

WAS ADLER A DISCIPLE OF FREUD? A REPLY

HEINZ L. ANSBACHER

University of Vermont

All those who have known Adler will be able to confirm Maslow's account (17) that Adler strongly denied having ever been a student of Freud, or a disciple or a follower.

The first time this denial appeared in print is in a footnote which Adler inserted in a later edition of his *Ueber den Nervoesen Charakter*. The denial is made in a parenthetical phrase referring to Freud as, ". . . their teacher—not mine, as is often erroneously maintained" (7, p. 24n).

The phrase is part of the following caustic passage: "Mr. Freud has had luck with [the interpretation of] my spoken word. . . . My mild rejection, 'it was no pleasure to stand in his shadow'—i.e., to be made an accomplice to all the absurdities of Freudianism, because I was a co-worker in the psychology of the neuroses—he at once interprets as a confession of my revolting vanity to put before unsuspecting readers.¹ Since to date none of those who know wanted to admit this bad luck of their teacher—not mine, as is often erroneously maintained—I see myself forced to destroy the formation of a legend" (7, p. 24n).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the evidence in support of Adler's denial.² In view of the historical facts that Adler was fourteen years younger than Freud, was for nine years a member of Freud's circle, eventually became president of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society and co-editor of the *Zentralblatt fuer Psychoanalyse*, Adler's denial certainly appears as a puzzling problem. But there are indeed a number of indications which permit the conclusion that neither from the start nor at any later moment was the relationship that of disciple and teacher.

THE ORIGIN OF ADLER'S ASSOCIATION WITH FREUD

According to Ernest Jones, "In the autumn of 1902 Freud addressed a postcard to these four men, Adler, Kahane, Reitler and

¹Adler refers here to Freud's statement in his history of the psychoanalytic movement (13, p. 339).

²A similar paper has been published in 1955 by Paul Rom (20), to which the present writer is indebted for several references. The present paper has the advantage that a number of new sources have become available since then.

Stekel, suggesting that they meet for discussion of his work at his residence" (16, p. 8). Note that the initiative came from Freud and that it was to be a "discussion" group.

This invitation is related by Jones to a need for emergence from isolation which Freud felt at that time. "For years—he said ten—Freud had suffered greatly from intellectual loneliness" (16, p. 6).

What was the prior relationship which could account for Freud selecting Adler of all possible choices to be among those he wanted for intellectual companionship? The best source of information on this point today would seem to be Adler's biography by Carl Furtmueller (as yet unpublished), who himself joined the Freudian circle after 1908 and left it with Adler in 1911. Furtmueller was Adler's first literary collaborator and a life-long friend (12). According to Furtmueller, "When Freud developed part of his new theories in the Vienna *Gesellschaft der Aerzte*, around 1900, and faced the passionate and disdainful opposition of the bulk of his colleagues, Adler published a report in a medical journal in which he asked for an objective, careful examination instead of a *limine* rejection of Freud's statements. Some time later, when Freud published his *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Vienna's leading newspaper, the *Neue Freie Presse* . . . poked fun at this new 'Egyptian dream book.' Again Adler took the defense" (15).

Similar accounts of the first contact between Adler and Freud are given by the other three biographers of Adler. Manes Sperber writes: "The two met for the first time in 1899 or 1900. Adler at that time stood up for Freud after the latter had been ridiculed in the Vienna Medical Society for his new theories" (21). According to Hertha Orgler, "Adler heard Freud for the first time at a lecture at the Viennese Society of Medicine. This lecture was received very unfavorably. Freud had left in anger before the discussion started, and Adler supported him vigorously, later publishing a paper saying that it was necessary to give serious attention to Freud's ideas" (19, pp. 24-25). According to Phyllis Bottome, "It was the fashion at that time, in Viennese medical circles, to mock at Freud; and when an article appeared in the *Neue Freie Presse* holding his new book up to ridicule, Adler answered it by a strongly written defense. . . . Freud was much touched by it, and sent Adler a postcard thanking him for his defense and asking Adler to join the discussion circle of psychoanalysis" (12, p. 69).

However, Furtmueller's statement regarding Freud's talk before the *Gesellschaft der Aerzte* does not coincide with Freud's own account.

