

THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL INTEREST¹. *

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The most distinctive concept in Adler's Individual Psychology, but also the most difficult and the one that has least caught on in the general psychological literature is *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, generally translated as social interest or social feeling. These two translations will here be used as synonyms since they are both found in Adler's writings in English. The preferred translation will be social interest, the term used by Adler in his last paper written in English (9), indicating a gradual shift from the more phenomenological, feeling, to the more operational, interest. Just as the striving from a minus to a plus situation—toward overcoming, success, superiority, or perfection—is the master motive in Adler's psychology, so social interest is the cardinal personality trait, with traits regarded as reflecting "the relationship of an individual to his environment" (5, p. 133).

"Degree of social interest is the main characteristic of each person and is involved in all his actions," according to Adler (9, p. 774). He superordinates social interest to nearly all desirable traits, and absence of social interest to nearly all undesirable traits. Consider the following passage:

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the value of an increase in social feeling. The mind improves, for intelligence is a communal function. The feeling of worth and value is heightened, giving courage and an optimistic view, and there is a sense of acquiescence in the common advantages and drawbacks of our lot. The individual feels at home in life and feels his existence to be worthwhile just so far as he is useful to others and is overcoming common, instead of private, feelings of inferiority. Not only the ethical nature, but the right attitude in aesthetics, the best understanding of the beautiful and the ugly, will always be founded upon the truest social feeling (6, p. 79; 10, p. 155).

Thus social interest becomes Adler's criterion for mental health. "Social interest is the barometer of the child's normality. The criterion which needs to be watched . . . is the degree of social interest which the child or the individual manifests" (10, p. 154).

¹This paper originated in earlier comments in the *Indiv. Psychol. News Letter* (15), as part of a discussion from which other participants and further references are herein quoted. We wish to express our appreciation to Paul Rom, editor of the *News Letter*, for having initiated this discussion.

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In an earlier paper, devoted to the structure of Individual Psychology as a whole, we made the point that the difficulty with social interest lay less with the translation, as had often been thought, than with matters intrinsic to the concept (14, pp. 351-353). We may add that, in fact, the concept has been as much of a problem in German as it has been in English (48). This being the case, little would be gained by using the German term in English writing, as is occasionally suggested. The advantage of the German term is only that the extension of meaning beyond the social, which we shall discuss below, is better implied in "*Gemeinschaft*" than in "social," although this extension is not obvious. This is why some earlier translators used "community feeling" or "community sense" (3, pp. 9, 20, 350), or "communal feeling," etc. The gain from using the German term would, however, be more than offset by an increase in the reader's uncertainty through creating in him the false impression that all his difficulties would be solved if only his command of the German language were more adequate.

The essential property of social interest in any language is that it is a term composed of two parts: *interest*, a psychological *process*, and *social*, standing for *object(s)* in the outside world at which the process is directed. The difficulty is that neither part denotes a single referent. Rather, each represents a dimension. We shall call the first the *process dimension*, the second, the *object dimension*. While the distinction between the two dimensions is at times not quite clear, we consider it a defensible working hypothesis.

The previous paper, mentioned earlier, included a discussion of the process dimension of social interest, although it was not called by this name (14, pp. 351-353). We showed from Adler's various uses of the term that it referred to three different kinds of processes which could be arranged into three developmental steps, as follows.

In Step 1, social interest is an assumed *aptitude* for cooperation and social living which can be developed through training.

In Step 2, this aptitude has been developed into the objective *abilities* of cooperating and contributing, as well as understanding others and empathizing with them.

In Step 3, social interest is a subjective *evaluative attitude* determining choices and thus influencing the dynamics of the individual. When not backed up by the skills represented in Step 2, such an attitude of social interest may not be sufficient to meet all contingencies.

Understood in this way, rather than as a second dynamic process counteracting the striving for superiority, social interest fits into a holistic theory of personality such as Adler's, which requires one dominant dynamic force, and has no place for two or more conflicting forces. Dynamically, the function of social interest is to direct the striving toward the socially useful side. In such favorable development, "the ineradicable will to superiority is united with social feeling, and issues in courageous and optimistic activity upon the useful side of life" (6, p. 32).

The purpose of the present paper is (a) to explore and delineate the object dimension of social interest and (b) to discuss further aspects of the process dimension outlined in the earlier paper.

