UPRIGHT POSTURE AS THE FOUNDATION OF INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ADLER AND STRAUS

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A child who raises himself from the ground for the first time comes into an entirely new world, and in that second he somehow senses a hostile atmosphere.

—ALFRED ADLER (4, p. 44)

Human gait is, in fact, a continuously arrested falling. Therefore, an unforeseen obstacle or a little unevenness of the ground may precipitate a fall. . . . It is motion on credit.

—ERWIN W. STRAUS (9, p. 148)

The characterization of the theoretical foundation of Individual Psychology in terms of upright posture was suggested to the present author by one of Adler's most significant childhood experiences: "One of my earliest recollections is of sitting on a bench, bandaged up on account of rickets, with my healthy elder brother sitting opposite me. He could run, jump and move about quite effortlessly, while for me movement of any sort was a strain and an effort" (5, p. 30).

The author intends to demonstrate through a comparison of Individual Psychology with the analysis of upright posture by Erwin Straus[1] that Adler's childhood experience conditioned in a foundational sense his building of a home, i.e., Individual Psychology. The fact that some persons feel at home in Individual Psychology while others find contentment in Psychoanalysis or Analytic Psychology may be clarified by the intuition that the founders of schools of psychology are significantly impressed by different childhood experiences which strike harmonious chords in some (disciples) and

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[1]Erwin Straus is a German born phenomenological psychiatrist who immigrated to the United States in 1938 and to this day continues to be one of the leading figures in the phenomenological movement within psychology and psychiatry both here and abroad. He is one of the contributors to *Existence* edited by Rollo May et al. (7). In 1966 his 75th birthday was celebrated by a Festschrift (10). Here is his phenomenological characterization of psychology: "Experience is the only authentic theme of psychology. Psychology deals with or should deal with experiencing beings, not with a mind or an intellect nor with a nervous system or an apparatus, not with a consciousness and data of consciousness nor with stimuli and motor responses. Psychology can be defined as a branch of knowledge dedicated to the study of experiencing beings insofar as they are experiencing beings" (9, p. 249).

not in others (outsiders).[2] However, this intuition cannot account for the total theoretical structure of Individual Psychology, for it illuminates only the ground or foundation of Adler's home and not its form or superstructure.

To grasp also the skeletal form of Individual Psychology, the author has suggested that friendship is Adler's fundamental life motive (6). Once Individual Psychology is comprehended according to its creator's primordial experience of life (of standing up) and his fundamental motive (of befriending others), the theory as a structural whole becomes intelligible as an attitude toward life which illuminates reality according to a basic experience and intention.[3] Within this context, cultural-historical events and conditions do not solely determine theoretical formulation; rather, they initiate the therorist to interpret a cultural-historical factuality in terms of his basic experience of life and life motive. For example, World War I probably played a large role in the development of Adler's conception of "social feeling" as well as in Freud's formulation of the "death instinct." The fact of man's inhumanity toward man remains unaltered; however, the significance of this fact within an Adlerian or Freudian system is greatly determined by the theorists' basic life attitude. As von Sassen (11) notes, Adler's optimistic conception conforms to a theory of compensation or achievement in the world; whereas, Freud's pessimistic concept corresponds to a theory of repression or achievement within the self.

This paper hopes to clarify how a fact changes in significance according to an attitude deeply rooted in experience. Since Adler sensed the implications of this experience rather than reflecting upon the experience itself, he theorized without being clearly aware of the experiential ground of his theory building. Straus, on the other hand,

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[2] A similar thought is expressed by Adler: "As soon as a scientific system is offered to the world, it appeals to individuals, both layman and scientists, with a trend of mind similar to that of the author of the system and provides them with a scientific foundation for an attitude towards life which they had achieved previously" (1, p. 197).

[3] To the philosopher such notions as primordial experience and life motive represent psychologism in its most pure form. The author readily agrees with the correctness of this label, but he points out that only a psychologism can adequately account for the diversity of therapeutic schools in psychology. We are better able to understand a theoretical system, in the author's opinion, if the theorist's perspective is grasped first before cultural-historical conditions and events are brought to bear in explaining the origin and structure of his psychological theory, for it is always man's relationship to cultural-historical factors which determine their significance for him.

does explicitly analyze the human factuality of upright posture, and develops many formulations from it. By pointing out the great similarity of these to several basic tenets of Adler, we intend to demonstrate that Adler's early experience of desiring mobility and upright posture gave the original directions to his psychology.

The scope of this paper involves comparing the upright posture as analyzed by Straus with Individual Psychology according to (a) the striving from below to above; (b) overcoming as humanity's original life task; (c) the upright urge and society; (d) standing, the problem of distance, and psychopathology. Finally some general conclusions will be made in summary form.