While Freud relates that he did give a report before this society and that he "met with a bad reception," the date was 1886, not "around 1900," and the topic was what he had "seen and learned with Charcot" (14, p. 23). Freud continues that he returned to the society somewhat later to demonstrate a case and says: "This time I was applauded, but no further interest was taken in me. . . . Soon afterwards . . . I withdrew from academic life and ceased to attend the learned societies. It is a whole generation since I have visited the *Gesellschaft der Aerzte*" (14, pp. 24-25). Nor has Adler's defense of Freud in a medical journal or a newspaper been documented to date, either by Adlerians, or by Freudians (16, p. 8). Only regarding Freud's postcard invitation to Adler is there general agreement (see also 22, p. 116), although its exact wording is not known.

Why did Freud invite Adler? Regarding the other three members of the original discussion group Jones offers explanations. Max Kahane and Rudolf Reitler had attended Freud's university lectures (16, p. 7). Wilhelm Stekel had been a patient of Freud (16, p. 7) and subsequently suggested to Freud the idea of starting a discussion group. Freud himself stated, "The stimulus came from a colleague who had himself experienced the beneficial effect of analytic therapy" (13, p. 307). It is probably this situation in the original group which Adler had in mind when he remarked in his last book, once more denying that he had been a disciple of Freud, "I was never psychoanalyzed, and . . . I never attended one of his lectures" (8, p. 254).

As to why Adler was invited, he and Freud have remained silent. Jones offers no explanation, although he does for the other three. Still, to do so in Adler's case as well should have been a particular challenge to Jones since Adler subsequently proved so 'difficult' to Freud.

The only explanation available, then, is that by Adler's biographers. Although it is not entirely satisfactory because of the contradiction between Furtmueller and Freud, and because Adler's defense of Freud has not been documented, it does make plausible that Adler should have considered himself so free and equal in his relation toward Freud. In Adler's case Freud would have been obligated for having received comfort from Adler, whereas in the case of the other three Freud was in the authority position of their former teacher or psychotherapist. This explanation also makes it plausible that Freud wanted Adler in his new small circle—even if Adler had "made it clear from the beginning that he did not agree with Freud and that he had his own opinions," as Maslow (17) quotes Adler.

THE NATURE OF ADLER'S ASSOCIATION WITH FREUD

Psychology of the neuroses, the meeting ground. In the passage quoted initially, Adler called himself a co-worker of Freud in "the psychology of the neuroses"—that is to say, not in psychoanalysis. There are indications that the subject matter of the original discussion group was indeed formulated in this neutral way. When at the turn of the century Freud had given lectures at the university, lectures which Kahane and Reitler attended, these were under the title, "The psychology of the neuroses" (16, p. 7). Sperber describes the group which Freud had formed as one of discussions of "the psychology of the neuroses" (21).

If this, then, was the stated purpose of the group, which, again neutrally enough, was called the Psychological Wednesday Society, joining it did not necessarily commit one to psychoanalysis. Alexandra Adler, Adler's daughter, remembers that her father "always insisted that he had joined Freud upon his invitation, and that Freud kept assuring him that everybody's views would be respected" (9).

Seminars, not lectures. We do not know the actual content of the Wednesday evening discussions during the first four years. But from 1906 to 1915 the minutes of the meetings of the group, which in 1908 became the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, have been preserved, and the first volume of these, 1906 to 1908, has now been published (18). During this period the group had about 20 members of whom an average of 10 would appear on a given evening. If we may generalize from these meetings to those of the earliest years we may say that the discussions were not of Freud's work, as Jones erroneously phrased it ("discussion of his work," see above). Rather, the meetings were in the nature of seminars where members presented papers of their own which were then discussed by the group. The rule was that every member had to participate in the discussion, the order of participation being determined by lot, and Freud's comments were not too much longer than those of the others. During the 53 meetings reported for 1906 to 1908, Freud actually presented only two papers, whereas Adler, e.g., presented four.

Thus it was quite possible that Adler could have attended these meetings regularly without thereby considering himself a student of Freud, in the sense of disciple or follower.

Differences of opinion. While Adler had naturally accepted some of Freud's concepts—since the group could otherwise not have held any interest or stimulation for him—there is evidence of differences

from the beginning. It is simply that these differences became greater rather than smaller. As Furtmueller points out: "There is not one of Adler's papers [even during the time of his cooperation with Freud] which would show him as a 'Freudian' in the narrow sense of a school" (15).

