

FUNDAMENTALS OF INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY

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This paper appeared originally as a contribution to a large two-volume handbook of the science of work, edited by Fritz Giese, Institute of Technology, Stuttgart, with the collaboration of 280 contributors (3). We are pleased to publish it in this Centennial Issue for the first time in English, translated by the editors.

The Giese handbook, dated 1930, was actually published in installments, beginning in 1927. We assume the present paper was written in 1926 the year Adler adopted the term "life style" (6), because typically for this transition period, the terms "life plan" and "life form" still predominate, while "life style" is used only twice, and also because the bibliography essentially ends with 1926. We further assume that the paper was among the earlier installments, because already in 1929 it appeared in a French translation (2), in Georges Politzer's journal, to which Giese was a contributor (7).

The paper presents a good overview of Individual Psychology as of this period. We make this qualification because it was only during his last years that Adler turned more consistently from a dynamics of inferiority feeling—compensation, as is still the case in the present paper, to one founded in "the creative life power of the individual" (5, p. 51). In the later dynamic, it is in comparison with the goal for which he strives that "the individual is continuously filled by an inferiority feeling" (4, p. 117). This represents the shift from deficiency motivation to growth motivation (Maslow) which we today consider so important for an adequate theory. Whereas originally inferiority feelings could be considered primary, as in this paper, they become of secondary importance, and the concept of compensation is practically not to be found in Adler's later writings.

*But aside from this limitation, the paper shows very well how situationally and transactionally oriented Adler was, how well he understood the necessity of considering man's ecology, and his political and work situations, in addition to his social situation, in order to arrive at an adequate conception of his psychological situation. It is perhaps exactly for this reason that the paper was attractive to the editor of *Revue de Psychologie concrète*.*

Finally two particulars of this paper should be pointed out, both of which can perhaps be accounted for by the fact it was written for a handbook in which the psychological interest was essentially industrial and vocational.

1. Adler gives more attention to occupational wishes, choice, and practice as an aid in understanding a person than to early recollections. While the proportion is not to be taken as a literal recommendation, the stress on occupational interests and activities serves as a good reminder to take these factors fully into account.

2. Adler speaks of four great questions of life, whereas in all his other writings and in the present paper as well, he always recognizes only three—social relationships, work, and love. The new, fourth problem is “attitude toward art and creative endeavor (schöpferische Gestaltung).” In absence of an explanation by Adler, we take this as an extension of the problem of work into leisure time, the two together then representing man’s wider problem of how to employ his time usefully, in work or in leisure.

Adler concludes the paper on the advanced note from the viewpoint of the philosophy of science, that he does not claim his theory to hold “eternal” truths, and only believes it “does justice to . . . our present knowledge of man, and . . . does so better than other . . . theories.”

Individual Psychology is concerned with “normal” and “abnormal” man in his uniqueness, and his aptitude for society, love and vocation. The areas of investigation are: the understanding of human nature (*Menschenkenntnis*), education, work, vocation, and psychotherapy.

The capacity of the human organism for achievement, its connectedness with the earth, with human beings, and with the other sex, are the given preconditions which we recognize. Only the first of these appears alterable. We recognize as variable functions the attitude the individual takes toward the community, the kind and amount of his work achievement, and his attitude toward the other sex, and we evaluate these by their ultimate usefulness for the community. Thus we arrive at the conclusion that the I-Thou relationship, the productivity for the community, and the relationship of the sexes are never private matters but problems of the community, and that erroneous solutions, as they arise from inadequate preparations in early childhood, offend against the absolute truth and have detrimental results for those who carry them out.

GOAL STRIVING AND SELF-CONSISTENCY

Such assertions had, of course, to be justified in the correctly understood peculiarity of the human psyche, in the study of which Individual Psychology has arrived at many new insights. One of these is that the human psyche is closely connected with the motor apparatus which serves through appropriate movements to overcome, to attack, and to ward off the difficulties of the environment. The psychological organ is first of all an organ of attack and defense, to make the future favorable for the person.

This can be accomplished, even imagined or understood, only if we assume a goal which stands firm under all circumstances: to gain security and superiority over attacks from outside by nature and man. As the concrete portion of this goal the following may take a prominent place: the tempting tasks of self-preservation and drive satisfaction; striving for power, wealth, dominance, godlikeness; or, corresponding to our outdated cultural ideal, the masculine role of a hero.¹

This goal, gained in early childhood, dominates the movements of the psyche and the body, and collects all innate and acquired powers into a self-consistent personality. It forms the self-consistent life plan, and runs right through all expressive movements and symptoms like the uniqueness of an artist through his creations. Only when we have recognized this, the individual's action line, when we regard each one of his phenomena in the light of the whole personality, the connection of the part with the core of the personality, can we understand the significance, the meaning, the value, and the necessity of each phenomenon.