Striving from Below to Above

Man's striving from below to above, from a minus to a plus, from inferiority to superiority, from imperfection to perfection finds its point of origin in the upright posture. Adler sees the upward urge as the primordial root of all man's behavior: "The urge from below to above never ceases. Whatever premises all our philosophers and psychologists dream of—self-preservation, pleasure principle, equalization—all these are but vague representations, attempts to express the great upward drive" (1, p. 103).

Straus in his analysis of upright posture also sees the psychological implications inherent in such a way of being in the world:

The direction upward, against gravity, inscribes into space-world regions to which we attach values, such as those expressed by high and low, rise and decline, climbing and falling, superior and inferior, elevated and downcast, looking up to and despising. On Olympus high, remote, inaccessible, and exalted, dwell the Homeric gods. . . . Below, in the depths, is Hades and the world of shadows (9, p. 142).

For Adler the upward urge represents the pre-given man-world structure. He states, "From this network" (upward urge acting as nucleus of differentiation) "which in the last analysis is simply given with the man-cosmos relationship, no one may hope to escape" (1, p. 103). Straus concludes, "Upright posture pre-establishes a definite attitude toward the world: it is a specific mode of being-in-the-world" (9, p. 139). While Adler speaks implicitly about the psychological implications of the upright mode of existence, Straus does so explicitly. Both theorists also see the upward urge and the man-nature struggle developing into the striving to overcome, to achieve.

OVERCOMING AS HUMANITY'S ORIGINAL LIFE TASK

"The origin of humanity and the ever-repeated beginning of infant life," Adler writes, "impresses with every psychological act: Achieve! Arise! Conquer!" (1, p. 103). Straus sees this overcoming attitude as a result of man assuming the upright posture: "Upright posture, which we learn in and through falling, remains threatened by falls throughout our lives. The natural stance of man is, therefore, 'resistance' . . . Man's status demands endeavor. It is essentially restless. We are committed to an ever renewed exertion" (9, p. 143). Both Adler and Straus see the child as not seeking primarily security nor pleasure but superiority, an achievement in principle unattainable in a complete sense. Why else would the child persevere in arising only to fall if it were not to achieve greater freedom and power afforded him in the upright posture? Why is the child still dissatisfied with himself after having mastered the upright stance, after having become like adults, after having achieved more than his parents? It appears that in having challenged nature through the acquisition of the upright posture man is reciprocally challenged in his dialectic with the world. Similarly, according to Adler, "All life (forms) are properly developed for the victorious overcoming contact with the outside world" (1, p. 240). Straus states this insight more precisely: "It seems to be his nature to oppose nature in its impersonal, fundamental aspects with natural means." He continues, "However, gravity is never fully overcome; upright posture maintains its character of counter-reaction" (9, p. 141).

UPWARD URGE AND SOCIETY

Society, for both Adler and Straus, represents the critical support for man's striving from below to above, for his uprightness. Man in his natural opposition to gravity depends upon the community to sustain his posture or stance in the world, ultimately, to safeguard his survival. Adler refers to man's precarious stance in nature when he states, "From the point of view of nature, man is an inferior being" (1, p. 129). Likewise, Straus stresses man's primordial conflict with nature rather than any superficial conflict between society and the individual: "Considering man in his upright posture, we do well to envisage the possibility that not society has first brought man into conflict with nature, but that man's natural opposition to nature enables him to produce society, history, and conventions" (9, p. 142). Perhaps no other psychologist has so stressed, as Adler

has, man's natural vulnerability and inferior position in nature forcing him to gather together in social groups in order to survive:

Social interest is the true and inevitable compensation for all the natural weakness of individual human beings. The human being, even biologically considered, is clearly a social being, needing a much longer period of dependence upon others before its maturity than any other animal. The human mother also is more dependent before, during, and after giving birth (1, p. 155).

Adler considers even the strong adult as capable of "only little resistance against nature, he needs a larger amount of aids to live and preserve himself." He continues, "Consider the situation of a man in a jungle, alone and without aids provided by culture. He would appear incomparably more threatened than any other creature" (1, p. 129). From this viewpoint Adler concludes that community alone offers man his place in evolution, for as long as individuals dialogue with the community cooperatively, they guarantee their survival as a species. In regard to man's societal evolution, Adler states that "every human thought had to be so constituted that it could do justice to a community" (1, p. 129). Within this framework, the individual must fit his personal quest into the larger structure of society's more original task, i.e., safeguarding the existence of humanity. The task of every individual, therefore, is to overcome problems the solutions of which contribute toward the betterment of society.

