

## ADLER AND THE MODERN WORLD

A SPECIAL REVIEW<sup>1</sup>

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Lewis Way's book is a new paperbound edition of the original 1950 hardcover, in the introduction to which Alexandra Adler wrote: "A thorough and painstaking work, this book may be expected to take a prominent place in this field of literature." There is no reason to qualify this judgment today. The book is aimed at a special audience, namely those who are acquainted with Adler only through popularizations, and imagine him to be a superficial psychologist. The author wants particularly to show the full "strength and subtlety" of Adler's thought (pp. 12 & 355). Adler, like Dewey in a sense, suffered both from narrow popularization and from his own broadness: he was either cheapened in the common understanding, or, ignored because the reach of his ideas led too far. Lewis Way, setting out to correct the effects of popularization, at the same time has succeeded in presenting a remarkably coherent and concise view of Adler's system.

In doing this the author has avoided a major temptation, and the weakness of most interpretative, systematizing books: This is definitely *his own* book, and not simply a presentation of Adler's writings in large block quotations. There is remarkably little quoted material; the book flows smoothly and very readably. It is important to note that the publishers have made an excellent presentation, and that the index is first-rate. The chapter arrangement is intelligently planned. The book begins with a chapter on the development of Adler's early views on organ inferiority. This is followed by an excellent chapter on "Wholeness and Purpose," in which the author shows himself at home in both philosophy and theoretical positions of biology, drawing on Bergson as well as Hobhouse and Smuts. The chapter serves to orient the whole work, and to present Adler's views in their full uniqueness: thus, the discussion of life style is introduced with the idea that "Psychology is an independent science, and it would have the right to form its own concepts were there none already available to suit the nature of its subject-matter." If only our

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<sup>1</sup>Way, Lewis. *Adler's Place in Psychology: An Exposition of Individual Psychology*. New York: Collier Books, 1962. Pp. 384. \$1.50 paper.

graduate students could be convinced of this. They would certainly profit too from the author's neat summing up of the mechanistic-teleological argument, and they could see how directly modern existential psychology—Sartre for example—has elaborated the ideas of wholeness, purpose, possibility, freedom, choice-for-being, inherent in Adler's earliest thought.<sup>2</sup>

#### CONTRAST WITH FREUD

The chapters which follow present the bulk of Adler's views on the guiding fiction, the neurotic character, sex and its deviations, the need for social interest—and succeed admirably, I think, in conveying Adler's ideas to a new audience with the intended strength and subtlety. A critique of psychoanalysis, and the contrasting of Adler with Freud, is judiciously left until after Adler's system is fully expounded. Thus, Chapter 10 provides a clear exposition of Adler's differences from Freud. There is a succinct two-page summing up of the weaknesses of Freudian psychology (pp. 295-296), which is as good as any I have seen. Throughout, the appraisals are balanced and penetratingly thought out; and the tone is one of proper historical objectivity (cf. p. 132).

The author has presented us with a true scientific document, and an incisive detailing of exactly where Freudian psychology has erred. Thus, in discussing Freud's views on sex, he makes a criticism which is not enough aired in our psychiatric residency programs: "By means of subjectivity, symbolization, appeals to innate disposition, the creation of antitheses, dualisms and internal compulsive forces, Freud—however involuntarily—*takes the neurotic at his own valuation and justifies his mistaken attitude to life*" (p. 289; italics in the text).

It might be worth mentioning that we see an especially flagrant example of this in the psychoanalytic explanation of the psychoses, which views them principally as aberrations of the sex instinct. Instead of finding out *why* the patient is so ill-adapted, and *why* he has such a narrow range of behavior, psychoanalysis takes his sexual preoccupations at their face value. The possibility is not considered that sexual fantasies and behavior may be the *only* preoccupation that the patient is *able* to entertain.

Social scientists, reading this book, will draw some of their own

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of the similarities between Sartre and Adler see: Stern, A. Existential psychoanalysis and Individual Psychology. *This Journal*, 1958, 14, 38-50.—Ed. note.

surprised conclusions on the sophistication of Adler's thought. For example, in Adler's view, many difficulties that accompany the onset of old age are psychological and not physiological; that is, women who, at the climacteric, suddenly bemoan their loss of beauty and reproductive function are reacting to *social poverty*—to poverty of opportunity for satisfying role performance—rather than to a new physiological poverty (p. 231). The contemporaneousness of Adler's ideas on social role, and their difference from Freud's views is striking here. Freud wanted to interpret a woman's reaction to the loss of her powers, as due to a secret urge to fornication. (See: *A general introduction to psychoanalysis*, New York: Liveright, 1920, pp. 213-218.)