OBJECT DIMENSION

Extended Meaning of Gemeinschaft

From the start, Adler extended the meaning of *Gemeinschaft*, the social in social interest, to a variety of "objects" one would not necessarily assume under this term. In fact nearly all objects in the world are potentially included. This may be illustrated by the passage Adler added in 1922 to one of his earliest papers, "The Aggression Drive," originally published in 1908. It reads:

Gemeinschaftsgefühl which is innate to man must be regarded as the most important regulator of the aggression drive. It is at the basis of any relationship of the child toward people, *animals, plants and objects*, and signifies the *cohesion (die Verwachsenheit) with our life*, the affirmation, the conciliation with it. Through *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* in its rich differentiations (parental love, filial love, sexual love, love of one's country, *love of nature, art, science*, love of mankind) acting together with the aggression drive, there comes about the general attitude a person takes, which actually constitutes his psychological life (2, p. 25, italics ours).

Several points are noteworthy here, of which actually only the last refers to the object dimension of social interest.

(a) Adler states flatly that social interest is innate. Later he wisely modified this by saying: "Social feeling is not inborn; but it is an innate potentiality which has to be consciously developed" (6, p. 31). We should like to underline *consciously* because this gives Adlerian psychology as a whole its strongly cognitive emphasis with the great importance attributed to social interest.

(b) Adler uses "aggression drive" not in the sense of hostility only, as is generally done today, but rather in the sense of an active striving—later variously named striving for success, superiority,

or perfection, among others. George A. Kelly also made this distinction between hostility and aggression, and regarded aggression as a dimension ranging from inertia to initiative (28, p. 143).

(c) Adler subsumes under social interest explicitly all the various forms of love, whereas generally he avoided using the term love, except in the sense of sexual love (see 16).

(d) Of major interest in the present connection is that social interest is equated with an affirmative attitude toward life in general and all objects in the world. Thus the *Gemeinschaft* of the *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* is not limited to the community of men, but means a general connectedness. Actually in the preface to his first major book Adler used *Gemeinschaft* in a sense that did not refer to the community of men. When he presented the proposition that every aspect of the personality becomes subordinated to the fictional "personality ideal" or "the self-consistent life plan," he wrote: Even organically, "the individual becomes a self-consistent *Gemeinschaft* in which all parts cooperate for a similar purpose" (1, new translation). He quoted this passage from Rudolph Virchow, 1821-1902, the famous pathologist, social reformer, and liberal parliamentarian, who was in this passage referring to the *Gemeinschaft* of the cells in the body.

Similar statements about social interest as a general cohesion with and affirmation of life, made by Adler five and six years later, are:

The social feeling remains throughout life, changed, colored, circumscribed in some cases, enlarged and broadened in others until it touches not only the members of [the individual's] own family, but also his clan, his nation, and finally, the whole of humanity. It is possible that it may extend beyond these boundaries and express itself toward animals, plants, lifeless objects, or finally towards the whole cosmos (5, p. 46).²

The innate social feeling is actually a cosmic feeling, a reflection of the coherence of everything cosmic, which lives in us, which we cannot dismiss entirely, and which gives us the ability to empathize with things which lie outside our body (5, p. 60, new translation).

In another paper the following year, after an enumeration of psychologists who "stressed empathy as a fundamental fact of our experience," Adler stated, "Individual Psychology may claim as its contribution to have pointed out that empathy and understanding are facts of social feeling, of being in harmony with the universe [*des Einigseins mit dem All*]" (11, p. 43).

²A slightly different translation also exists (10, p. 138).

Meanings According to Various Adlerian Writers

Among Adlerian writers notably Wexberg took up the extended meaning of *Gemeinschaft* as was pointed out by Brodsky (19). Wexberg included objectivity, logic, readiness to work and devotion to one's work, devotion to nature and art, and readiness for responsibility of all kinds under *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*. "To cross the boundaries of one's self only with regard to human beings is not possible. One who is ready to extend himself will also be able to forget himself in nature and art. In the end there exists *Gemeinschaft* also with things" (49, p. 78).³

For Wexberg this was a matter of centrifugal versus centripetal tendency (49, p. 82). This pair of terms corresponds to what the Gestalt psychologists have called task- or other-centeredness versus self-centeredness, the former being based on the human capacity to do justice to the requirements of a situation, be it social or non-social (16, p. 117 ff.). The opposite of self-centeredness might also be called self-transcendence.