Already in 1905, while Adler accepted the concept of repression, he also noted, "we never find complete repression of psychic material" (2). While he accepted unconscious determination of a symptom, he stressed that "often a conscious circumvention of the resistances is involved," and that the conscious modifies the unconsciously driving force (2). In 1907, while accepting libido, Adler added, "A great deal depends on how the individual tolerates this libido" (18, p. 96). In 1908, while accepting the importance of the sex drive, he attributed primacy to the aggression drive which resulted from a confluence of several drives including the sex drive (4).

In his major work of this period, the *Study of Organ Inferiority and its Psychological Compensation*, Adler wrote: "The interesting psychic phenomena of repression, substitution, conversion, which Freud demonstrated in his psychoanalysis and which I also found to be the most important constituents of the psychoneuroses, develop upon the above-described formation of the psyche in the case of inferior organs. In a like manner the usual statement of 'sexual basis' of psychoneuroses is cleared up by the above" (3, p. 65). Thus, while Adler again accepts Freudian concepts, he subsumes them under his own theory. It is noteworthy that he speaks of "his [Freud's] psychoanalysis," confronting it with his own findings. This is far from an attitude of identification which one would expect from a disciple.

Wittels, a member of the group from 1907 to 1910, described the situation as follows: "It was obvious that Adler had certain intentions. He expressed himself cautiously: 'Our science is still in its initial stages. . . . In the present state of our knowledge we cannot go quite so far. . . . At any rate, I should not myself presume that . . .' . . . It was not a struggle for clarity because one saw that his thoughts were ready. It was a struggle for the courage to bear the consequences if this should undoubtedly lead to the break with a man like Freud" (26, pp. 146-147).³

Within a few years, by 1911, Adler renounced all drive psychology, redefined the unconscious, and questioned the phenomenon of re-

³Translation modified from the German original.

pression. "Whether one can speak of 'repression' at all is very doubtful" (6, p. 190n).

As early as 1908, almost before Adler himself had found a formulation for it, Freud noted their fundamental difference. Whereas he was genetically oriented toward discovering antecedent causes, Adler's orientation was finalistic, teleological. In finding fault with a statement by Adler, Freud stated, "Our interest [in contrast to Adler's] is focused on the way in which something comes about, develops, not on the final goal" (18, p. 321).

Lack of personal friendship. The personal relationship between Adler and Freud was never a close one. According to Furtmueller, "A warm relationship was never established with Freud or with most of the other members of the group. On the contrary, there were soon difficulties which, however, were bridged by Freud who held Adler's collaboration desirable and useful. So Adler remained. . . . But he never forgot that Freud was the older man, the man who had achieved a historic progress in psychology, and the host. Where he disagreed, he never stressed the disagreement. As far as possible he used the terms accepted by the circle for expressing his own thoughts" (15).

This description of the personal relationship between Adler and Freud as always rather distant is confirmed by Jones who writes, "Adler was never an intimate friend of Freud's . . . Adler's scientific differences with Freud were so fundamental that I can only wonder, as I did in the Fliess case, at Freud's patience in managing to work with him for so long" (16, p. 131).

In the light of this, Phyllis Bottome's original contention that Adler had at one time been Freud's personal physician (11, p. 64), a statement that has been taken over from her by others (10, p. 56), appears more than questionable. Jones found that the story could not be confirmed by any member of the family (16, p. 131), and Bottome omitted it from later editions of her biography of Adler (12, p. 75).

A STUDENT IN THE BROADER SENSE

Was Adler a student of Freud? In the broader meaning of the term he most certainly was, possibly his greatest student. How else could he have become the incisive and cogent critic who even anticipated a number of developments in psychoanalysis (see 10, pp. 21, 37-38, 95)?

In the early years Adler did not hesitate to acknowledge this debt. He wrote in 1904, "We owe to Freud much enlightenment regarding the enormous part played by infantile impressions, experiences, and developments in normal and neurotic individuals" (1, pp. 1-2). "Possibly the powerful accent was needed with which Freud considers the life of the child and the demonstration of the tragic conflicts which arise from anomalies of childhood experiences, to make us realize the high significance of a science of education" (1, p. 3). In 1905 he contributed additional material to what he recognized as Freud's discovery that even a thoughtlessly given number proves to be psychologically determined (2). In 1908 he found that he "could confirm Freud's view of the dream in all points" (5).

