

ADLERIAN VIEW OF THE PRESENT-DAY SCENE¹

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The Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children has stated:

In spite of our best intentions, our programs are insufficient . . . piecemeal . . . fragmented, and do not serve all those in need. . . . The nation, which looks to the family to nurture its young, gives no real help with child rearing until a child is badly disturbed or disruptive of the community. . . . Within the community some mechanism must be created which will assume the responsibility for insuring the necessary supports for the child and family (7).

Dr. Waggoner, past president, American Psychiatric Association, said: "I am not aware of any significant emphasis in our country on the training of parents or potential parents in what is by far the most important aspect of human development—the provision of a proper environment for child rearing that offers the best chance for preventing mental or emotional disorders in later life" (8, p. 1706).

THE SCHOOL SCENE

This "most important aspect of human development" which Dr. Waggoner speaks of, is exactly what Adler stressed all during his life as the most important task of Individual Psychology: the prevention of neurosis. And, over 45 years ago Adler evolved, described and promoted the "mechanism" which the Joint Commission said, must be created. Adler pointed to the schools, which he called "the prolonged arm of the family" (1, p. 156), where much of the harm that may have been done to the child in his home, can be corrected, if the teachers could be trained to do this, and if they would accept the responsibility involved.

As always, when Adler evolved a theory, practice was quick to follow, emerging as it did, from his theory. Practice, in turn, added to, modified, reformulated, and rearranged his theory's generalizations and recommendations, as new experiences and new problems presented themselves, while at the same time he staked no claim to finality or completeness.

Teachers were quickly won over, since they found that the new method eased their burden and made teaching much more effective

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and gratifying. Not only were discipline problems quickly dissipated, but learning greatly improved. Children started to help each other with their subjects, as they helped each other with their personality difficulties. This refuted one of the main objections that had been made against Adler's new theory: Children, just like human beings in general, were supposed to be competitive and aggressive by "nature," and their aggressiveness and competitiveness would always, it was held, overwhelm and undo all training for cooperation. Psychoanalysis as well as the old academic psychiatry held to that theory.

When Albert Einstein in 1932, distressed by the prospect of disaster, toward which the world was moving, asked Freud to lend his authority and scientific findings to help promote world peace, Freud answered that he saw "no use in trying to get rid of men's aggressive inclinations" (6, p. 283). This presupposes a built-in aggressiveness in man, the silencing of which would depend on suppression. Compare that to Adler's statement: "I should like to say once more here that Individual Psychology demands the repression of neither justifiable nor unjustifiable wishes. It does teach, however, that unjustifiable wishes must be recognized as being opposed to social feeling, and that they can be made to disappear, not by suppression, but by an addition of social interest" (2, p. 290). All freedom, after all, presupposes self-control, but not at all self-suppression, violence to one's own will; it presupposes not a passive subordination of desires to necessity, but a rational and humane evaluation of a man's desires and interests. This, then requires that the personality correspond to those social attitudes and values in which the progressive direction of the evolution of society is most completely expressed, under the given, concrete circumstances.

In recent years more and more people have recognized that aggressiveness and competitiveness are not inborn. For example, Gordon Allport, the late dean of American psychologists concluded:

Although he is negativistic, the child of two is not yet competitive. Only by the age of three can he be taught to "get ahead." Between three and four, about half acquire a sense of "I beat you." By the age of six or seven in our culture we can safely say that self-esteem acquires a competitive flavor. In other cultures it is not so . . . The individual identifies his self-esteem with his esteem for the group (5, p. 119).

