

ALFRED ADLER AND THE FULFILLMENT MODEL OF PERSONALITY THEORIZING¹

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The textbook writers and theory interpreters usually consider Adler to have had much in common with Freud. Adler is discussed by some, such as Ruth Monroe (12), as a "neo-Freudian," and by others, such as Hall and Lindzey (7), as a "social psychological theorist." As far as I can imagine, a neo-Freudian expresses essentially Freudian ideas in a modern idiom. Although the ideas are changed, and in that sense new, they are still supposed to be recognizable as Freud's in parentage. The designation, social psychological theorist, though less explicit in itself is used in a context intimately relating it to Freud. Usually, the chapter on social psychological theorists follows that on the pure Freudians, and the difference between the two emerges as a tendency to replace the biological, narrowly sexual emphasis of the latter with an emphasis on society and culture as the determiners of personality. But the implication is that the basic insights of Freud carried in such concepts as the unconscious, anxiety, defense, instinct, fixation, and reality principle, still remain.

I cannot see how one could properly understand Adler as either a neo-Freudian or a social psychological theorist. There is little concern with sexuality, or the pleasure principle, or the reality principle in Adler, and he emphasizes society no more than does Freud. It should be remembered that Freud gave to society a major role in shaping character structure, the superego, and even the ego, through the action of parents during the various stages of psychosexual development. It is my contention that Freud and Adler differed so radically in their view of man that no attempt to highlight their similarities will be fruitful.

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Actually, for some time I could not even apprehend how the terms neo-Freudian and social psychological theorist had ever come to be applied to Adler. Now, after long reflection, I believe that one reason is simple associationistic thinking—Adler started in Freud's inner circle and must, therefore, have retained its influence even after breaking away. But perhaps the more important reason is traditionalistic thinking. Freud was such a giant that we have willingly taken him as the parent of us all, and define ourselves by the degree to which our ideas resemble his. Psychoanalysts are, of course, delighted with this traditionalistic thinking, for it places them at the center of the universe of personality theorizing. And it relegates theorists such as McClelland (11) and George Kelly (8) to the darkest reaches of outer space. So different is their theorizing from that of Freud that many personologists look upon them as being merely descriptive, or even superficial. But we should remember that the Aristotelian view about the earth as the center of the universe was, though wrong, so entrenched by tradition—a religion being virtually based upon it—that it stifled progress for centuries, and virtually destroyed Galileo and the others who opposed it.

However great Freud was, we cannot risk letting him define our personological universe and fall passively into orbit around him. We must regard Freud's theory as one approach to understanding man, and not as the source of all insight. And once we do this, it becomes apparent that Adler's theory is so different from that of Freud as to constitute a distinct and separate approach.

FREUD'S CONFLICT MODEL

In my recent personality textbook (9) I classify Freud's theory as an expression of the psychosocial form of the conflict model. The conflict model assumes the existence of two great forces which are set in content and inherently in opposition. In the psychosocial form of the model, one great force springs from the individual whereas the other great force has its source in society. Because conflict is inevitable and constant, the best life one can make is a compromise that establishes a dynamic balance between the opposing forces. The conflict model is, therefore, a tragic view of life.

For Freud (4) the force springing from the individual is the id, that repository of seething, timeless, chaotic, selfish instincts clamoring for gratification. But if everyone expressed this force, this pleasure-principle functioning, in unmitigated form, then in the

ensuing competition for instinctual objects, some persons would inevitably have to go without any gratification at all. This is such a horrible anxiety-provoking prospect that men evolve society, which constitutes a system of taboos and sanctions governing individual behavior. The great social force aims at preserving the common good, which in Freud's theory amounts to ensuring a minimum of instinctual gratification for all by destroying the possibility of complete gratification for anyone. This destruction takes place by the process of defense, whereby the person does not act on socially-unacceptable aspects of the instincts and loses consciousness of them as well. The social force achieves this aim by enlisting parents in the process of socializing the child through the use of punishment and the inculcation of guilt. Once socialization is complete, the person's whole life expresses the attempt to maximize instinctual gratification while minimizing punishment and guilt. That this is called reality-principle (in contrast to pleasure-principle) functioning indicates the compromise or tragic nature of the life. In Freud's terms, you can do worse than this, by trying to deny one great force or the other, but you cannot do any better.

It may seem to some of you as if I am doing Freud an injustice by not considering the "ego psychology" implications in his writings of significance. One reason why I do not think this is true is that the main thrust of his position is as I have stated. Taking all of his writings together, the emphasis is certainly on defensiveness, conflict, unconsciousness of the real nature of the instincts, and the importance of avoiding anxiety, punishment, and guilt. In a very real sense, Freud's view is a psychology of adjustment to societal imperatives. The current elaboration of ego psychology is interesting and important enough in its own right not to have to be traced to some fringe implications of Freud's position.

My other reason for classifying Freud as a psychosocial conflict theorist is that in so doing the most unique aspects of his position are highlighted. At least since Plato, Western thought has emphasized animalistic urges, conscience, and reason as the three main parts of personality. But reason could always be given the most important role in constructing the good life because it was assumed to be separate and distinct from the other two parts. It was Freud and Nietzsche more than any others who dislodged the Platonic ideal by discrediting reason. For Freud, the ego (which corresponds to reason) is an offshoot of the id (or animalistic urges) and the

servant of id and superego (or conscience), both of which are stronger than it. That is why Freud spoke of rationalization rather than reason. In his scheme, the most that could be achieved through attempting to reason is a pale shadow of the truth, and the worst is a dangerous illusion. In the history of ideas, that may well be remembered as Freud's great contribution.