In view of such statements he was eventually also able to accept the term psychoanalysis, to accept the presidency of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, and to become editor with Stekel and Freud of the *Zentralblatt fuer Psychoanalyse*. And when Adler and a number of others finally broke away from Freud in 1911 to form their own group, this was for a short time called the Society of Free Psychoanalytic Research, much to Freud's chagrin (13, p. 340).

As Furtmueller points out, Adler "wanted and was willing to learn, although he understood that what he learned would be assimilated with his own way of thinking and used as an element in his own independent work" (15).

The debt to Freud is acknowledged in most forceful words by Erwin Wexberg who, after the first World War, was possibly Adler's most able co-worker, and editor of a handbook of Individual Psychology. In his book on Individual Psychology, the most important textbook at the time, Wexberg even described Adler as "one of the oldest pupils and associates of Freud" (24, p. 9), although in the subsequent American edition the phrase was reduced to "one of the oldest associates" (25, p. 12). In his foreword to a revised edition of *Heilen und Bilden* of which Wexberg had become the editor, he stated: "We do not want to fail to recognize the manifold stimulation and fructification which modern psychology owes to psychoanalysis, and especially the historical origin of Individual Psychology from psychoanalysis. Yet we have become convinced that in the course of further development the divergence between the psychoanalytic and the individual-psychological theory and practice has become so great that a clear separation is in the interest of both, and in the interest of the scientific public" (23).

In his later years, when Adler stood far apart from Freud, he made the following acknowledgment. It was in reference to the very same topic about which he had expressed such unqualified agreement with Freud some 25 years earlier. "In my investigation concerning dreams I had two great aids. The first was provided by Freud, with his unacceptable views. I profited by his mistakes" (8, p. 254).

While in the broader sense of having learned from him Adler certainly was a student of Freud, in the narrower sense of a follower or disciple, he was not. Adler was sought out by Freud for a discussion group in which the views of each member would be respected, he accepted Freudian views generally with qualifications, and he never had warm feelings for Freud. This is not the picture of a disciple, "a follower who has learned to believe in the truth of the doctrine of his master or teacher" (Webster), who feels personal allegiance to his teacher, and who in turn wants to spread the doctrine himself. "To sit at the feet of the master was not an attitude one could expect from Adler. Still less was he able or willing to *jurare in verba magistri* (to swear in the words of the master)" (15).

ADLER'S ANGER

Why did Adler become so angry when he answered Maslow's question regarding "his discipleship under Freud"?

If we look at Freud's account of the beginnings of his discussion group, we find: "From the year 1902 onwards, a number of young medical men gathered round me with the express intention of learning, practicing, and spreading knowledge of psycho-analysis" (13, p. 307). This description clearly places the members of the group in the category of disciples—almost literally in accordance with the dictionary definition.

In the light of the best evidence available today, this account is not in accordance with the facts. Freud leads one to believe that he was sought out by the others, whereas in fact the initiative came from Freud, certainly in Adler's case. Freud claims that the express intention of the group was the study, practice, and spread of psycho-analysis, whereas it was a group concerned with the psychology of the neuroses. Freud certainly creates the impression that he was holding forth at these meetings with the members sitting at his feet, so to speak, whereas in reality the meetings were in the form of a seminar in which he played a surprisingly modest part, at least during 1906 to 1908. Finally, Freud maintains that the members had from the

start accepted the obligation to spread the new "knowledge," whereas, according to our information, Adler had warned Freud that he had his own opinions and had received Freud's assurance that everybody's views would be respected.

We can understand that for such distortion Adler would call Freud a swindler. He would call him sly and a schemer because he felt Freud had tricked him into a situation where he could plausibly be called Freud's disciple, although he had insisted from the start that he could accept Freud's ideas only with reservations.

But why did Adler become so emotional about his denial? Emotion arises in situations where the individual feels overwhelmed. And this is exactly the case in this instance. Here is this statement by Freud, which puts Adler in an unfavorable light, which does not correspond to the course of events, which was nevertheless widely accepted in Adler's days and has since gone into the literature as a "historical fact," and which Adler was quite powerless to counteract.

One of Adler's attempts to present his side of the story in print was: "Freud and his followers are uncommonly fond of describing me in an unmistakably boastful way as one of his disciples, [just] because I had many an argument with him in a psychological group. But I never attended one of his lectures, and when this group was to be sworn in to support the Freudian views I was the first to leave it. . . . I have never boasted of my former discussions with him" (8, p. 254). But statements such as this have generally made no difference, as we all know.

