

It may be asked, if striving is striving toward a goal, then, when the goal is reached, does the striving end? No! That would be the state of God. Adler wrote:

Man must strive continuously towards self-preservation and ascendency. In this manner he found God whose function it is to point the way. God, as man's goal is the harmonic complementation for the groping and erring movements on the path of life. The striving to gain strength from the divine goal always flows from man's insecurity and constant inferiority feeling . . . always reflects the same ruling, completion-promising, grace-giving goal of overcoming (1, p. 461).

Likewise, Asch notes that the striving does not come to an end. "Men act like beings whose possibilities are never fully realized, and to the realization of which they must bend their efforts" (2, p. 337).

The goal is sometimes called the real self, ideal self, idealized self image (Horney), etc. Asch reiterates Adler's self-ideal in that "one

can form an ideal self, the kind of self one aspires to be in one's own eyes, and in the eyes of the world" (2, p. 289). Adler had labeled the teleological striving as toward the self-ideal (1, p. 94). "The goal of the mental life of man becomes the governing principle, its *causa finalis*" (1, p. 98). The unity of the personality comes from the fact that all strivings, all actions, all thought strive towards realizing the self-ideal.

SOCIAL INTEREST

It may well be that the concept of social interest is not only the most crucial part of Adler's as well as Asch's theory, but also the place where they are most similar. In fact, Asch is probably the first psychologist outside the Adlerian group to use and stress the very term "social interest."

Adler emphasized that man and society are inseparable. "In addition to regarding an individual's life as a unity, we must also take it together with its context of social relations" (1, p. 127). To meet his social embeddedness man has a readiness in the form of a capacity for social interest. "Social interest is . . . an innate potentiality which has to be consciously developed" (1, p. 134). The developed social interest comprises the feeling of belongingness, spontaneous social effort, the ability to identify with and understand others, and to feel obligations toward them (1, pp. 134-139). Asch agrees with Adler that "to become concerned for others, and to occupy ourselves with their fate, is a fundamental capacity of human beings" (2, p. 357). "Of the fact of social interest there can be no doubt" (2, p. 333).

The Freudians and behaviorists claim that social relations are engaged in because they are instrumental in the satisfaction of biological drives. Asch rejects these theories, just as Adler did.

They find no place for precisely the phenomenon with which inquiry should begin—the presence of a direct overflowing interest in other human beings, in the life of groups, and in the need to participate in them (2, p. 332). A society built on the calculation of private profit would be in constant danger of collapse at every tension or crisis as its individual atoms scattered to seek their own safety. It is hard to see how a condition of social balance can be reached if the orientation of each is to contribute as little as possible and to extract as much as possible (2, p. 316). Freud in effect denied or ignored the positive striving toward others that is not the consequence solely of sexual and strictly personal problems. . . . He had not encompassed certain everyday realities of affection, sympathy, public spirit, and the attractions of understanding (2, p. 347).

Although both Adler and Asch stress the fact of social embeddedness, in addition to social interest, neither claim that the self is merely a product of the environment. For Adler the effect of the environ-

ment is mediated by the stand the individual takes towards it, and for Asch, similarly, "The self is neither an absolute entity rotating in its own orbit nor the characterless reflection of social influences" (2, p. 287). Just as Adler claimed that the life style was the individual's way of relating to the world, so Asch believes that the "self is a product of action with objects and persons" (2, p. 284).

THE NORMAL STRIVING

Social interest and the striving for superiority are not contradictory, according to Adler.

The whole of human life proceeds along this great line of action—from below to above, from minus to plus, from defeat to victory. The only individuals who can really meet and master the problems of life, however, are those who show in their striving a tendency to enrich all others, who go ahead in such a way that others benefit also (1, p. 255).

Asch, too, holds, "In serving the needs of others, the individual should at the same time be furthering his interests, and while serving his interests, he should be advancing those of others" (2, p. 313).

The goals toward which one strives are then, according to Asch, such things as "one's family, one's art or science" which become "an end in the pursuit of which alone the individual discovers his significance" (2, p. 569). The parallel in Adler would be: "The only salvation from the continuously driving inferiority feeling is the knowledge and the feeling of being valuable which originate from the contribution to the common welfare" (1, p. 155).