#### SIMILARITY WITH DEWEY

In presenting the full range of Adler's ideas, the book leaves no doubt that Individual Psychology is a system in its own right, and not a reaction to other schools (although one might have preferred that the chapter entitled "Individual Psychology and Rival Schools" read "Other Schools"). Adler's views call Dewey to mind more often than Freud<sup>3</sup>. For example, his devaluation of the IQ test (p. 253), with its static view of intelligence, and his insistence instead that one see the child as a growing, developing, free organism, functioning in a particular environment, is shared exactly by Dewey. Adler's stress on practical adaptation and social interest is fully pragmatic. Like Dewey, Adler had no stomach for institutional narrowness and murky esoterics: He turned away from disciplinary medical science to the broader public, against the urgings of medical colleagues who confused full public communication "with cheapening" (p. 188). (Unhappily for all in our democracy, this confusion on the part of "experts" still exists.)

Adler, like Dewey, simply refused to fragment science and life. Perhaps in this he is most contemporary, and his orientation most urgently needed. Lewis Way shows the full scope of Adler's psychology, and his own mature grasp of reality, by implying that the doctrine of social interest inevitably entrains social criticism:

Our whole society appears at present to be characterized by a very deep sense of frustration. This frustration is not, in our view, merely a sexual one, as Freud would suggest. It has roots that are far more general. It is due to the insecurity which the spirit of competition breeds in everyone, to the futility which is felt at successes which are unrelated to achievement, to the monotony of the tasks which

<sup>3</sup>The differences between Dewey and Freud have been dealt with in: Feuer, L. S. The standpoints of Dewey and Freud. This *Journal*, 1960, 16, 119-136.—Ed. note.

the human beings are called upon to perform, to the lack, finally, of an understandable social purpose to which the individual feels himself to be contributing . . . Unless the evils inherent in our present social organization can be adjusted, it would be foolish to expect the Adlerian appeal for co-operation to meet with a very wide response. The society itself promotes the feeling of inferiority and the compensatory striving for success which are characteristic of the neurotic (pp. 217-218). To-day, if we need more co-operative persons, it is also true that we need a social *milieu* better adapted to encourage human co-operation (p. 232).

It is especially important, I think, for those who will discover Adler through Lewis Way's book, to realize that the only psychology that man can use is one which connects him to the whole of life. In this reviewer's opinion, at any rate, psychology, like philosophy, is ultimately criticism. And criticism is possible only if one is grounded in the belief, as was Adler, that life moves forward to realize itself. Adler's psychology leads logically to a constructive social criticism that Freudian pansexuality could never achieve. Freud's message to our young intellectuals is to acquiesce, and this is a message they would heed at their own and everyone's peril (cf. p. 307).

#### THE BREADTH OF INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY

Chapter II has some good, pointed discussions of other psychologies: experimental, Gestalt, McDougall's, Kretschmer's, and an excellent brief treatment of Jung. The author gives some incisive reasons for the fad of behaviorism in America:

Behaviourism has always been considered by Europeans as a typical product of America, in its wholehogging enthusiasm, in its youthful naivety and dogmatism. Europeans look with a kind of amused wonder at its credulity, at its lack of that profound scepticism which men like Nietzsche regarded as the basis of culture and the beginning of wisdom. It lacks the historical sense and seems to imagine that all that existed before the present generation was a mere mass of superstition (p. 315).

And he goes on to give even more direct reasons why Individual Psychology has lagged in popularity:

Behaviourism is equally prized in the universities because it is something that can be *learned*. A psychology like Adler's cannot be learned in this purely external manner, for it requires for its understanding a fund of sympathy, imagination and deep experience of all life's overtones and undertones. Thus it is not suited to examination purposes, knowledge of it cannot be statistically measured, it cannot be demonstrated by specialists and professors who are intellectual automatons. It is not that Individual Psychology is obscure; rather, it is patently simple, provided one brings all one's facilities to its understanding (p. 316).

To which one can only yell "Bravo!" and add that, unluckily, even the full range of faculties of many of our accredited academic intellectuals is woefully inadequate to broad, human understanding. What manner of men are these, who will impugn the most trenchant criticism with a mechanical and haughty: "Where is your empirical evidence for that statement?"—and will turn right around and predict most of the future behavior of psychological test subjects on the basis of the flimsiest and most subjective evidence? This is a belief in the possibilities of science won at the expense of man, a true anti-humanism.