Adler knew very well that in our Western Society parents are nilly-willy drawn into the pernicious competitive spirit, and that

children are the victims of that attitude. He knew that we could not reach all the parents, re-educate them and thus save the children; but we could reach all the teachers, and they could undo much of the harm done to the children in their homes; eventually the children could then even re-educate their parents, at least to some degree. This was Adler's vision. He wrote:

Under our present system we generally find that when children first come to school they are more prepared for competition than for cooperation; and the training in competition continues throughout their school days. This is a disaster for the child; and it is hardly less of a disaster if he goes ahead and strains to beat the other children than if he falls behind and gives up the struggle. In both cases he will be interested primarily in himself. It will not be his aim to contribute and help, but to secure what he can for himself. As the family should be a unit, with each member an equal part of the whole, so, too, should be the class. When they are trained in such a way, children are really interested in one another, and enjoy cooperation. I have seen many "difficult" children whose attitude was entirely changed through the interest and cooperation of their fellow-children. . . . Sometimes people doubt whether children can really be trained to understand one another and help in this way; but it is my experience that children often understand better than their elders" (1, pp. 163-164).

We see then, that this could be done in our schools, which today are chaotic and often largely a shambles; it is obvious that it should be done, if it could be done; *we* feel that it must be done. What *is*, after all our mental health scene? What is our school scene? What our drug scene? I can tell you only from my experience in the American setting; but, from all I can fathom, it is not very different in the other Western countries.

THE PSYCHOTHERAPY SCENE

The psychiatric - psychological - psychotherapeutic scene has changed somewhat since our last congress in 1966, although the beginnings of these trends were already discernable; they have since come to much fuller bloom, if bloom is the right word for that. I am speaking of the "encounter" groups, "transactional" groups, "interactional" groups, "Gestalt" groups, "Esalen" groups, "marathon" groups, "sensitivity" groups, "nude" groups, "human relations" groups, and many others that are springing up daily and proving to be longer or shorter lasting fads. Some are just money-making schemes; others derive their existence from some paranoid person, who lusts for power, and forms or leads such a group. This, of course, is not a condemnation of group therapy as such, because there are many groups in which genuine therapy is done; but very little, if any therapy is done in most of the groups I referred to.

The tremendous rise and popularity of these fads shows that they obviously answer a desperate need in people for something that is a bit more meaningful than their impoverished and alienated lives, and for something that at least resembles a relationship, because their competitive upbringing and environment had undermined and prevented their ability to form relationships from developing.

The idea behind the formation of such groups for the enhancement of socialization and the formation of relationships was, of course, basically a sound one; did not Adler himself say: "As soon as the patient can connect himself with his fellow man on an equal and cooperative footing, he is cured" (1, p. 260)? Adler, however, never said this about what amounts to a poor imitation of a relationship, which is usually all that is achieved in these groups. Adler spoke of relationships where social feeling for a fellowman is increased, and where self-boundedness is decreased. But these groups foster mainly catharsis, self-expression, with little or no increase in social feeling, and very often nothing but loud and overt depreciation of others, with a spurious and temporary self-elevation of their impoverished egos; a completely self-centered activity. There is no sensitivity about the feelings of others in most of these sensitivity groups. The question arises: How sensitive are sensitivity groups? And the "tactile" relationships that are promoted, often only hide the lack of real relationships among the members of these groups.

Psychoanalytic theory having failed them, and with nothing else to lean on, many of the leaders of these groups have developed a total contempt for theory, and an adulation of practice alone. They often even pride themselves with "not knowing" and being "not interested" in the purposes of neurotic behavior of the patients in their groups, the origins, the history and the meanings of their symptoms, and only indulge with their patients in the "practice" of feelings. As invariably happens, when practice alone is pursued, it is apt to trail off into opportunism, and, we are again reminded of the saying that opportunism is the best way to miss opportunities; also, that ignorance is more easily tolerated by those who are ignorant.

I may be accused of lack of charity, or even cruelty for my attempt, with my criticism of these groups, to rip away the illusions the participants entertain about their life in these groups, by which they try to cover the dismal alienation and the lack of meaning of their lives. But they can really be helped only if they are helped

to give up their alienated and meaningless condition, so that illusion about it becomes unnecessary; so that they can come to a better understanding and begin to have real relations, instead of only the semblance of them.

