

## ADLER'S BROAD-SPECTRUM CONCEPT OF MAN, SELF-CONSISTENCY, AND UNIFICATION<sup>1</sup>

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Any theoretical system may be categorized operationally in terms of the range of phenomena and dynamic principles subsumed. From such criteria, Adlerian Individual Psychology is now seen to have encompassed a much more global and broad-spectrum concept of man than any of his contemporaries. In retrospect, Adler is now perceived as having been concerned with a much wider range of behavior than Freud, and much more pragmatic issues than Jung's mysticism.

The Adlerian model of man is genuinely global and broad-spectrum, being concerned with the continuing struggle for existence in the here-and-now. Adler's insistence that human destiny is largely social, and that man is irrevocably embedded in society, raised very practical questions concerning the global unit of what I have called the-person-running-the-business-of-his-life-in-the-world (4).

This primary concern with man-in-the-world means that Adler had perceived the necessity of an individual psychology dedicated to the study of how each person develops and makes his way in society. Adler squarely faced the raw phenomenal behavior data of any man's adjustment in the world, the meaning and significance of his being in the world as a practical member of society.

The Adlerian principles of action, of movement in social space, of overcoming inferiority and striving for superiority, of rising above and transcending human limitations—all these dynamic postulates involve, in my view, a concept of man as striving towards progressively higher levels of organization and existence. Adler may be regarded as one of the earliest eclectics, being concerned with everything from psychobiology, in his concept of organ inferiority, to

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existentialism, in his preoccupation with the social meanings of life(1.)

Adler saw the need for a global theory that would describe global behaviors. Adler's viewpoint can be characterized by looseness. He saw the forest in its great outlines where preciseness may not do justice to the subject matter. His social ideology was modeled after biological truth in such breadth as only an eclectic viewpoint could encompass.

The Adlerian model of man stressed not so much what happens to man but what man does about it. Adler correctly recognized that many neurotics utilize "if only" rationalizations—"if only such things hadn't happened to me, I wouldn't be that way." Adler stressed that the normal man behaves "as if" the critical factor is what man does to influence his own destiny.

Adler stressed the importance of human intelligence in perceiving realities correctly, and cognitively reorganizing the possibilities for compensation and adaptation. Freudian psychoanalysis has no place for the IQ. For Adler, man can compensate "in spite of" his condition or what has happened to him, by maximizing the positive and minimizing the negative, cognitively. Adler insisted that intentionality must be reflected in any valid etiological equation explaining what man can "do." Active "doing" is what counts according to Adler.

Adlerian psychology is particularly relevant in the atomic era. The human condition changed drastically after the Hiroshima explosion—for the first time mankind could not even be certain it had a future. Man's attention was dramatically directed to his human predicament and what he could do about it rationally. Here Adlerian psychology has much to contribute in its emphasis that the good in man can and must triumph.

#### CONCERN WITH THE HUMAN CONDITION

Life always evolves within a background of circumstances and situations which may be designated as the human condition or predicament (when limitations constitute vexing problems). The conditions of one's own nature, of the world into which we are born, and of the situations which confront us—all these constitute a set of limiting conditions within which life must be lived. Psychologically, it is extremely important that the nature of the human

condition be accurately perceived, faced realistically, and told exactly as it is.

Although Freud had an important insight into the human condition in his concept of human polymorphous perversity, it was Adlerian Individual Psychology which concerned itself directly with the struggles of each person with the human condition. Adler's concern with organ inferiority directly investigated the conditions of one's own nature viewed broadly as a biologic experiment. Stated in other terms, Adler perceived correctly that every person's central problem lies in the fact that he is stuck with himself, with his biologic and psychological limitations.

But Adler escaped from a purely mechanistic theory of human inferiority by recognizing the possibilities for compensation and social growth through movement in positive directions. Disregarding the obvious truism of the infinite value of one's own life to one's self, Adler was more concerned with the practical question, "What can the individual do (to improve his personal-social condition)?"

Any valid and comprehensive model of man must be capable of dealing with and diagnosing the status of man's struggle to improve the human condition at all levels from the lowest to the highest patterns of organization (integration). Adler did not completely disregard the implications of the human condition (as have most psychologies) but instead proceeded to create a psychology dynamic and eclectic enough to encompass all the behavior phenomena demanding consideration.

#### MAN IN ACTION

The Adlerian concepts of action, life style and social movement imply that the real meaning of life is in doing. Man has only potential value when considered philosophically or theologically. Man has only sentimental value when considered as a loved one by family or friends. Man is only an experiment of nature (even though the highest) when considered psychobiologically. Man achieves social value basically in terms of the valence of what he does. The real meaning of any man is in terms of what he can and does do.

Our concept of the meaning of social movement goes beyond the ideal of living in the service of others. The desire to be of help to others is laudable but not enough. It is in terms of really solid performance, throughout a life, that social significance is achieved. Every act performed well, any improvement of the self in the service

of improved competence, every creative performance brings man closer to full humanness—in the acutalization of potentials.