Lewis Way elaborates on this position rather poetically when he says:

Adler used the word *Gemeinschaft* because his meaning embraced not only the society of men, but an attitude of identification with the whole created universe. The 'community,' as he seems to have envisaged it, included love of nature as well as love of our fellowmen, and even love of the inanimate. It was the sense of kinship with the other animals and the basis of our sense of beauty, of the earth and the sea and the sky. I would therefore be inclined to translate this difficult word as 'sense of community'—of community with the Universe which is to be regarded as essentially 'friendly' (47).

In his book on Individual Psychology, Way stated:

The feeling for the *Gemeinschaft* is wider than the term 'society' suggests. It embraces the sense of relatedness, not only to the human community, but to the whole of life, and is therefore the highest expression of Adler's concept of totality. It means the human being's sense of himself as a part of the unity of existence in contrast to the fear of standing in the cosmos as a single unrelated organism.

We sometimes see examples of this sense of kinship with all that exists in the work of great artists, like that of Beethoven, in the recognition of oneness, and in the love, sympathy, and desire for combination with life which music such as his so often expresses. In a narrower form, the same emotion can also be felt sexually towards another human being, especially when that being comes to symbolize the whole sex, so that in the love for one is expressed the love for all. It is difficult to believe that the feeling of natural sympathy for life which is apparent in the work of great artists and mystics is not a more comprehensive form of the same feelings as expressed by the lover (46, p. 176).

³There is also a translation of the book by Wexberg (50) which, however, in the passages of interest here is not very adequate.

Farau sums up the necessity for such an extension of the concept of the *Gemeinschaft* in the words, "He who sees in Adler's *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* only a social feeling, rather than a cosmic feeling which includes social feeling, cannot understand and apply it fully" (24, p. 16).

On the other hand, there are the more pragmatic Adlerians who use *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* in a far more limited meaning. Accepting social interest as the translation, Dreikurs essentially equates it with the "feeling of belonging." "Social interest, in the context of the Adlerian viewpoint, means that the person experiences belonging and knows he has a place" (23, p. 235). Adler at times indeed equated the "feeling of belongingness" (*das Gefühl der Zusammengehörigkeit*) with social interest (4, p. 32). E.g., he considered that "love in all its thousand variations is a feeling of belongingness and hence . . . a social feeling" (10, p. 435).

In a syllabus by Mosak and Shulman who accept this limited meaning, we find under "goals of coping behavior" the entry "expansion"; and as one form of expansion, "the feeling of belonging (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*)" (37, p. 8). From the viewpoint of the object dimension the emphasis in "belonging" is on those persons or that situation toward which one has such feeling. Other characteristics generally taken as pertaining to social interest, such as contribution, equality, cooperation, other-centeredness, empathy, as well as belonging, are listed under "factors promoting human growth and full functioning" (37, p. 16). Thus, while these authors equate social interest with "feeling of belonging," they take the entire complex of concepts usually associated with this term to be a part of a larger concept of social expansion or human growth.

A middle position between "cosmic feeling" and "feeling of belonging" is taken by O'Connell who has suggested the term humanistic identification to denote his conception of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*. His objections to social interest are that "interest appears too mild, volitional and intellectual; social too narrow, compliant and tethered by conventions and mores" (38, p. 44). Although humanistic identification is still limited to social relationships, it is broad in its coverage of these. "It covers the intellectual, affective, and behavioral aspects of the optimal relationship to others, namely, understanding, empathizing with, and acting in behalf of others" (38, p. 47). It is "demonstrated intellectually by 'outsight,' a commitment toward understanding the psychological needs of others

and the tension generated by their lack of fulfillment; and [behaviorally] by an active movement toward satisfying such needs and becoming a significant other" (38, p. 44). O'Connell's "humanistic identification" comes closest to the description at which we shall eventually arrive on the basis of the present logical analysis of the term social interest.

Self-Actualization

Let us look at people in whom, one might say, social interest is highly developed, to see toward what "objects" they are interested, to arrive so-to-speak at an empirical description of the extent of the object dimension.

People with high social interest would, of course, be mentally healthy, since social interest is the criterion for mental health. Furthermore, since Maslow's (33, 34) self-actualizing people are also mentally healthy, there should be a similarity between the two groups. Thus to obtain a description of high social interest people we started with Maslow's list of characteristics of self-actualizers, i.e., the "object" concerns of this group, to see to what extent this group could be matched with concerns Adler described as characteristic of social interest. The results are shown in Table 1.

