

PSYCHOLOGY AS A ROAD TO A PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY¹

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I am very glad to be speaking on an occasion that honors an institution founded in the name of Alfred Adler; and I am especially glad of the opportunity now because it affords me an occasion for working out the relation between the perspective that Adler developed and certain conceptions that have emerged out of the investigations in which I have been engaged during the past few years.

I have been particularly fascinated by Adler as a person. I think that any of you who have read my *Death and Rebirth of Psychology* (3) must realize that. I could not get away, not only from a strong admiration for the man, but from a warm personal feeling about him. I never met him, but I could not avoid the feeling of somehow knowing him and of being known. Perhaps that is the main quality of Adler that fascinates me, because one feels in his writings a tremendous quality of caring, a concern for one's fellow human being. One feels from his writings and from the whole structure of what he did that for him what was important was not that a theory be verified, or that a psychological conception be vindicated, but that a troubled human being be helped in a really tangible livable way.

Because Adler was interested in persons and in the day-to-day realities of their lives, he did not recommend things that were not really possible for them in actuality. It was because of this honesty and personal concern that Adler took a step in his work that has been tremendously important to me and for which I have privately honored him in my thinking: He recognized the integral connection between the historical condition of society and the psychological condition of the individual human being. He integrated into his practice this recognition that it does no good to pretend to be healing a troubled human being as though he were living in a social vacuum when the social situation—which includes not only the immediate family com-

¹This is the first part of an address entitled "The Dimension of Depth in Modern Psychology," delivered at the Tenth Anniversary Dinner of the Alfred Adler Institute, New York, January 7, 1961. In it the main problem facing psychology today is formulated. The second part presenting the answer, particularly the psychotherapeutic method of the flow of imagery (waking dream, "twilight imaging"), will be dealt with in full in a forthcoming book (5).

plex but the encompassing social milieu—provides the circumstances out of which the neurosis arises.

The social situation itself has to be altered. This was the striking conclusion which Adler reached around 1916 in the midst of the first World War. He realized then that political means and economic means are not at all adequate for improving the underlying social condition that has such serious psychological effects. He recognized that the condition could be corrected only by techniques capable of treating and improving society where its weakness inherently lay: on its psychological dimension within the individual human being. Thus there came the paradox which has always intrigued me, and I am sure has puzzled many others, that Adler's *Individual Psychology* has as its ultimate goal the treatment of *society*.

There are tremendous implications in this as to the nature of what a science and practice of psychology is and is to be, what the goal of psychology is, what modern psychology is for.

THE NEED FOR A PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY

We might state it this way. The goal of modern psychology, its reason for being, is to provide modern man with a conception of his human nature large enough to enable him to meet the problems of the present moment in history and to enable him to take the next creative step that civilization and the further development of the human species requires. That is a large order. It means that if psychology is to fulfill its reason for existence it must provide a working conception of life capable of meeting the need of the whole human being. It must indeed be capable of serving as a personal philosophy (*Weltanschauung*).

It must be empirically grounded in a scientifically valid way, but it must be capable of serving as a large and livable perspective with which the modern human being can fill the vacuum of meaninglessness that is the residue of the externalized life of our time. To fulfill its reason for existence, psychology must provide a way, a conceptual framework and a methodology with which to experience meaning in life, a way that will be valid for the individual as an integral member of our culture and as an integral member of the human species as a whole.

It was because Adler (1) dared to take so large a goal for his work, even though he took only the first steps toward fulfilling it, that he was so roundly attacked, and even ridiculed during the later years of his life.

For all this, today there seems to be no question at all but that time has vindicated this aspect of Adler's position. We see this in all the existential gropings, both within psychology and in the whole field of letters in our time. Not only that, but history itself has emphasized the importance and the urgency of developing a psychological conception that is capable of restoring a vitalizing meaning to life, and of placing something of significance in the vacuum where traditionally the human spirit used to be.

SOCIAL FEELING

At this point, however, let me add and emphasize that while the great need is for an experience of meaning in life, it is not at all a question of intellectual philosophy. It is not something for the mind to settle rationally and consciously. It reaches much deeper than that, to the depths of the human being where the meaning of life is not an idea but a fact of profound experience. Here what is involved is not something clear and rational, not something irrational either—but something more than rational, something transcending the ordinary definitions of human perception and opening a feeling of connection to another dimension of awareness and to another dimension of existence.

This, I have felt, is what Adler (2) had in the back of his mind when he spoke of social feeling (*Gemeinschaftsgefuehl*, also translated as social interest). He meant it not only as the relationship between people in society, but much more profoundly as the subtle psychological linkage that connects man to the cosmos, that provides in the deepest recesses of human nature a connection to life, a feeling of relationship to the universality and ongoingness of all things. Here ultimate meaning is experienced, but it is not a matter for rational decision. It does no good to be in favor of it. The experience of connection to life is rather something that happens to one. It is a fact of existence—not merely an idea, not merely a belief or a philosophy.

I want to emphasize this, because repeatedly in the past few years I have had persons come to me and say that they feel they would function better psychologically if they knew the meaning of life, and they ask will I tell them? But I do not tell them, for the first step in their growth is for them to understand the profound reason why the meaning of life is not something that can be told to them intellectually and accepted rationally. It is valid and healing for them only when it comes to them out of the depths of their being with the full impact of

an authentic experience that has come in the course of time and out of the fullness of what their whole personal being contains.