The concept of life style may be operationally defined in terms of the offensive-defensive strategy (either conscious or unconscious) developed by each person to cope with the world and particularly other humans. Adler contended that life style develops very early in childhood, and becomes a life-long super-factor determining a large percentage of the variance in behavior. Vladimir Pishkin and myself are currently at work on a major factorial research into which Adlerian life-style factors have been built-in along with Freudian and other factors known to determine various hierarchical levels of behavior. We will soon know from actual objective work exactly what influence the various categories of organizing factors have in determining important behaviors. In terms of integrative psychology (4), the problem is to maintain the highest levels of integration across time in order to achieve full humanness.

#### CONCERN WITH ETIOLOGY AND DIAGNOSIS

One of the things which greatly impressed me in my observations of Adler working clinically was his interest in diagnostics. Adler was a profoundly sensitive diagnostician, keenly alert to cues indicating the etiology of clinically important behaviors. I have watched Adler make exceedingly astute clinical deductions simply from systematically observing patients. In my opinion, he was a genuine master clinician and his success stemmed directly from diagnostic acumen and validity.

Starting out with astute observations concerning the developmental implications of organ inferiorities, Adler was concerned with the compensatory mechanisms for overcoming inadequacy and transcending limitations. Having rejected the Freudian metapsychology of the unconscious determination of behavior, Adler developed much broader concepts of social roles and meanings in which each person can do much in controlling his own outcomes. Adler was deeply concerned with diagnosing all facets of growth and development particularly in terms of the effects of what the person does in the (social) world. This diagnostic effort was much broader than in simply assigning classificatory labels—it was concerned with the ongoing process of coping and adaptation and essentially with the question of "How am I doing?" Here, the basic diagnostic effort is

to differentiate etiologic relationships in the ongoing processes of the stream of life. Adler was concerned particularly with the cross-roads of life which importantly determine developmental outcomes. Adler attempted to diagnose the values, ideals, and goals underlying such complex organizing principles as self concepts or life styles.

My own concern with psychodiagnosis was importantly influenced by realization of the depth of Adlerian concepts and of the necessity for developing diagnostic methods capable of discriminating the etiological equations involved. A broad-spectrum model of man requires broad-spectrum diagnostic methods in order to represent validly the etiological factors involved.

#### ADLER AND LECKY'S SELF-CONSISTENCY THEORY

In 1927, Prescott Lecky took a sabbatical leave from his instructorship in psychology at Columbia College to spend a year in Europe studying under the pioneers of the new dynamic psychology stemming from Freud and his disciples. Lecky never did get to know Freud, met Jung only briefly, but did get to spend most of the year working with Alfred Adler. On his return to Columbia in 1928, Lecky started his course in Personality of which I was one of the students. Lecky was full of enthusiasm over Adler's Individual Psychology and particularly with a new self psychology.

Lecky clearly perceived that behaviorism and the Columbia brand of objective psychology completely failed to come to grips with higher level behaviors related to the self functions. Mechanistic psychology is totally incapable of dealing with the phenomenal complexities of conscious awareness, the developing self concept and life style, and the highest levels of control regulated by reason, values, ideals, and goals. The concept of integration had been given lip service in clinical psychiatry but never defined operationally or developed systematically as to its theoretical implications.

Lecky correctly perceived that the prime need of the self is to become, and to maintain unification, integration, and self-consistency (3, pp. 152-166). This led to the principle of self-consistency as the controlling factor in resolving conflict and behaving in a unified way. Lecky stressed that the self concept tends to be organized in self-consistent ways and, in turn, determines self-consistency as the person attempts to achieve and maintain an ideal self status. Thus, what a person perceives, learns, or remembers is largely

determined by the needs of the self concept and self-consistency. Here Lecky was influenced by Adlerian concepts of socialized components of the self concept, the fact of man being socially embedded, and the requirement that man's social strivings be cooperative and positively oriented.

#### CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTEGRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Our own concern with integration as a central phenomenon of behavior organization (4) stemmed from the necessity of postulating some dynamic mechanism capable of organizing all the levels of etiological factors and psychological processes which can be demonstrated to exist. Logical and empirical considerations required us to postulate that raw behavior exists only in the form of a sequence (stream of life) of *psychological states*, so that *states*, rather than traits or personality structures, are the basic units to be studied and explained. Integrative psychology is always a state psychology. Adlerian concepts of action and movement imply different states of coping with life.

Integrative psychology postulates that integration (unification) is the central psychological process underlying all organized behaviors, and that all psychological processes can be reduced to integrative behavior. It is necessary to postulate the concept of various hierarchies of factors organizing increasingly more complex patterns of behavior. The prime motive is to maintain the highest levels of integration possible at time and place, in a continuing process as life unfolds. All this is implied in Adlerian principles of action, of movements towards preferred states of personal-social existence.