The table shows rather full agreement between Maslow and Adler as to the objects with which mentally healthy people are concerned. According to Maslow (34, pp. 19-41) such people function on the level of growth motivation, rather than deficiency motivation. This conception is similar to that of Mosak and Shulman (37, p. 16) who considered the various characteristics of social interest as promoting human growth.

Usefulness

At this point we wish to return to one of the initial statements (see p. 2) that social interest is a criterion of mental health. From what has been said so far, it would appear that social interest could be fully described as growth, expansion, or self-transcendence. But to include the function of criterion of mental health, social interest must be further qualified.

This necessity can be illustrated by the many instances of mere expansion in mental disorder. One finds growth and expansion in the hallucinations and obsessions of the schizophrenic and paranoiac. One finds appropriate approaches to tools and other inanimate objects precisely in the psychopath. One finds love of animals in

TABLE I. OBJECTS OF CONCERN OF PEOPLE STRIVING WITH WELL-DEVELOPED SOCIAL INTEREST (ADLER), AND OF SELF-ACTUALIZING, GROWTH-MOTIVATED PEOPLE (MASLOW)

Objects of concern	Striving with social interest	Growth motivation ^a
1. Self	Feelings of worth and value, courage and optimism (6, p. 79)	Acceptance of self, others, nature (p. 206)
2. Opinion of others	Independence of opinion of others (11, p. 97)	Independence; autonomy, detachment (pp. 213-212)
3. Problems outside self	Overcoming common instead of private inferiority feelings (6, p. 79)	Focused on problems outside oneself (p. 211)
4. Fellowman	Being a fellowman, friend (6, p. 32)	Better interpersonal relations and friendships (p. 218)
5. Fellowman	Equal, cooperative footing with fellowman (10, p. 347)	Democratic, not authoritarian character structure (p. 219)
6. Mankind	Love of mankind (10, p. 136)	<i>Gemeinschaftsgefühl</i> ; identification with mankind (p. 217)
7. Realities of life	Feeling at home in life, acquiescing in common advantages and drawbacks (6, p. 79)	Comfortable relations with reality, more efficient perception of it (p. 203)
8. Universe	Harmony with universe (10, p. 136) cosmic feeling (see above)	Oceanic feeling, mystic experience (p. 216)
9. Ethics	Religious and ethical feelings (11, p. 283)	Clarity in ethical norms and dealings, religious in a social-behavioral way (p. 221)
10. Aesthetics	Better aesthetic judgment (6, p. 79)	Freshness of appreciation of beauty (p. 214)
11.	Improved mind (6, p. 79); spontaneous social effort (6, p. 31)	Creativeness, spontaneity in inner life, thoughts, impulses (pp. 223 & 208)

^aAll references in this column are to 33.

many a hater of mankind. One finds particularly lofty social and religious ideals and daydreams in the neurotic as a form of gaining a feeling of superiority over others. Adler cautioned: "We must not be confused by the fact that some neurotics seem to be benevolent and wish to reform the whole world. This . . . can be merely a response to a keenly felt minus situation" (11, p. 90).

A striking example for the need for further specification is the oceanic or cosmic feeling. This may be associated with wanting to merge with the universe, not as an expansion of life, but in the

form of death. Thus it may accompany suicidal behavior. The case of suicide who requested in his farewell note that "my ashes [be] scattered over the mountains" (44, p. 201) may well have had cosmic feelings. From the Freudian viewpoint it is thus possible to conclude that the death wish is an important factor in the oceanic feeling. "The death wish . . . is the fantasy that attempts to bring about the oceanic feeling in reality . . . in the acting out of the suicide."⁴

The frequent religious delusions among the insane are well known, and among the normal population, the more religious are often the more prejudiced and not conducive to a climate of mental health (12, p. 264).

In all these instances a decision must be made between *true* and *false* creativity, love of animals, high ideals, oceanic feeling, and religious sentiment, with only the *true* variation being a characteristic of mental health.

To make this decision possible, Adler offered the attribute of social usefulness as criterion of mental health.

The really important differences of conduct are . . . those of usefulness or uselessness. *By useful I mean in the interests of mankind generally.* The most sensible estimate of the value of any activity is its helpfulness to all mankind, present and future, a criterion that applies not only to that which subserves the immediate preservation of life, but also to higher activities such as religion, science, and art. It is true that we cannot always decide what is strictly worth while from this point of view. But [the more] we are guided by the impulse to act usefully . . . the nearer we approach to *true* perception (6, p. 78, italics ours).