Likewise, character traits strike in us an understanding note only when we leave them in the context of the entire line of movement of the person. Thus we have learned that modesty may be bragging, that a critical attitude and the depreciation tendency may be a feeling of weakness. Laziness, indolence, loss of interest, absent-mindedness, and inclination to waste time are always found in people who no longer believe in themselves or in the productiveness of their performance; and nervous symptoms appear always when an imminent decision threatens to lead to defeat. We shall expect

¹In another paper of this period Adler added an alternative to "the typical ideal of our time," which would be required by social feelings, namely, "that of the saint, purified, to be sure, from fantastic clinkers originating from superstition" (1).—Ed. note.

timid considerations and counterarguments in those whom we know to have had previously a hesitating attitude. We have always found that waywardness is connected only with cowardliness in life. It begins, once the individual has lost hope, and left the side of generally useful achievements. The remaining activity is useless, as primarily in neurosis, or harmful, as in criminal careers. Likewise we have been able to show that cases of sexual perversion (homosexuality, fetishism, sadism, masochism, etc.), and neurosis, originate not in primary drives, nor in experiences, but in that they banish the sex drive to the remaining field of action once the norm has been excluded through distrust in their own power.

INFERIORITY FEELING AND COMPENSATION

All these and other phenomena we have observed take place simultaneously in all the known relational systems. They follow the main line of movement in the direction of a fulfillment, of an aspired superiority over existing difficulties, and they also always are related to the community and its traditional lawfulness regarding fellowmanship, work, and love. All human behavior is at every point a reply to these three great questions of humanity and at the same time an attempt at compensation for a feeling of inferiority. We assume, then, a general inferiority feeling in man from which arises the striving to overcome all hostile forces. The entire development of mankind, its worthwhile and its mistaken attempts, characterize this course. And even in this mass-psychological consideration we find a compelling correction in the rule of social interest and its aim toward the common weal.

This inferiority feeling—compensation relationship appears to us to be the deepest mechanism yet found in all psychological life. It is so deep-seated and so much the master of all movements that no one, not even our critics, can think or object, except in line with this dynamic: inferiority feeling—compensation.

Individual Psychology starts with the understanding for the child's inferiority feeling. Its stimulation arouses all powers, the entire psychological movement, to force compensations, or to push in that direction. The necessity to superordinate a goal to every movement brings into all psychological movement a plan which leads to a self-consistent organization of the personality. All abilities and drives are subordinated to this life plan. Efforts to make reflexes, a drive, the constitution, or sexual libido the starting point

of psychological research are in vain—except for revealing the trivial sequence of cause and effect, separated out from the context of the personality. One can discover the meaning and significance of such research, that is, its usefulness for psychology and *Menschenkenntnis*, only if one subsumes under the openly observable facts, secretly or unconsciously, the life plan found by methods of Individual Psychology. This means that one inquires into the way, the intention, the wherefore of these facts.

The development of the young child's life plan is decisively influenced by the evaluation of his organs. The greater the innate inferiority of an organ the more clearly will the striving for compensation set in, often leading to overcompensation. We can speak of balanced compensation when the outcome proves adequate to man's cosmic and social connectedness. This can happen through greater achievement and an increased growth spurt, or through the stepping in of another supporting organ. The effect of training is always also involved. In addition, we always find characteristic psychological efforts arising from the distress of the threatened life and the child's increased weakness and insecurity which are encountered on the path to perfection. This is one of the roots of increased creative power for which Individual Psychology has brought about such clear understanding. The mightily increased training of a weaker organ (alimentary tract, sense organ, organ of movement, etc.) leads to new movements and devices, technically superior because more differentiated; sharpens attention and interest; and in favorable cases leads to a stronger grasp of the coherence between man and his surroundings, and continuously lends the individual who has remained victorious the strong courageous feeling of great competence. Elsewhere we have described in detail how visual, accoustical, and motor types may arise from such constitutions, who are particularly capable of earning a good living. Also, Alice Friedmann and I have shown that a large number of left-handed children within our right-handed culture are put at a disadvantage, but under favorable circumstances, through a continuous training of the poorer right hand, can attain better achievements than the right-handed.