THE DRUG SCENE

The drug scene is, of course, very much related to the above. The need to erase the unbearable reality, by the use of drugs, and to conjure up beautiful dreams instead—at least hopefully so—is, after all, an old and well tried method, practiced since biblical times. That its use, as is the case with alcohol, should greatly increase in our time and age is not surprising, since the ruling forces in our society impose on people a denial of true human values, and an exultation of violence and atrocities, albeit only committed against other-colored or other-thinking people. Our youth on the campuses are treated as if they were idiots, when they are told officially that their sit-in at the campus is violence, but the slaughter in Vietnam is patriotism and bravery. Heavy drug intake not only erases for them, at least temporarily, the intolerable reality, but often also makes them ineligible for the draft. Those who were fortunate in having a good relationship in childhood, have usually a better chance to withstand the pull to escape into nirvana.

THE PROFESSIONAL'S SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Adler said that the honest psychologist, (psychiatrist, educator, or, for that matter anyone who is deeply concerned with the fate of individuals and mankind) cannot shut his eyes to the fact that there are conditions and circumstances that interfere with the development of social feeling in the child; that prevent the child from feeling as a fellow human and that lead him, instead, to live as if he were in an enemy country. We must, therefore, said Adler “work against nationalism when . . . it harms mankind as a whole; against wars of conquest, revenge, and prestige; against unemployment which plunges peoples into hopelessness; and against all other obstacles which interfere with the spreading of social interest” (3, p. 454). Adler said that we must not forget that it is the total circumstances, the total relationship of the environment, which send out their waves into the mind of the young, developing child. Then, there is the fact of violence and war, and its glorification in school, on television, in literature, in the movies and by the government.

The child with an underdeveloped social feeling will easily accommodate himself through such influences to a world where it is quite natural to compel men to fight with machines and poison gases. He will learn to feel that it is more honorable to kill as many of his fellowmen as he can, and he will forget that they too, could and would be of value for the future of mankind. Adler stated that we have sufficient experience to claim with certainty that such wars and racial persecutions are almost invariably followed by a deterioration of social life, of comradeship, of love relations, and by a big increase in crime and mental disease.

We should be concerned to create and foster those environmental influences which will make it difficult for a child to get a mistaken notion of the meaning of life; which will make it difficult for the child to feel that a personal victory over a fellowman, or the destruction of a group of fellowmen by his group, is more rewarding, more elevating than cooperation with them.

GUIDANCE OF YOUTH

How do we explain to a child (after we have explained it to ourselves, I suppose) that despite the teachings of Christ and the tablets of Moses, despite our teachings that "Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt love thy neighbor," our real world offends against these teachings time and again, and that hate and killings and oppressions are fostered by our governments and other power groups? How can we expect students, or even younger children *not* to consider the grown-ups to be hypocritical? How can we expect them *not* to feel a generation gap? Why should we expect them to want to join us in our society? They find that our society generally prefers clean-cut Nazis to maybe not-so-clean pacifists. They find that in our society appearance is of utmost importance, and essence of little consequence; they find that form is more important than content. Fortunately, youth cannot stand such lack of idealism; youth will not fall in with the opportunism of the adult world in Western society, with its slogan-ridden, image-conscious business-and advertising-world.

What should we as Adlerians, as Individual Psychologists, do about our youth? How can we help them when they are in trouble? Certainly, we should *not* attempt to "adjust" them to the superficial, hypocritical, opportunistic and corrupted standards of the existing society. We have to explain to them, that, sadly enough,

human society is only a few thousand years old and has not, as yet, developed sufficient social interest; and that a real fellow human must work unceasingly against the evil, competitive, aggressive trends in our society, and work *for* cooperation with, and love for his fellowmen, and for a more ideal society.