Adlerian psychology is concerned with a remarkably wide spectrum of behaviors and explanatory principles, all of which must be represented in a systematic integrative psychology. Our own thinking has been greatly influenced by Adlerian concepts of the self and life style (life schema). Accumulating evidence indicates that many behaviors are organized by relatively high-level self-executive functions in which the self not only perceives itself but actively engages in efforts to transcend previous states of being. The self must at all times be in a state of unification (integration) and Prescott Lecky's self-consistency principle provides an important mechanism for the resolution of conflict.

## REALISTIC PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPERATIVES

Historically, Adlerian psychology is gaining in relevance because it is much more realistically related to existential concerns than Freudian or Jungian theories. In an era when sexual expression is much easier and less conflictual than formerly, the chief existential concerns relate to how to get along in the world and make the most of life. Adler's concerns with power and self-actualization opened up important and formerly unexplored areas of ego psychology which still have not been adequately researched.

In my own professional development, it so happened that I was exposed as a graduate student at Columbia at the same time to Alfred Adler and Harry L. Hollingworth who, although worlds apart theoretically, both were interested in what may be called "realistic psychological imperatives." In one form or another, the concept of "duty to behave" in a certain way appears in many ideologies. The concept of "ought" implies that there are standards, laws, duties, rational reasons, sanctions or principles governing classes of actions which imply the imperative to behave in specified ways. One such imperative is the need to be realistic, to see things and tell things as they are.

At a time when traditional value systems are under heavy attack from both the extreme left and the extreme right, and when the younger generation are accusing the values of the older generation as being responsible for all that is wrong with our culture, it is very important to discriminate the valid from the invalid, the realistic from the unrealistic, and right from wrong. What we are getting at is that any valid system of psychology must reflect natural laws and psychological imperatives correctly and realistically.

For the purposes of the present argument, it is convenient to group psychological imperatives into three classes of (*a*) imperatives based on natural law which are largely immutable, (*b*) imperatives based on social laws or requirements which are relative to time and place but nevertheless must be considered realistic, and (*c*) imperatives based on purely personal appetites or faiths which are matters of personal preference. Any culture which does not obey natural imperatives is doomed to extinction. Any group which does not obey social imperatives must expect ostracism. And each person should be very realistic about the fallibilities of his own personal preferences, keeping in mind the clinical-judgment truism that the

more certain a person is that he is right, the more he is apt to be wrong.

The realism of any person's perceptions and conceptions of life may be evaluated roughly in terms of how correctly these three categories of imperatives have been internalized (2). Any person who does not conserve time, energy, money, and material resources must soon become bankrupt. The person who does not conform to social conventions must expect isolation and retaliation. The person who is too impulsively self-centered usually does not become involved in positive social movements.

Adler was concerned about all these matters with a realism not approached in other major schools of psychology. Modern basic-science psychology in America, influenced mainly by logical positivism, has been too compulsively concerned with methodological considerations to see the forest for the trees. Many psychologists have looked down on such practical matters as the management of money, property, time, work habits, and personal advancement. Adler was eclectic and broad-spectrum enough to perceive the realism of trying to deal with very practical matters of adjustment. In my own personal experience professionally, Adlerian psychology is the only system to have some practical relevance in case handling with mental defectives, social misfits, felons, and maladjusted normals.

#### EVALUATION

The ultimate clinical validation of any theoretical viewpoint such as Freudianism or Adlerian Individual Psychology is a function of breadth of phenomena which the system is able to clarify and explain. Although the Freudian metapsychology at first seemed to be universally applicable and complete as a psychological system, accumulating research evidence indicates its invalidity in such applications as projective psychology and even in psychoanalysis. The influence of Freud has diminished markedly during the 1960's coincidentally with the failure of research to validate the applications of psychoanalytic theory. Similar comments are applicable to Jung, few of whose concepts have received validation, so that he is now perceived as an intriguing mystic. Adler, on the other hand, receives increasing recognition because more and more of his concepts are found to be relevant and clinically valid.



Why has Adlerian psychology not attracted the extensive research and professional support that Freudian psychoanalysis has commanded? With the exception of the historical studies of the Ansbachers, who have waged a single-handed struggle to bring Adlerian theory the recognition it deserves, there are no major research projects in Individual Psychology. One explanation relates to the fact that Adlerian theory went far beyond available research methodology in the 20th century. Adler's theories went far beyond current research techniques and, hence, were largely ignored by the logical positivists interested only in behavioristic motor phenomena.

It is probable that there will never be an Adlerian movement comparable to Freudianism because the era of schools of psychology has been replaced by a thoroughgoing, basic-science-oriented, broad-spectrum eclecticism requiring broad investigation. Adler himself said:

I make it the duty of every student of Individual Psychology to acquire as full a knowledge of other psychological systems as possible. . . . I, for my part, have never hesitated to acknowledge the progress of any scientific system . . . never attempted to deny some deep common connection in the research of the various old and new systems . . . thereby we are by no means advocating a weakly (or sickly) eclecticism (1, pp. 3-4).

Historically it is important to keep the record straight by giving Adler credit for his pioneering in broadening the spectrum of psychological theorizing.

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