ORIGINS OF MISTAKEN GOALS

In any case, increased insecurity causes a mood or despondency in the child which leads first of all to low self-esteem. This psycho-

logical situation can never mean a point of rest. From it originate increased movement, haste, and impatience. A whole sequence of other character traits are strongly evoked from the total psychological growth-material and lead one to infer a whipped-up life plan and an extremely high goal. Normal successes of life are no longer enough, but specially great successes, concealments, safeguards, pretenses, and excuses are needed to quiet the deepened inferiority feeling. "To be more than others" becomes the maxim of life, or at least to appear to be more; to be everything or nothing, hammer or anvil! All these are errors on the way to an art of living and fellowship which necessarily lead to conflicts. Stormy ambition at the beginning of the course regularly creates a counterweight of extreme caution from which arise the greatest inhibitions. Every test and decision becomes a terrible threat to the laboriously maintained equilibrium. This type is most frequent. We find him well protected by an excuse or a symptom of nervous disorder, not at the front of life, but somewhere in the hinterland, way below the average and the achievements which he could have attained. Where he should prove himself, he shows somehow the hesitating attitude.

There are four great questions of life which, although schematized, encompass all the relationships of life; the social relationship to fellowmen, the question of occupation, the question of love, and the attitude toward art and creative endeavor (*schöpferische Gestaltung*). In these four questions there is always an unsolved remainder, or one of the questions, in a less happy and exaggerated way, is made the focus of life. Such children require a special method of education; such adults, a re-education along the lines of Individual Psychology.

Children who are brought up harshly, without love and warmth, grow up in a similar depressed situation [as cases of organ inferiority], and meet with similar difficulties. In their case the extremely important function of the mother (or a substitute) has been lacking, which would have given the child the experience of a trustworthy partner who is a fellowman and would have mediated to him the Thou and its relationship to the I. In this relationship the child matures into a social being, develops his social interest, and learns to comprehend himself as a part of all of humanity.

Here one sees again the total inadequacy of the Freudian conception of this relationship as libidinous (Oedipus complex), since a sexual tie would never lead toward community, but always again to other sexual ties or to the repression of sexuality. Incidentally,

Freud is presently already about to change his conception in accordance with ours.

This second type of child (often illegitimate) finds himself in an oppressive, hostile world, which can easily obstruct for him the straight path of making himself useful to the community, as in the first type. In all human relationships he will reveal a tendency toward isolation, and will not easily be won for togetherness, nor for working together.

The third type of person less suited, more poorly prepared for life and work, comes from the enormous circle of pampered children. Here the mother's function, mentioned above, has turned out to be too strong. The tie becomes so overpowering that nobody but the mother, no situation but the motherly one is readily accepted. Here, too, the development of fellowmanliness suffers, but so also does the development of the child's abilities, because the mother with her care and guardianship stands everywhere as an obstacle in the way. The entire form of life of the child will now adjust to this symbiosis and is in bad shape for other situations. Thus there is no room for the development of self-esteem and initiative. In all independent achievements a nostalgic grasping for help and relief will appear. The whole conduct of life reveals a serious inferiority feeling.

FEAR OF FAILURE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The above three situations essentially have in common the acquisition of an increased inferiority feeling, a higher and more rigid guiding goal, and a life style more or less in contradiction to the demands of life. Such demands always make themselves known loud and clear as soon as the individual enters a new situation, different from the previous one, for which, due to his life style as well as his highly raised expectations, he is not properly prepared. At first it may be failures which scare him. Later his growing discouragement, the concretization and confirmation of his serious inferiority feeling, prevent him from coming closer to a solution of his life problems. This inhibition forces a change in the old goal-direction. Now the password is no longer superiority, but prevention of a visible or felt defeat.

The new goal presents a new form of life in sharply delineated features. Since due to fear of failure everything must remain unfinished, all striving and movement turn into pseudo-activity which,

at least on balance, takes place on the useless side. The individual becomes unsocial or neurotic, or both at the same time. His uselessness, because he has lost the belief in distinguishing himself on the useful side, can grow to a point where he becomes punishable, i.e., by laws through which the community seeks to protect itself against erroneous developments.