By contrast, striving "on the useless and vain side of life" is "striving for *false* success" (7, p. 263, italics ours).

The Interests of Mankind

Adler's definition of "useful" is of the greatest importance. To repeat it: "By useful I mean in the interests of mankind generally." Since the value of any activity is to be judged by its usefulness to all mankind, whatever may have been included under social interest, self-actualization and growth, are also subject to this stipulation. We may say then that *true* social interest is that which is in the interests of mankind, or in short, it is an "interest in the interests of mankind."

This definition turns out to be actually the definition which the philosopher Ralph Barton Perry, the biographer of William James, gave to social interest. In his treatise on *The Realms of Value* Perry, quite independently of Adler, mentions social interest and

⁴S. L. Botney, personal communication, July 20, 1965.

defines it as "interest of one person in the interest or interests of a second person" (42, p. 81). The second person can, of course, be extended into a group and the whole of society or mankind. The crucial part is that we are not merely interested "in a second individual where [his] interests are disregarded" (42, p. 81). This might be the case when we merely wanted to exploit him.

By making this distinction between interest in a second individual, and interest *in the interests* of a second person or society, Perry approaches Buber's differentiation between the I-it and the I-Thou (20). One may speak of an I-it basis of a human relationship when an employer treats his workers merely as machines, as objects. True social interest, i.e., being interested in the interests of the other would be included in Buber's I-Thou concept.

Before Adler, Perry, and Buber, John Stuart Mill wrote of "fellow-feeling" (36, p. 17) and "social feelings of mankind, the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures" (36, p. 38).⁵ And very much like Adler he identified such feelings with greater mental health.

When people who are tolerably fortunate in their outward lot do not find in life sufficient enjoyment to make it valuable to them, the cause generally is, caring for nobody but themselves. To those who have neither public nor private affections, the excitements of life are much curtailed, and in any case dwindle in value as the time approaches when all selfish interests must be terminated by death: while those who leave after them objects of personal affection, and especially those who have also cultivated a *fellow-feeling with the collective interests of mankind*, retain as lively an interest in life on the eve of death as in the vigor of youth and health (36, pp. 16-17; italics ours).

It is most remarkable that Mill too speaks of fellow-feeling with the "interests of mankind."⁶ O'Connell's "humanistic identification" mentioned earlier, is in fact a further specification of this general idea.

The consensus of the three independent authors besides Adler on the definition of social interest or its equivalents is then that *the grammatical object* of the interest is *no longer an actual object*, such as people, animals, plants and inanimate objects, *but a life process*, namely, the interests of others. Such a definition becomes semantically somewhat awkward as an *interest in the interests of mankind*. But it describes this main trait most dynamically and adequately

⁵We first became aware of this aspect of Mill through Feuer (25).

⁶Other similarities between Mill and Adler are that Mill emphasizes the social nature of man, the importance of equality, and spoke of "social ties" (36, pp. 38 & 39). He also accepted the principle that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, and was like Adler a champion of individual liberty and a meliorist in theory and practice (21, pp. 24 & 34). Of course there was the basic similarity of Mill's utilitarianism and Adler's inclination toward pragmatism.

as a merging of your interests with those of others, as essential harmony with and affirmation of mankind. This is at the basis of mental health and happiness. Otherwise there would be a clash of interests, conflict, such persons feeling about life around them "as though they were living in an enemy country" (10, p. 118).

PROCESS DIMENSION

Empathy, Identification, Common Sense

Turning now to the process dimension of social interest we may say that interest in the interests of another involves identification or empathy.

Individual Psychology was from the start a phenomenological psychology. The motto of Adler's first major book (1) was Seneca's *Omnia ex opinione suspensa sunt* (everything depends on one's opinion). The individual with a developed social interest will extend the wisdom of Seneca's sentence to his relations with others, i.e., will be able to understand and appreciate their subjective experiences, their private worlds, their opinions. Such an individual is tolerant, that is, he is reasonable, understanding, able to empathize, to identify. He has common sense, not merely "private intelligence" (10, pp. 253-254). Adler described this as follows:

Social feeling is more than a feeling. It is a form of life [*Lebensform*—Eduard Spranger] . . . I have found . . . a phrase which expresses clearly what could contribute to our explanation: "To see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another." For the time being this seems to me an admissible definition of what we call social feeling. We see at first glance that this gift coincides in part with another which we call identification or empathy (Lipps). This identification occurs always according to the degree of social interest . . .