Often, too, such persons, as we proceed in our discussion, say to me that now they agree and they do realize that the meaning of life in its profound sense can come only through an experience from the depths of being. But they, they say, are not capable of such experiences; they are modern people and they are accustomed to secular scientific ways of life. Their habits of thinking are intellectual. They are analytical. And this dimension of experience, this other one, is strange to them, alien, not accessible to them. What should they do?

Really they are saying what Freud said, when at one point he recognized the validity of deep religious experience, what he called then the "oceanic feeling." He said he saw the importance of this, but that he himself was temperamentally unable to know what is involved in it. Here is an important question. What shall we do for the person who feels temperamentally unable to experience social feeling in its ultimate spiritual sense as connection to life, as connection to the cosmos, to time and to eternity? This seems to me to be the hub of the problem that modern psychology is called upon to meet and to solve. It cannot hedge this nor can it postpone facing it by addressing itself to personal problems and leaving the larger ones to wait. This is the ultimate psychological problem of our time and it must be faced directly if modern psychology is to fulfill its historical reason for being.

This is precisely where we find the special calling of depth psychology. Here we have the unique role that depth psychology, in its larger generic sense which includes Individual Psychology, has the possibility of playing in the life of modern man. For depth psychology is not philosophy. Its role is to give access to a profound and vital meaning of life, but it is not a philosophy. The special calling of depth psychology is that it provides an operational methodology, a body of concepts that are inherently techniques for opening the way by psychological principles to the depths of oneself and to the depths of human existence. The special contribution of psychology for modern man is that it provides him with specific operational methods for gaining access to the elemental dimension of reality, the dimension of spiritual reality that is within him. And the reason for which this role is so overridingly important at this point in history seems to me to be precisely in the terms that Adler understood: that only a basic psychological transformation in the underlying quality of modern personality can avoid the historical debacle that seems now to be impending for our civilization.

THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF LIFE

With this general prospective I would like now to become more concrete: What are the nature and the sources of the social, historical problem that arises in our time and that we experience in psychological form?

It will be sufficient for us to indicate the overall perspective here, as I have treated this subject in considerable detail elsewhere (4). The central occurrence that has made the modern world a predominantly secular civilization is that the traditional symbols and beliefs of Western culture have been emptied of their inner content. During the past two centuries what had been felt to be the "spiritual" meaning of life has lost its ring of truth; consequently, modern man has been left without a frame of reference for his life. Only a vacuum of meaning has remained, and this vacuum is often filled by a shallow "scientism," a worship of science. This is not true of actively engaged scientists; the creative scientists engaged in their research are persons who do have a meaning in their lives. But the general quality of modern culture is that there is a sense of emptiness where inner feelings, with respect to what had once been felt to be spiritual meaning, are concerned.

I have found the evidence accumulating that modern man is suffering much more from the repression of his spirit than from the repression of sexuality as Freud once said. It is because traditional beliefs and symbols have lost their inner content, that it has become commonplace for modern persons to feel ashamed of their spiritual feelings and spiritual longings. They treat the religious stirrings within themselves as throwbacks to primitive times, as superstitions unbecoming to a scientific age. Therefore, they repress the very feelings that would in an earlier generation have provided the basis for their feeling of meaningful connection to life. It is no wonder that one often finds that the most therapeutic occurrence for modern persons is the acceptance of the capacity to become involved in the strivings of the spiritual life.

The practice of psychotherapy since the days of Adler has moved in a direction that enables it to understand the psychological reasons why this is so. The works of C. G. Jung and the later writings of Otto Rank have also contributed significantly to this understanding. There is consequently a considerable body of case material testifying to the therapeutic importance of overcoming the repression of the spirit in our time. Elsewhere (4) I have recorded a striking incident of how

through a deep dream and its interpretation a modern non-religious woman was brought into touch with the repressed spiritual striving of her nature. It resulted in a tremendous freeing of her emotions and opened the way for a transformation of personality.

More significant even than this is the case of a minister who recently participated in a seminar which I conducted. He had been in one or another traditional mode of analysis for several years, and, he said, it had seemed to him that everything that he felt to be real in himself had been diagnosed away. The effect of his analysis was to leave him empty and spiritually drained; and what was worse for a minister, devoid of his sense of the reality of his spiritual vocation. Finally what enabled him to break out of his psychological stalemate and to free himself was his recognition that what was working in the depths of his spirit was authentic and valid and that he was entitled to permit himself to participate in its reality. Only then was he able to treat his inner life seriously, and only then was he able to grow.

We have in this a most striking aspect of the psychological situation of our time. By secularizing our culture and emphasizing the rational and technological aspect of society we have emptied man of what is the essence of his being, his spiritual nature; and we have repressed the urges in man that seek to bring his spiritual quality to expression. We have pressed these urges below and there, in ways that are very similar to the pattern which Freud ascribed to the repressions of sexual instincts, we find a festering of the repressed spirit. This is why the greatest need and the challenge of psychology in our day is that it provide the theoretical perspective and the working concepts that will make it possible for us to redevelop the spiritual side of human nature realistically and adequately with a knowledge that is based upon empirical facts.

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