Standing and the Problem of Distance

At this point one may ask: At what price does man purchase victory over nature? Straus explicitly replies to this question: "With upright posture an inescapable ambivalence penetrates and pervades all human behavior." He states further, "Upright posture removes us from the ground, keeps us away from things and holds us aloof from our fellow men" (9, p. 143). In like fashion Adler continually speaks of mental disease as originating from the exaggerated distance between the individual and his fellow men with a concomitant antagonism between the world and the things thereof.

For the purpose of this paper we shall discuss first, man's distance from others; and second, his imprisonment in the alien world of sensing which Straus terms "landscape."

Distance from others. Straus writes that "in upright posture we find ourselves 'face to face' with others, distant, aloof—verticals that never meet" (9, p. 145). He further writes that "dictators,

reviewing their troops, try to show by their rigid poses their imperturbable and unshakable will" (9, pp. 145-146). For Adler distance from communal life is synonymous with a distance from reality, a rigid insistence upon being at all times above others, complete self-boundedness, and a striving to be godlike (2, pp. 102-103).

Imprisonment within the "landscape." According to Straus psychopathology represents a disturbance in one's I-world relationship consisting of a disintegration of the distance separating one from the world of sensing, or "the landscape," or what we may call nature. He says this about the mentally ill: "They (mentally ill) live within the horizon of their landscape, slaves of the unmotivated and unfounded certitude of impressions which no longer can be adapted to the general order of the world of things and the general meaning context of language" (8, p. 361).

A synthesis of the views of Adler and Straus would define the pathological movement as an inverse relation between common sense and private sense: as distance from one's fellow men increases, disrupting communal dialogue, distance from "the landscape" decreases, resulting in the capitulation of one's initiative over to the captivating impact of "the landscape." In other words, as social dialogue decreases, one is left more and more with his private feelings which increasingly reflect his inferior ability to face nature alone.

The "landscape" or sensory world of private experiences overpowers the socially estranged person and dominates his action to the extent that he loses himself in the directness and narrowness of the alingual world of sensing. Straus gives the following description of what it must be like for one to be alone in nature:

Light, color, sound, smell, moving shapes entice or frighten directly in their immediate appearance. When we are frightened by a loud crashing, our fright is not the result of former experience of danger and threat. The sudden alarm is in itself frightening. . . . Reflection is reduced to silence before the immediate force of the uncanny, the terrifying, or the powerfully seductive (8, p. 198).

Likewise Adler has glimpsed the terrifying character the world assumes when one drifts too far from his fellow man in search of radically personal significance or power:

We (humans) are much milder than the facts of life in nature, than this cosmos which calls to him who has a longing for power and violence in the greatest variation: I don't like him, he must be removed! He who like the psychologist witnesses this hard logic of human living together, longs to make this infinitely dark voice audible to all, to warn them of the abyss into which individuals, whole families, and people fall, to disappear forever. But we need the new method, the new word to make this dreadful voice audible (3, p. 172).

It is the author's contention that Straus provides "the new method, the new word." It penetrates into man's essential being-in-the-world as far as this can be detached from being-with-others, his *idios cosmos*, his private world of sensing.

Summary and Conclusions

To conclude let us now recapitulate how Straus' analysis of the human factuality of upright posture forms the basis or ground of Adler's psychological theory.

The theoretical foundation of Individual Psychology is rooted in Adler's childhood experience of having difficulty in assuming and maintaining the upright posture, though Adler was not clearly aware of the experiential ground of his theory building. The many ramifications of the upright posture are reflected in Adler's stress upon the striving from below to above as fundamental in human motivation, the original life task of mankind as overcoming nature through cooperation, the individual's need of communal life for support against nature, and the essence of psychopathology as distancing oneself from community participation and dialogue.

Within this perspective, Adler's concept of social feeling takes on a deeper significance in its reference to man's need to be close to others, to cooperate with them, and to be concerned about their welfare (1, p. 138). Closeness to others enhances man's cultural world largely carved out of evolution by the assumption of the upright posture and maintains the needed distance from the alingual world of sensing which in its exclusiveness is an alien world for man. Man, as an upright being, sustains his new mode of life in dialogue with fellow men (the *social* aspect of social feeling) which mediates his relationship with the private world of sensing (the *feeling* aspect of social feeling).

Within this context Adler's approach to therapy also takes on a more profound meaning. He states that "The task of the physician or psychologist is to give the patient the experience of contact with a fellow man, and then to enable him to transfer this awakened social interest to others" (1, p. 341). The fact that man must both learn how to stand upright and how to live cooperatively with others is significant for Straus in its relation to cultural development and for Adler in its therapeutic, social reform aspects. Straus even reveals how upright posture makes possible language, writing, tool making,

and expansion of world horizons or perspectives which transcend man's rootedness in nature (9, pp. 147-157).

Finally within this framework, the following statement by Adler takes on a deeper meaning: "The love of our neighbour . . . will become as natural as breathing or the upright gait" (5, p. 168).

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