When a child aims to become like his father, wants to see with the eyes of the father, etc. 'understands' him, and has a useful goal before his eyes, we call this identification. . . . Identification is absolutely necessary in order to arrive at a social life. Sympathy is merely a partial expression if identification which, in turn, is one aspect of social interest. . . . We identify with a picture by regarding it. We identify also with all other inanimate objects. In the theater every spectator empathizes and participates. This is identification in our sense—not to usurp the role of the father, etc. . . . Individual Psychology may claim as its contribution to have pointed out that empathy and understanding are facts of social feeling, of being in harmony with the universe (11, pp. 42-43).

Empathic understanding is especially important in psychotherapy. When Adler called psychotherapy "an exercise in cooperation and a test of cooperation", he included empathy: "We can succeed only if we are genuinely interested in the other. We must be able to see with his eyes and listen with his ears" (10, p. 340). We have reached an empathic understanding when we can "make

the honest admission that under the same conditions, with the same picture of the world and with the same erroneous goal of personal superiority, we ourselves would have taken practically the same course of action" (10, p. 395). By thus extending social interest to the patient through empathy, the therapist gives him "the experience of contact with a fellowman," and then enables the patient "to transfer this awakened social interest to others" (10, p. 341).

The ability to identify with others, feeling part of the whole, feeling at home on this earth, seeing the situation as others see it, all these aspects of social interest are the basis for "a way of acting and behaving which we designate as 'reasonable.'" And reasonable in turn is equated with "common sense." Common sense is manifested in "all behavior which we find advances the community" (11, p. 44).

The opposite is "private intelligence," an idiosyncratic way of seeing and solving the problems. Such private intelligence is a basic characteristic of all failures in life, i.e., the mentally disturbed. Already Kant had stated: "The only feature common to all mental disorders is the loss of common sense, and the compensatory development of a unique, private sense of reasoning" (see 13).

In psychotherapy the patient would learn "to re-see the world and alter his old private view in order to bring it more into harmony with a 'common view' of the world—remembering that by common view we mean a view in which others can share" (10, p. 254).

Cooperation, Synergy

In addition to its emphasis on the subjective, phenomenological side, Adlerian psychology is also definitely pragmatically oriented. Thus more important than a mere *interest* in the interests of others would be corresponding *actions*—the processes of cooperation with and contribution to others.

Adler expressed this very strongly in stating: "The normal man is an individual who lives in society and whose mode of life is so adapted that—*whether he wants it or not*—society derives a certain advantage from his work" (7, p. 103; italics ours). The neurotic, on the other hand, "expects a contribution from the group in which he lives" (10, p. 114). Adler held with William James, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (11, p. 64; 27, p. 34). He saw the task of psychotherapy as "to develop behavior on the useful side and to establish in general a useful attitude towards life and society" (7, p. 40). We should like to point out that behavior is mentioned

first, attitude, second. May we repeat here that useful means in the interest of mankind. "The patient must be guided away from himself, toward productivity for others" (11, p. 200n). "All my efforts are devoted towards increasing the social interest of the patient. I know that the real reason for his malady is his lack of cooperation, and I want him to see it too. As soon as he can connect himself with his fellowmen on an equal and cooperative footing, he is cured" (8, p. 260).

It is to be noted that the footing must be equal as well as cooperative. Without equality no true cooperation would be possible. Adler speaks of "the law of the equality of all human beings" which cannot be violated "without immediately producing opposition and discord" (5, p. 180). The three main problems in life—work, friendship, and love—all social problems, can only be solved in such a cooperative way. One must be "a good fellow worker, a friend to all other men, and true partner in love and marriage" (8, p. 262). The best predictors for these tasks would be tests of cooperation and Adler cites as an example the custom in a certain part of Germany to let an engaged couple cut a log together with a two-handled saw (8, p. 263).

By this pragmatic criterion of socially useful action for mental health, Adler's psychology becomes the most objective among the several present-day trends in humanistic psychology. It sets limits to self-exploration and to the examination of ultimate problems. The line at which such activities would detract from usefulness, i.e., from being in the interest of mankind in general, in fact where any behavior would no longer be socially useful, would be the divide between the *true* or *real*, and the *false*, as discussed above. The decision would often still be difficult, as mentioned before, but at least we could use an objective criterion in the sense of Sullivan's consensual validation, or common sense, the closest we can come to objectivity.