We would say it is from this feeling of powerlessness in the face of an untruth about him, which has nevertheless become established, a the truth in the eyes of the world, that Adler became so emotional.

CONCLUSION

We have attempted to assemble the evidence pertaining to the association of Adler and Freud, much of which has become available only in recent years. It shows that while Adler was a keen student critic and co-worker of Freud, he never was his disciple as this term is generally understood. The notion of Adler's discipleship was originally established by Freud and has widely persisted throughout the literature despite efforts to dispel it. It is hoped that with the more complete record now available, the old notion may eventually become replaced by a more factual account.

REFERENCES

1. ADLER, A. Der Arzt als Erzieher (1904). In A. Adler & C. Furtmueller (Eds.), *Heilen und Bilden*. Munich: Reinhardt, 1914. Pp. 1-10.
2. ADLER, A. Drei Psycho-Analysen von Zahleneinfaellen und obsiedierenden Zahlen. *Psychiat.-neurol. Wschr.*, 1905, 7, 263-266.
3. ADLER, A. *Study of organ inferiority and its psychical compensation: a contribution to clinical medicine* (1907). New York: Nerv. ment. Dis. Publ. Co., 1917.
4. ADLER, A. Der Aggressionstrieb im Leben und in der Neurose. *Fortschr. Med.*, 1908, 26, 577-584. Also in *Heilen und Bilden*, 1914, 23-32.
5. ADLER, A. Zwei Traeume einer Prostituierten. *Z. Sexualwiss.*, 1908, 1, 103-106.
6. ADLER, A. *Praxis und Theorie der Individualpsychologie*. 2nd ed. Munich: Bergmann, 1924.
7. ADLER, A. *Ueber den nervoesen Charakter*. 4th ed. Munich: Bergmann, 1928.
8. ADLER, A. *Social interest: a challenge to mankind*. London: Faber & Faber, 1938.
9. ADLER, ALEXANDRA. Personal communication.
10. ANSBACHER, H. L., & ANSBACHER, ROWENA R. (Eds.) *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler*. New York: Basic Books, 1956.
11. BOTTOME, PHYLLIS. *Alfred Adler: a biography*. New York: Putnam, 1939.
12. BOTTOME, PHYLLIS. *Alfred Adler: a portrait from life*. New York: Vanguard Press, 1957.
13. FREUD, S. On the history of the psycho-analytic movement (1914). In *Collected papers*. Vol. 1. London: Hogarth, 1953. Pp. 287-359.
14. FREUD, S. *Autobiography* (1925). New York: Norton, 1953.
15. FURTMUELLER, C. Alfred Adler. Unpublished manuscript.
16. JONES E. *The life and work of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 2. New York: Basic Books, 1955.
17. MASLOW, A. H. Was Adler a disciple of Freud? A note. *J. Indiv. Psychol.*, 1962, 18, 125.
18. NUNBERG, H., & FEDERN, E. (Eds.) *Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society*. Vol. 1. 1906-1908. New York: Int. Univer. Press, 1962.
19. ORGLER, HERTHA. *Alfred Adler: the man and his work*. London: Daniel, 1939.
20. ROM, P. Adlers Verhaeltnis zu Freud. *Psyche, Stutt.*, 1955, 9, 117-123.
21. SPERBER, M. *Alfred Adler: der Mensch und seine Lehre*. Munich: Bergmann, 1926. As quoted by P. Rom (20).
22. STEKEL, W. *The autobiography of Wilhelm Stekel*. Ed. by E. A. Gutheil. New York: Liveright, 1950.
23. WEXBERG, E. Geleitwort zur zweiten Auflage. In A. Adler, C. Furtmueller, & E. Wexberg (Eds.), *Heilen und Bilden*. 2nd ed. Munich: Bergmann, 1922, Pp. v-vi.
24. WEXBERG, E. *Individualpsychologie: eine systematische Darstellung*. Leipzig: Hirzel, 1928.
25. WEXBERG, E. *Individual Psychology*. Trans. by W. B. Wolfe. New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corp., 1929.
26. WITTELS, F. *Sigmund Freud: his personality, his teaching, and his school*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1924.