

# FRIENDSHIP: THE ADLERIAN MODE OF EXISTENCE<sup>1</sup>

JAMES F. BRENNAN

*Western State School and Hospital, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania*

To some, namely those well acquainted with Adler, the title of this article goes without saying; to others it may represent a provocative thesis which is not understood. More than likely, readers will "find what they have known before" (3, p. 155). Naturally, the scope of the article seeks to make the title understood, i.e., discuss what is meant by friendship and existence in general, then Adler's relationship to these concepts in particular. By defining friendship, then existence, and relating these concepts to Adler as theorist and therapist, a new perspective may emerge under which one is able to stand.

How does one define friendship? Webster (8) defines the term "friendship" as "a state of being friends." The term "friend" is defined in two ways: (a) "one attached to another by esteem, respect, and affection; an intimate;" (b) "one not hostile, one not a foe; also one of the same nation, party, kin, etc." Despite the apparent clarity of Webster's definition, he fails to reveal the limiting situational factors and the essential experiences of friendship relations. A more precise definition would include three elements: first, objective factors necessary for friendship relations; second, the primary experiential atmosphere in such relations; and last, the friend's attitude toward the befriended.

The author believes these three elements are contained in the following definition: Friendship is a complex of human experiences which emerges from socially structured human interactions of a personal and intimate nature; such interactions foster frequent conversation and mutual understanding in an atmosphere of comfortableness and cooperation; and both parties in friendship relations intentionally sustain and renew the interaction for its personal value.

At first glance the definition seems precise but empty, deceptively pregnant with meaning but embedded in ambiguity. To reveal its clear meaning an analytic breakdown is needed, stressing the three facets of the definition: first, socially structured human interactions;

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<sup>1</sup>This paper is based on the author's master's thesis, "Friendship in Adler's psychology," Duquesne University, 1965.

second, an atmosphere of comfortableness and cooperation; and last, the value of the befriended.

First, friendships are only experienced through interaction with others in socially structured situations. In other words, one cannot experience the fruits of friendship without another who shares common meanings. The social context gives human encounter the possibility of intimate interaction, for intimacy demands the ability to communicate with and understand the other. For example, the development of intimate friendship between a Tibetan tribesman and a Hebrew scholar would be blocked by a communication barrier. Only after the barrier is bridged could any understanding develop, and such understanding would include the learning of each other's language and social customs.

Second, friendship relations are permeated with an atmosphere of comfortableness and cooperation. Each one feels safe and behaves as an equal in spontaneously communicating his personal feelings and freely cooperating in mutually rewarding activities. For this reason, master and slave cannot be friends, for each one so fears the other that communication and activities are coordinated to maintain one at the expense of the other. Conversely, as Adler points out, a climate of equality fosters empathy: seeing with another's eyes, hearing with another's ears, and, we might add, standing in another's shoes (2, p. 340). For instance, an atmosphere of equality enables one to look upon his friend's fear of elevators without contempt; instead, he calls upon his own fear of deep water in order to understand and appreciate his friend's apprehension. Each one feels comfortable and freely cooperates in revealing, protecting, and enhancing the other's personality.

And last, friendship relations are intentionally sustained and renewed for the personal value each places upon the other. Friendships involve mutual commitment; however, the decision to maintain a friendship is based upon the personal value one has for the other and not upon collusion. Political slogans or symbiotic economic pacts do not bind people together in friendship; rather loyalty to the other as a person of value, sustains and renews the genuine friendship relation. Loyalty springs from the mutual trust and interest one has for the other instead of from the benefits of following an ideological cause or of maintaining a lucrative business arrangement. The renewing of friendship, torn by misunderstanding, is not political fence mending nor allying with one business competitor against another one; instead,

it is two people so interested in each other that they overcome hurt pride and a feeling of being betrayed in order to re-establish the friendship relation.

From this analysis, it becomes clear that friendship is just one way of existing with others. However, what precisely is meant by "existing with others"?

Existence is the general concept which encompasses all possible modes of "being-in-the-world-with-others" (5). In effect, man is existence. In this context, the term "existence" is used by van Kaam (6) in its original etymological sense: *existere*, meaning "standing outside of oneself, a going beyond oneself, a being present outside in the world" (5, p. 178). Man is thereby distinguished from other beings on the basis that he stands outside of himself passively *in* and actively *at* the world with others. Man is situated *in* the world with others, and he participates *at* it with them. As Luijpen says: "My presence in the world is a *co*-presence; my encounter with the world is *our* encounter; my world is *our* world" (5, p. 178). To think of man without taking into account his situation in the world and the way he participates with others in his environment is unfruitful. Considering man as an individual requires insight into how he is present or standing beyond himself with others in the world. The following discussion seeks to reveal Adler's mode of existence.

Adler's mode of existence is to befriend others. He stands out to others in friendship and intentionally strives to make the world a more friendly place in which to live. To support such a contention involves relating the three aspects of the definition of friendship to Adler's personality theory and practice of psychotherapy. How are (a) socially structured human interactions, (b) an atmosphere of equality, and (c) the value of the befriended, reflected in Adlerian theory and praxis?