Lewis Way joins his insight here to that of many others, on the sorry state of social and human science in contemporary America: the narrowness, abject worship of technique, the idiotic disciplinary fragmentation, the lack of social sense and scope, the ignorance of elementary political postures, the shallow notions of history, the insensitivity to life's tragedy and opportunity. This is not only why behaviorism appeals, but also why any narrow doctrine does—Freudianism has the same grab bag of encapsulated and striking formulas, that can be swallowed in any sophomore course, and taught in any slavish psychiatric residency program.

The author begins this chapter (Chapter 11) by saying that Individual Psychology does not claim to cover the whole psychological field. It couldn't. But Individual Psychology does point to the vast reaches of that field, and to the acting, choosing, purposive organism that is at its center. Thus, Individual Psychology inevitably points beyond itself. It has found itself in the embarrassing position of claiming status as a valid, integral psychology of neurosis, while insisting that neurosis is as broad as the whole of social life. Freudianism had no such embarrassment: it never pointed beyond itself, and thus was able to retain its appeal for the more unenthusiastic searchers for knowledge. Undoubtedly, in the new directions toward a unified human science, Freudianism will remain a landmark, a towering historical monument. It may be that Adler's thought will leave less coherent impact, and translate itself instead into living coin—largely anonymous, like Georg Simmel's, but *used*. If this does happen, it is certainly what Adler the pragmatist himself would have preferred.

Today it is no longer informative to say that Adler's place in psychology is "secure." Man is selective, and history is a repository of ideas waiting to be applied to present problems. The stature of Adler's ideas is growing, as people from all disciplines are turning to the

broader, interrelated situation, in their groping for understanding. Anyone who has contact with the brighter graduate students and residents in psychiatry, for example, can delight in watching them pick and choose, and note their impatience with the narrow, the facile explanations that previous generations seemed to take such satisfaction in.

#### SOME OPEN QUESTIONS

With all this said, there are a few very minor dissatisfactions to be registered over the book. The weakest section I thought to be the treatment of the psychoses. Lewis Way is well aware of the paucity and tentativeness of knowledge in this field (p. 175). Admittedly the book is meant as an exposition of Adler's psychology, and does not aim to bring his views on psychosis abreast of current thinking. But notwithstanding this, I see no reason to continue to make the "goal of superiority" serve as the burden of explanation for phenomena as complex as the psychoses (pp. 172-181). This idea may have served Adler well, at the very beginning of modern psychology. But in an up-to-date exposition of Individual Psychology, to leave "the striving for superiority" as the unadorned motive of psychosis, is to give Individual Psychology an unnecessarily dated posture in this particular area. In itself this is a reductionist simplification that cannot appeal to the modern student.

Furthermore, how can one reconcile the idea that the psychoses are to be considered as exaggerations of neurotic life styles (with which I agree), with the author's use of the term "disease" (p. 178), and "disease of paranoia" (p. 179)? It is precisely the merit of Adler that he played down the medical posture, a position which is gaining favor in the very latest theoretical work on all the so-called "psychiatric syndromes."

Finally, there is one confusion which is traceable, I think, to a contradiction in Adler's own thought: Lewis Way includes a discussion of homosexuality as a "perversion," but concludes his chapter on "Sex and its Deviations" with the correct observation that the homosexual "has usually a good deal of social interest, and is often a gifted and sensitive type" (p. 154). We can hope that the apparent inconsistency between personally "aberrant" behavior, and the presence or lack of social interest, will be resolved or clarified by continuing refinement in theory.

The final chapter fittingly attempts an appraisal of possible ex-

aggerated emphases in Adler's work, and the author relies fully on his effortless style and broad range of knowledge. Specifically, the reader is left to ponder one strain in Adler's thought that seems to this reviewer especially perplexing: How could Adler build a psychology which stressed external adaptation above all, and the need for full social interest, and still have abandoned determined political programming and action? Lewis Way quite correctly sees that we shall need not only more cooperative individuals, as noted above, but also a society which will fulfill their fullest potential (p. 360). As the author says, we cannot expect Individual Psychology to provide more than a beginning, and Adler made this by striking out the boundary between science and life. Adler died before World War II and the heavy emptiness of the threat of World War III. Thus we have learned what Adler could not know as fully as we do now, namely, that no science can circumscribe itself without cutting off the vital social interest which attests to its maturity. In the year 3000 it may well be said by historians of science that our physicists, who went ahead and invented the hydrogen bomb in an age of militant nationalism, were in fact doing "poor science."

### CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

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