Usually we encounter great pessimism about the possibility of improving society, and a show of moral superiority of the youth over the society he condemns. Here, then, we can show our young rebel that his moral and ethical superiority did neither fall from heaven, nor did it spring virginally out of his superior brain. Many generations of humans have labored on thoughts and concepts, to bring about philosophies of equality, the wrong of prejudice, the dignity of human life and many other high-minded ideas, and that without them first paving the ground for him, his brilliant brain could not even have conceived of the ideas and ideals he now holds. And isn't our task in life, therefore, to add to this fund of ideas and ideals for the sake of the present and future generations?

REBELLION AND PROGRESS

I have been speaking here of a conversion of a rebel without a cause, into one with a cause. We should never try to stop him from being a rebel; after all, rebels have always been the catalysts for progress; but rebellions can be channelled into socially useful, constructive directions, instead of being dissipated in nihilistic and self-centered self-assertions or consciousness-expansions with or without the use of drugs or mystic contemplations. Adler wrote:

Every intellectual and every religious uprising has been directed against the striving for power; the logic of the communal life of man has always asserted itself. . . . But . . . the present stage of our culture and insight still permits the power principle to prevail. However, it can be adhered to no longer openly but only through the exploitation of social interest. An unveiled and direct attack of violence is unpopular and would therefore no longer be safe. Thus when violence is to be committed this is frequently done by appealing to justice, tradition, freedom, the welfare of the oppressed, and in the name of culture. . . . Social interest is transformed from an end into a means and is pressed into the service of nationalism and imperialism (3, pp. 455-456).

We are indeed fortunate here in New York City, to have Mayor Lindsay, who understands this thoroughly, and who has warned us not to forget that those who suppress freedom, always do so in the name of "law and order."

While Adler believed explicitly in the progress of mankind, he also knew that there was disagreement regarding the meaning of

progress. For Adler, human progress was a function of a higher development of social interest. He said:

Admittedly the level of social interest is presently still low, as indicated by such phrases as "Why should I love my neighbor?" and "After me the deluge" [the first, a phrase used by Freud, the second by Louis XVI]. But social interest is continuously pressing and growing. For this reason, no matter how dark the times may be, in the long-range view there is the assurance of the higher development of the individual and the group. Social interest is continuously growing; human progress is a function of the higher development of social interest; therefore, human progress will be inevitable as long as mankind exists (4, pp. 25-26).

As to the latter, however—the continued existence of mankind—Adler warned that it was up to us to see to it that mankind is not extinguished. He said, "The belief that the cosmos ought to have an interest in the preservation of life is scarcely more than a pious hope" (2, p. 272).

CONCLUSION

Addressing an international gathering, I do not hesitate to state that, as Individual Psychologists, as Adlerians, we are pledged to work for progress, for peace, for equality, for cooperation and for the growth of social interest. Internationally our cooperation should become much closer, also, because we may again enter a time, where this may become fraught with difficulties. In 1935, at a psychiatric congress in Holland, 339 psychiatrists from 30 countries signed a manifesto against war; only four years later, the holocaust of the second World War began. This year in San Francisco, at the psychiatric convention, again many manifestos against war were signed. Let us hope and work for it, that we can prevent another, even more horrendous holocaust to be perpetrated on mankind. I therefore repeat what I quoted from Adler, so that it may ring in your ears: "The honest psychologist cannot shut his eyes to social conditions which prevent the child from becoming a part of the community. . . . Thus the psychologist must work against nationalism when it is so poorly understood that it harms mankind as a whole; against wars of conquest, revenge, and prestige; . . . and against all other obstacles which interfere with the spreading of social interest" (3, p. 454). To work against these evils we must be ready to join with *all* people. We must admit that we are weak when alone, and that we can accomplish things only in cooperation with others. This was the social message in Adler's philosophy. Maybe in this way, will we be able to be of some help in preventing the demise of

mankind, and may then even help a bit in developing mankind to greater glory, through the miracle of social interest.

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