For such working together in the mutual interest the term *synergy* is sometimes used. According to Webster it means "combined action, especially combined healthy action of every organ of a particular system—combined operation (as of muscles)." Synergic means "working together, cooperating." Social synergy as used by Maslow, after Ruth Benedict, represents "a fusion of what the individual wants personally with what is good for him and at the same time good for others" (35, p. 164).

The term synergy is not altogether new to Individual Psychology. It was used by Leonhard Seif (43), the early, prominent coworker of Adler in Munich. He applied it to the phenomenon of the harmonizing of personal interest and the interests of others.

Earlier, the concept of synergy had played an important part in the work of Lester Frank Ward (45), the sociologist of amelioration and progress. Ward stood for a man-centered sociology whose real object was to benefit man, as Becker (18, p. 69) has pointed out. In such a sociology the need for a concept such as synergy arose, just as Adler needed the concept of cooperation to describe the condition of the individual's successful confrontation of the problems of life.

Since man can, in a sense, cooperate also with things, animals, and nature in general, the process aspect of social interest which is cooperation, is in effect the same as that which in terms of Gestalt psychology is responsiveness to the "requiredness" of the situation (e.g. 30), as we have mentioned elsewhere (16, pp. 117-119). In the example of a couple cutting a log with a two-handed saw, each is certainly responding to the requiredness of the situation. Altogether, the three life tasks, of which Adler speaks so often as calling for cooperation, are instances of situational requiredness.

The same concept of requiredness has also been applied with regard to empathy. As the Gestalt psychologist Solomon Asch concludes a chapter on "Social Interest": "To recognize the nature of a situation is to be responsive to its requirements; in this way many concerns and goals arise. This trend comes to clearest expression in the social relation" (17, p. 346).

Value Function

In the Adlerian model, man is active and has, within the confines of what is given, still an important leeway of personal freedom. For Adler, behavior is not "caused" by an unconscious, drives, primary forces, environmental conditions, nor heredity as such. He rather accepts the working hypothesis "*as if* nothing in man's life were causally determined and *as if* every phenomenon could have been different" (10, p. 91). His position on human dynamics is well stated as:

the effort to understand that mysterious creative power of life which expresses itself in the desire to develop, to strive, to achieve, and even to compensate for defeats in one direction by striving for success in another. This power is *teleological*; it expresses itself in the striving after a goal, and, in this striving, every bodily and psychological movement is made to cooperate. (10, p. 92).

In such a psychology difficulties in life are not understood as conscious or unconscious conflicts which a person "has," but as the result of man's freedom of choice. To facilitate choice and decision, man develops opinions, attitudes, ideals, standards, and values—all cognitive structures which enable him to evaluate and judge alternatives (31, pp. 157-158). Social interest serves as such a guiding cognitive structure by which decisions are made, this function being perhaps the most important aspect of social interest.

Regarding this direction-giving function, social interest is a very felicitous translation of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, since interest can be equated with value. According to Perry, "an object of interest is *eo ipso* invested with value" (p. 41, 115). In social interest, then, we would value the interests or values of others and be guided by these. Thereby the concept is rendered especially indigenous to Adler's psychology which is altogether a value psychology. Our strivings are in each instance guided by values whether these are in our awareness or not. In his original controversy with Freud, Adler maintained that when a child clings to bad habits it is because he finds them "valuable" in asserting himself, not because they are intrinsically "pleasurable" (10, p. 67). Some of Adler's most important terms in German contain the root *Wert* (value) as in *Minderwertigkeitsgefühle* (inferiority feelings), *Selbstwertgefühl* or *Selbstwertschätzung* (self-esteem), *Entwertungstendenz* (depreciation tendency), *Gleichwertigkeit* (equality). Here again is a similarity with Gestalt psychology. Köhler considered values "at the bottom of all human activities." They are "the conviction that some things 'ought to be' and others not" (30, pp. 38-39).

In view of the importance of value in Adler's psychology, Adlerian psychotherapists have quite naturally from the beginning been concerned with social values. More recently they have contributed papers on the place of ethical values in psychotherapy (40), a critique of prevailing social values (22), and value systems in the psychotherapeutic process (32).

Future Orientation and Independence

A goal-oriented human value psychology implies concern with the future. Here we find once more parallels in Gestalt psychology. According to Köhler, "We cannot speak of motivation without speaking of goals, and if we speak of goals our thinking will necessarily imply a teleological determination of facts . . . In motivation the future takes part in the determination of the present" (30, p. 286).