While the individual is still in school such errors are usually inability, laziness, and all the phenomena of opposition to learning, at times, however, also trembling ambition and overzealous striving in which fear of the future discloses itself. When there is stronger inhibition of activity, we find at the onset of discouragement the alleviating circumstances of nervous phenomena, sham movements through which the individual, seized by the hesitating attitude, does *as if* he were doing something. In social, occupational, and love life, arguments against progressive development constantly arise. Incidents happen which are disastrous or are immensely exploited, and a continuous change of the point of attack testifies to the spuriousness of the initiative.

In such a hopeless mood, in the continuous fear of a disgracing defeat, usually in excessive dependency on the opinion of others, the right thing is often dropped and the wrong thing seized upon. Such people often describe themselves as haunted by misfortune, or born under an unlucky star. They are full of superstitions, because those who have lost the belief in themselves always believe in something else. They not only praise pessimism as the only concept of life worthy of man, but they also act accordingly. Thus they never arrive at the development of their powers because they employ them only in a half-hearted way. If they fail in a task, they consider their pessimism justified and do not understand that their deficiency is due to their inadequate confidence. A real increase in strength and a proper training, as well as good results, are always owed to an optimistic philosophy of life. This is of course more easily available to him who is rightfully convinced of his equal value and equal potential for success, in line with others.

RATIONAL APPROACH TO EDUCATION AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

The developments described above take place not according to a recognizable causality, but at the urge of necessity, under the compulsion of a final goal. In the understanding or concretization of this goal the possibility of errors on the part of the child, a quite sub-

jective factor, must always be taken into account. Such errors are obviously enough underestimation of the self and easily occurring discouragement, as well as overestimation of others. We aim to remove such errors through conversation, explanations, words and thoughts, to change the person who has become asocial into a fellow man. We are convinced of a much higher achievement potential for our protégés than they themselves and probably also other schools of psychology are. This justifies our claim to be taken as a rational method of education and psychotherapy.

At the same time, the strong emphasis on psychological dynamics, on the significance of social interest, and on the striving for power should remove us from the strange prejudice that Individual Psychology is an intellectualistic doctrine.

The experiences of a child or an adult, alter nothing on his action line once it is established, nor on his goal. However, both are interpreted and concretized according to his experiences. Experience can make one clever only to the extent that it enables him to bring his actions into a better form, to express his goal in a way which better corresponds to reality. In psychosis, the breaking off from the four problems of life is almost complete, and the logic of human living-together, "which binds us all," is given up as interfering with the flight from the community. Here the final goal usually shows itself in an unveiled, uncritical form: to be the Kaiser, God, Jesus, and the like. Within the community and the approximate range of normality, it is possible that ambition, a critical attitude, oversensitivity, etc. can exist as suspicious signs of such a goal setting. But an excessive sensitivity reveals the underlying inferiority feeling, and disturbs development, since contradictions and conflicts with the true demands of life develop spontaneously and give rise to nervousness as a safeguarding form of life.

A true alteration of the form of life, the life line, and the life plan seems possible only through the growing understanding for these coherences, in a rational manner, then, only through Individual Psychology insight into the misleading goal.

To accomplish such a task, be it through education or Individual Psychology treatment, to transplant the goal of children or adults into the area of the generally useful, it is necessary to know or to recognize the early childhood situation in which the psychological configuration and form were born.

PERSONALITY UNITY AND APPRAISAL

Through our network one can with some practice easily succeed in discerning from all the expressive movements the secret melody of a person. This is especially the case if we take into consideration his posture (also in sleep), outward bearing, and handwriting, as further indicators of the core of the personality. We also wish to point out that we appreciate what is new in our view and often contradictory to other views, and thus we can understand the resistance of sometimes even very meritorious investigators, which, however, is slowly receding.

A stronger resistance is offered against our findings regarding the limited significance of feelings, of pleasure and displeasure, and of their intensity as the causal explanation of actions. When my goal is fixed, then only those feelings will stir which fit into my scheme. Accordingly, feelings are no arguments, but only the betraying signs of my approval or disapproval of a present task.

Also, regarding the problem of will, we can follow only to a certain point the wonderful theoretical considerations of psychologists. We are convinced that, contrary to general theory, the visibility and duration of a willed act is in strict contrast to the expected action. Not only does nothing happen during the volitional act, but very often the prominence of will is followed by a remarkable inactivity. This holds primarily for practical life. It seems to be one of the cultural devices of our time that the will is so often presented for the deed.

In our contextual view we find a large number of movements and values in a new and clearer light. Take, for instance, doubt. If one accepts the necessity of psychological movement, and with this the obligation to participate in the external world, then we find that doubt, while it lasts, is a concealed but easily deciphered "no," a standing still.

