

## THE TIMELINESS OF ALFRED ADLER

### EDITORIAL

On the occasion of the 100th birthday of Alfred Adler, February 7, 1970, as we take stock of his legacy, we are impressed by the timeliness of the issues to which he addressed himself, and the suitability of his general approach and particular methods to these problems. This would be the consensus of the tributes paid to him in general, including those presented below, the centennial lecture by Ashley Montagu, and the other centennial events.

The paper by Adler which follows is published here because it has not been translated previously, and touches especially on these "timely" issues, although it does not present Adler's final conception of human dynamics.

Adler takes man's connectedness with the earth and the cosmos, with human beings, and with the other sex, as preconditions. In Adler's time the mention of earth and cosmos may have sounded like pure rhetoric. But today, this connectedness has achieved focal interest through the threat arising from it from man's far-flung waste and pollution. Only from a completely holistic orientation was such broad comprehension possible. Maslow states particularly of this holistic emphasis that "the times have not yet caught up with Adler."

Again, Adler's broadness of view made him include all social factors as important, not only the influence of the mother, but also that of the school, and "of economic oppression of one class by another and one nation by another." Elsewhere he included race prejudice. Sykes points out the great relevance of Adlerian theory to these problems. Adler also anticipated the new feminist movement in speaking of the "devaluation of woman," which prevents her from fully developing herself "in the production process, in art, and in science," as well as in equal sexual partnership.

At the basis of all these concerns was Adler's conviction that man was not essentially driven by energies unconscious to him, but was actively creating his own style of life in striving after goals, values and meanings, and that he was to be understood in his happiness as well as misery through these goals and the meanings he gives to life. The cognitive and value aspect of man removes him

far from the other forms of life and becomes the basis of Adler's humanism which Ellis points out. Frankl designates Adler "a forerunner of the existential-psychiatric movement," as others have also done.

Recognition of a crucial degree of self-determination shared with the existentialists—"we are our choices"—is an integral part of Adler's optimism, i.e., the conviction that a significant degree of change is possible. Our behavior—including our faulty behavior—is not inevitable. This is also the big message of Montagu's lecture: human aggression is not the blind working of such a force in us, but is a mistaken value-striving which is understandable—and alterable. Adler's optimism is theoretically formalized by the assumption of a trainable aptitude for community feeling, or social interest.

With these assumptions and by dropping all kinds of supposed "causes" obstructing change, psychotherapy becomes enormously facilitated. Symptoms are seen as arrangements of the patient, serving a purpose, and being maintained on account of their reward value. This view has now been adopted by behavior therapy. "Disturbed behavior is disturbing behavior," we heard the behavior therapist Goldiamond say.

Since Adler's system is transactional, dealing with the individual transacting with his world to achieve certain outcomes, the individual case is seen in his concrete social system, in a common-sense fashion, quite free of technical terms. The resulting directness and simplicity of language becomes a great asset in explaining the patient to himself, as noted by Bischof and by Chapman. Holland sees the advantage of diagnosis and treatment virtually merging. Consistent with his social-system orientation Adler also laid the foundations for present-day family therapy and the community mental health movement, as Wolberg observes.

Once more anticipating present-day developments, Adler did not think of psychology as an esoteric discipline, but thought it could and should be kept in terms everybody can understand, and that everybody can become a psychotherapeutic agent. The paradox on his 100th birthday is that exactly among the general public he is still relatively little known, but that among sophisticated professionals he is being appreciated more and more, as evidenced below.