Köhler adds here an important clarification which must also be accepted by Individual Psychology to remain on a sound basis. The actual mental processes representing the future "occur *now*, not tomorrow," they represent "the now experienced phenomenal 'future' . . . It is not the actual future . . . toward which we are directed . . . it is that part of an actually present phenomenal field which we call the 'future' " (30, p. 287).

Society, composed as it is of individuals, is also goal striving, i.e., oriented toward a better future, an ideal, a value, what 'ought to be,' a plus situation. In social interest, as we have seen, we are not interested in society as an existing object but in the interests or values of society. We are interested in the aspirations of society, an ideal, better society of the future. Thus Adler could say that in social interest the society referred to is not merely "a private circle of our time, or a larger circle which one should join. Social interest means much more. Particularly it means *feeling with the whole, sub specie aeternitatis*, under the aspect of eternity. It means a striving for a form of community . . . as it could be thought of if mankind had reached the goal of perfection" (II, pp. 34-35).

Adler fully recognized that this is an unattainable ideal. However, since all of human life and the history of mankind are seen as a great becoming (I, p. 445), it is for orientation purposes necessary to have a grand over-all direction-giving point. "The community which Individual Psychology invokes is a directive goal, an ideal, always unattainable, but always beckoning and pointing the way" (II, p. 279).

This consideration immediately removes behavior imbued with social interest from mere conformity, or mere "adjustment" to a presently existing group and present standards. Such an adjustment would actually freeze the great becoming. It would limit the individual, whereas social interest liberates him from the inadequacies of the present society, lets him rise above these, in his efforts for a better society of the future.

Adler consistently associates social interest with courage and independence (e.g. 6, p. 32). What takes place in psychotherapy, as well as in desirable education, is "growth of social interest" and at the same time "development of greater independence of the opinion of other people" (II, p. 97). The mentally healthy person cooperates for a better future for all and in doing so gains the independence and courage to fight present evils, be they ever so widespread, rather

than conforming to them. Adler would certainly have appreciated the call of the late Martin Luther King, Jr. for a new organization, the "International Association for the Advancement of Creative Maladjustment" (29, p. 185).

Furthermore, "An adaptation to immediate reality would be nothing other than an exploitation of the accomplishments of the striving of others, as the picture of the world of the pampered child demands" (10, p. 107). But the great cooperation and social culture man needs demand "spontaneous social effort" (6, p. 31). All the problems in life—including the three great basic problems of work and occupation, friends and social relations, love and marriage—require a solution which "cannot be regarded as a process of acclimatization merely, such as that of a worm acclimatizing himself to an apple, but as a process of meeting the problems according to standards which should be valid for all and for an hypothetical eternity" (11, p. 97).

Through its extension into the future the concept of social interest not only provides a place for the independent spirit, the present-day nonconformist who contributes to the advancement of mankind, but makes him the ideally normal man. The criterion of social usefulness, however, is applicable to nonconformity as it is to any other behavior. The question is whether the nonconformity is ultimately socially useful, in the interest of mankind, or valuable to mankind, or whether it is merely a rebelling for personal reasons.

If a theory did not provide a place for spontaneous nonconformity, on the useful side, but could conceive of it only as an act of hostile aggression, the theory could not do justice to the phenomena of positive change and progress on the human scene, phenomena we all can observe and on which we count in education and psychotherapy. Yet, as Gendlin has observed, most personality theories employ "a type of explanatory concept which renders change impossible by definition" (26, p. 101). It is encouraging, however, that among the humanistic psychologists there is now a growing concern with human potentialities (39).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A logical analysis is presented of social interest, the most distinctive term in Adlerian psychology, its cardinal personality trait and criterion of mental health, which, however, has always offered difficulties to understanding. The term denotes an object dimension, the objects toward which the interest is directed; and a process

dimension, the interest itself. In a broad extension of the "objects," social interest became virtually tantamount with self-actualization or growth motivation.

However, to preserve the significance of social interest as a criterion of mental health, it has been necessary to focus on its property of usefulness, defined by Adler as "in the interests of mankind." Social interest would then seem to be most properly defined as "an interest in the interests of mankind." Furthermore, since interest and value can be equated, social interest would also mean "to value what is valuable to mankind." The mental health function of such a trait would be apparent since an individual with such interests or values would be in harmony with the world.

In this light, the components of the process dimension of social interest are then discussed, i.e., empathy, identification and common sense; cooperation and synergy; value function; and future orientation and independence.

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