The pursuit of this and similar problems has yielded a further accomplishment of Individual Psychology, namely advancing the understanding of bodily forms of expression, the language of the organs, the utilization of affects, character traits, and nervous symptoms. We find that very often these contrast with the thinking, feeling, and willing of the individual in their [negative] social significance and dependency on a goal of superiority or of quitting, or of both. Whatever has been designated as conscious, unconscious,

preconscious, etc., is always shown to be in accord with the personal action line, and to possess social activity.

The self-consistency of the physical and psychological attitude of a person is also explained by the dominating role of the final goal, and we understand why it is usually not difficult to recognize at first glance a pampered child, or one raised without love, a teacher, a physician, an actor, a scientist. [As mentioned,] even sleep posture often coincides directly with the action line—fearful people like to pull the covers over their heads, or curl up like a hedgehog on the defensive; presentable people, who wish to appear big, cannot stretch themselves enough, etc.

Also dream life and fantasies depend on the action line: they are connected with a present problem, are seeking, as though going over a bridge, to coordinate it with the final goal, and thus to solve it individually. Associations and the entire current of thinking and understanding are subject to the same trend.

We consider very important our results in examining earliest childhood recollections. Whether genuine or made up, they are unusually close to the birth of the personality and illuminate for us the situation during the formation of the self.

We attribute equally great significance to the child's fantasies of occupational choice; they are clearly expressed, even though clumsy, concretizations and verbalizations of the striving for significance, power, and superiority. One can easily recognize in them the kind and extent of activity; usually infer the quality and depth of the inferiority feeling; and often find clear traces of a training for a later occupation. Accordingly, the problem of occupation becomes clear to us as a very deeply experienced concern of the whole personality. Occupational choice as well as practice mirror for us the whole personality of the individual.

MASCULINE PROTEST AND EQUALITY

Our theory of the masculine protest is in full accord with all the findings of Individual Psychology. It is nothing other than the concretization of a striving for power that is necessarily enforced through the social underestimation and undervaluation of woman in our culture. The automatic connection of the concept of power with that of masculinity allows girls only an open or concealed striving for equality with man, or a substitute of *seeming* equality.

Womanliness is experienced like an inferior organ from which there grows a strong compensatory striving. If it is possible to steer this trait toward the generally useful side, valuable achievements come of it, in the form of equal rights and progress. Otherwise the outcome is whipped-up, over-heated endeavor which leads to collapse and prevents the solution of life problems; or it is paralyzing cowardliness and embittered resignation with equally defective end results, usually with the appearance of neurotic disorders. This old process of fermentation creates much fruitless dissatisfaction in the soul of a woman; disturbs her social feeling; prevents her from fully developing her worth and her abilities in the production process, in art, and in science; and diminishes her aptitude and inclination for love, marriage, and motherliness. Disturbances in sexual contact are in the last analysis often to be traced to this evil of the devaluation of woman. Among the worst of these consequences are deficiencies in sexual behavior, perversions, and prostitution. The tragedy of this condition against which we must fight with all our resources in school and at home is increasingly recognized more clearly, thanks to our explanations. But it can be removed only in the context of the logic of human living-together, and with a strong foundation of equal value for all.

CONCLUSION

Our understanding of the relationships between man, earth, community, and bisexuality—as well as our establishment of the unity of the personality within these limits—keeps us from a one-sided belief in an eternally unshakeable wisdom and understanding. Individual Psychology claims no more for itself than to be taken as a theory which does justice to the present condition of civilization and to our present knowledge of man and his psychological conditions, and which does so better than other contextual theories.

Yet we consider decisive: the influence of the mother in the family as the one who prepares the way for social interest; the influence of the school in correcting the errors in upbringing made by the family; and the removal of economic oppression of one class by another and one nation by another.

In our numerous educational guidance clinics we act in accordance with these thoughts. Our educational measures appear to us as currently the best prophylactic interventions against waywardness, childhood problems, neurosis, and psychosis.

Two great difficulties—the superstition of the heredity of mental disorders, and the talent delusion—seem at present to be surmounted, and gradually room becomes available for the understanding of the fundamental significance, in the origin of the above failures, of errors in education and world philosophy.

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²In this brief bibliography as of 1926 supplied by Adler, the German originals have been replaced by the English translations, and some individual papers by the later collective work into which they were gathered.—Ed. note.

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³These references pertain to the editorial comments.—Ed. note.