Adler made an important distinction between "common-sense" and neurotic goals (1, pp. 253-254). The neurotic's goals reveal "private intelligence," are not in accord with society; he is neurotic because he is in poor relations to his fellow men. Asch comes close to Adler's "common sense," when he says: "To be in social relations, it is necessary to stand on *common ground* with others and to face daily conditions with shared understanding and purpose" (2, p. 576, ital. ours). The normal striving for superiority, then, is not narrowly egocentric, selfish; the aspired goal is of value to society as well as the individual.

The neurotic goals, by contrast, are seen by Adler as unrealistic and not in accordance with society (1, pp. 156-157). Similarly for Asch, "A too narrow concern with one's self, by restricting one's interests in the surroundings and in others, can become a source not only of misery, but of a restriction of the self" (2, p. 319). Most clinicians would consider misery and a restricted self as neurotic.

Adler's emphasis on social relatedness, did however, not imply the suppression of individuality or blind social conformity (1, pp. 141-142). Asch, likewise, sees that "social life makes a double demand upon us: to rely upon others with trust and to become individuals who can assert our own reality" (2, p. 499).

FURTHER IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL EMBEDDEDNESS

There are many other similarities in the thought of Adler and Asch on what might be called lesser points.

Work. One example is the concept of work. Reductionists think of work in terms of a means to an end—in this case, drive reduction; rats will learn to press a bar, turn a wheel, pull a string, etc., in order to be fed. Adler realized that work must be considered also in terms of mutual usefulness to society. "The person who performs useful work lives in the midst of the developing human society and helps to advance it" (1, p. 132). Asch, too, sees work not merely as a means-end tension-reduction relation, but also as the joint action of men. "Work produces great changes in the character of men and their relations with one another. Work socializes and individualizes; it requires not only a mastery of processes but also a disciplined disposal of one's powers" (2, p. 173).

Emotions. Reductionists talk of conditioned emotional reactions, or learned drives. Adler saw emotions as aspects of social relations. He spoke of emotions as socially disjunctive or conjunctive (1, p. 227). Emotions are always relations to some one or some thing. Asch also claims, "An emotion . . . is directed back to the object that arouses it" (2, pp. 110-111). We might further note that emotions are not in opposition to cognitive processes. Adler's theory may be somewhat validated by Asch's interpretation of the experimental studies in the perception of causality (2, pp. 152-157). Evidence argues that a perceptual-cognitive interpretation of emotions is more reasonable than the conative-reactional beliefs of the behaviorists or Freudians.

Group facts. The last point worthy of note is the concept of society as a whole. The reductionists generally take one extreme, that all that exists is the individual. Society is merely an abstract concept which these theories, minimizing the role of conscious processes, ignore. There is another extreme, those like Freud who consider society as distinct from any individual. We may perhaps call this the group-mind theory. Both Adler and Asch take a third position. Adler de-

fined the group-mind as "the conflux of individual yearnings and aspirations . . . the similarity in the styles of life of the more active members in each generation" (1, p. 447). Adler, then, recognized the group, but not as a reality distinct from individuals; individuals and society cannot be thought of apart from each other (1, pp. 2 and 126). Asch considers the group relation as that of a "mutually shared field" (2, p. 251). The whole of society has properties other than the parts, while dependent on the parts for its very existence.

Group facts must have their foundation in individuals; group consciousness, group purposes, and group values have an existence in individuals, and in them alone. But they cease to be "merely" individual facts by virtue of their reference to others. It follows that a group process is neither the sum of individual activities nor a fact added to the activities of individuals (2, p. 252).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Adler and Asch are in agreement on the following basic positions. They reject the reductionism of the behaviorists and the psychoanalysts with its elementaristic responses, habits and instincts, need gratification, and "objective" frame of reference. While biology furnishes the basis, the "psychic reality" or the individual's view of the world is of ultimate importance and must be understood in order to understand him. Neither Adler nor Asch accept a distinct unconscious. The individual is a unity, forward-looking, striving, determined by his opinion of himself and the world, his values, and goals. Adler and Asch chose the very same term to apply to the most crucial part of their theories, namely, social interest. For both it is based on a natural capacity for coping with the fact of social embeddedness. The social relatedness of all aspects of behavior and the conception of society itself are represented by close counterparts in the two theories.

The main difference is that Adler, as a busy practitioner, presented his Individual Psychology in bold outline form, while Asch, as an academic scholar and experimentalist building on the body of knowledge of Gestalt psychology, arrived at formulations of greater refinement and clarity. It is interesting to speculate to what degree Asch's work might have been furthered, had he known Adler.

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