#### ADLERIAN THEORY

Theoretically, in Adler's psychology the three factors of friendship are reflected in the following ways: first, socially structured human interaction serves as Adler's unit of analytic reconstruction; second, feeling equal gives meaning to his supraordinate inferiority-superiority construct; and last, value of the befriended clarifies Adler's integrating concept of social interest.

First, according to Dreikurs (4), Adler thought about human behavior in terms of an irreducible unit of analysis: human interaction

within a social context. A human act was never viewed outside its social setting or devoid of the innumerable interactions of the past and present as well as those anticipated in the future, which made the act possible. Adler's concern was with how the individual interacted with others in society, instead of how one related to an anonymous reality. His theoretical approach was holistic and poetical rather than reductionistic and mechanical. Also, his theoretical constructs reflect an integrating humanistic viewpoint.

Second, the inferiority-superiority construct allows Adler to see if a person does or does not interact with people in a spirit of equality. Feeling inferior or superior within an interaction denotes an unhealthy lack of safety. One's evaluation of a relationship as unsafe destroys his sense of being equal among others and paralyzes his ability to empathize and cooperate. In short, the inferiority-superiority concept allows Adler to determine whether one has friends and if not, what factors are preventing friendship formations. In this view, feeling equal is necessary for friendship relations and these in turn are necessary for a feeling of belonging and well-being common to mental health. To be without friends divorces one from common sense and isolates him more and more in his private thoughts. Although one may always challenge the correctness of common sense in a particular situation, he may not totally reject it without suffering estrangement and detachment from reality. Feeling personally inferior or superior in society is not in accordance with the common notion that all persons are equal—not in talent but in humanity.

And last, interest in others, concern for their well-being, and cooperative participation in their activities makes for friendships and clarifies Adler's integrating and normative concept of social interest. Social interest is but the friend's attitude toward the befriended. To befriend one also involves a correlative attitude which attempts to alter the world into one permeated with safety and opportunity for the befriended. The rightness or wrongness of one's behavior ultimately rests upon the notion of social interest, for interest in others constantly demands a change in the world, since evolving factors continually jeopardize the safety of those befriended. Those who strive to protect and enhance the lot of others project an ideal of society, one which springs from the personal value the friend places upon the befriended. It is within such a context that Alexandra Adler reiterates that "the only way in which one can estimate whether or not a person is right or wrong is by his relation to mankind as a whole"

(I, p. 36). The society Adler strove to bring about was a community of friends. Clearly, friendships play a significant role in shaping one's mode of behavior and ultimately the destiny of mankind. How then can friendship relations be fostered?

#### ADLERIAN THERAPY

Adler in theory implicitly attempted to provide a scientific way of developing friendship relations in practice. In other words, Adler wanted to know how he could befriend some people where others could not, due to their unscientific approach. His unit of analysis, socially structured human interaction, permitted him to understand one in terms of how he related to others and the impact this had upon society in general. By utilizing the inferiority-superiority construct, Adler was able to see what initiated one's retreat from friendship relations and what personal traits and attitudes maintained the barriers blocking their formation. The normative concept of social feeling guided his therapeutic interaction into a genuine human encounter which above all demanded the courage to risk oneself in friendship relations. Adler in befriending his patients also accepted the possibility of being injured and betrayed as does anyone who befriends another.

Adlerian therapy consists of befriending the patient by establishing an atmosphere of equality wherein the patient is valued as a member of the community of man (2, pp. 340-341). Understanding must enable the patient to establish friendship and expand his field of interactions so as to develop his common sense. In this way the therapy session serves as the community in microcosmos enabling the patient to perceive himself and act as an equal member of society. Way relates how Adler would create a comfortable, informal atmosphere by sitting face to face with the client. He would never demand radically distinct postures as a couch and chair would permit, nor designate for himself a special chair, since distinct postures and privileged seats disturb the sense of equality in much the same way as a throne does. An informal, comfortable atmosphere allows the patient to take a more open attitude toward the mysterious nature of his symptoms and preoccupation with self (7, pp. 177-178). In a sense his symptoms emerge from lack of friends, and the barriers he erects to avoid risking himself in friendship relations find some clarification in 20th century society. Today the old adage of "love thy neighbor as thyself" is still ridiculed and evaded but never silenced or ignored. To counteract

this negative social climate, Adler worked toward actualizing an ideal society, one which would school individuals in the science of friendship as well as in the three R's. Adler believed, "This problem [of society] is best solved by friendship, social feeling, and cooperation" (2, p. 132).

#### SUMMARY

Friendship when defined and discussed in relationship to Adlerian theory and praxis reveals what is usually left only to those who read between the lines of Adler's writings, namely, the intent to befriend the patient. Subjectively conceived as understanding, feeling equal to, and valuing the other, friendship is defined according to these three facets and their objective correlates: (a) Socially structured interactions make communication and understanding possible. (b) An experiential atmosphere of comfortableness and cooperation promotes a feeling of equality. (c) Interest in the other's welfare sustains the relationship based upon a person's value. In terms of theory and praxis, the first facet reflects Adler's unit of analysis which fosters an interpersonal understanding of the patient. The second mirrors his construct of inferiority-superiority which enables him to evaluate the patient's sense of equality and belongingness. The last points to social feeling, Adler's integrating construct which puts into motion the understanding of the patient's sense of personal inequality in order to win him as a friend. Adlerian theory is a science of friendship; its practice is a therapeutic method.

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