ADLER'S FULFILLMENT MODEL

Adler's theorizing (1, 3) was so different from this that it is even difficult to compare them. Where Freud described life as the attempt to maximize instinctual gratification while minimizing punishment and guilt, Adler emphasized the pull toward perfection. Sexuality in Adler's viewpoint is only one expression of man, not the main thing. There is no elaboration of the terminology of defense and conflict in Adler. And whereas Freud viewed society as the opponent of the individual, so that adjustment and compromise is necessary, Adler saw individual and social aims as potentially consistent with each other. Adler's individual shapes his own life and society in the same set of actions, by a process more accurately described as transcendence rather than adjustment. Adler must have believed in reason rather than rationalization.

In my textbook (9), I classify Adler's theory as an expression of the perfection version of the fulfillment model. In contrast to the conflict model, the fulfillment model assumes only one great force, which is localized in the individual. The best life is that in which the goals of the great force are progressively more realized. In the perfection version of this model, the goals are in the form of ideals of what constitutes the good life, rather than some sense of the particular talents and interests of individual persons. You can easily see why I classify Adler this way, by recognizing that the pull toward perfection is his only great force, and that the fictional finalisms, or goals, are in the form of ideals.

A fulfillment theorist can conceptualize conflict between the individual and society, but he does not consider such conflict as inevitable, seeing no basic incompatibility between personal and communal aims. When conflict occurs in a person, it is believed to be due to his reaction to some faulty societal, usually parental action toward him. For a fulfillment theorist, society does not have to fail the individual, and it is unfortunate when it does. As you can see, Adler's theory expresses this position well. The individual

will naturally be oriented toward perfecting himself and society through the same set of actions. But if family atmosphere does not involve love, respect, mutual trust, and cooperativeness, the probability is increased that the person will develop a life style that is competitive and destructive in the sense that he will try to perfect himself at the expense of society and other people.

Freud sees man as selfish but helpless in the face of a powerful and unchangeable social order. The only way is compromise and adjustment, and to hide one's equally unchangeable selfishness from the scrutiny of self and others. In sharp contrast, Adler sees man as willing and able to overcome his real and felt inferiorities for the good of himself and of the society around him. That society is not a repressive, unchangeable enemy, but rather something fashioned by the individuals functioning within it, and therefore in their service. Adler's is a psychology of transcendence rather than adjustment. This difference is more important, it seems to me, than any similarity one can find among the two views.

In essence, Adler is actually closer to personality theorists such as Gordon Allport, Fromm, Rogers, and Maslow, than he is to Freud. All assume only one great force, in contrast to Freud. For Allport (2), it is the pull toward psychological maturity through appropriate functioning; for Fromm (5), it is the tendency to fulfill one's human nature; and for Rogers (13) and Maslow (10), it is the tendency to actualize one's inherent potentialities. When psychosocial conflict occurs, for these theorists, it does so through a failing of society, which need not but can interfere with the great force. These theorists are all social critics, as is exemplified by Fromm's (6) condemnation of existing societies as insane. And the effect of conflict on the person is always construed as mental illness. Think of Allport's opportunistic functioning, Fromm's unproductive orientations, and Roger's discrepancy between self-concept and experiential self.

ACTUALIZATION MODELS OF FULFILLMENT

These theorists, along with Adler, all express the fulfillment model. This does not mean, however, that there are no important differences among them. Allport and Fromm, like Adler, specify as the goal of the great force ideals of what constitutes the good life. Each theorist assumes that the ideals he has postulated apply

to all people. They are perfection theorists because they see each person's task in life as aspiring to the fulfillment of the ideals.

Rogers and Maslow, though fulfillment theorists, are quite different. A good life for them is that which expresses the inherent potentialities of the particular person involved. There is no idealized conception of the good life; rather, there are as many good lives as there are persons. More likely than not, the attempt to pursue ideals leads away from the inherent potentialities and toward sickness. I consider Rogers and Maslow to express the actualization rather than perfection version of the fulfillment model (9).

The difference between the two versions may seem small but is actually quite important. Let us compare Adler and Rogers in order to see the difference in boldest relief. For Adler, the person is most obviously in the grips of the push toward perfection when he experiences a feeling of inferiority which he tries to overcome in some way. To be sure, constructive, cooperative compensations are healthier than destructive, competitive ones. But all compensatory effort begins with feelings of inferiority, and hence, such feelings could never be considered a sign of sickness. Indeed, they are a sign of being alive, of the attempt to grow.

According to Rogers, a person is most vigorously expressing the tendency to actualize inherent potentialities when he is not caught in elaborate self-conscious plans and conditions of worth, when he acts in terms of an intuitive sense of what he wants to do, and when he has a strong sense of well-being and satisfaction. Feelings of inferiority can only express sickness, implying as they do self-conscious concern with what one is and the difference between that and what one should or could be. You will recognize this discrepancy between self concept and ideal self as an indication of conditions of worth, a definite sign of trouble, according to Rogers.

Rogers must be thinking of the inherent potentialities as a kind of genetic blueprint, different for each person, and determining in an organismic, almost biological, way what course of behavior is best. Living healthily, growing, is something that happens fairly spontaneously, without a lot of self-conscious concern for what one is and is not doing. Where Rogers emphasizes a genetic blueprint, Adler offers a set of ideals constituting the good life. Hence, for him, living well would seem to involve much the same self-conscious concern that Rogers considers sick. The pursuit of perfection will very likely entail trying hard in some area of human

endeavor where inherent potentiality is actually low. To hazard an analogy from the game of bridge, Roger's theory extolls playing your long suit well, whereas Adler's theory extolls playing your short suits as capably as if they were long suits. In philosophical terms, Rogers espouses humanism, and Adler idealism.

SOUNDNESS OF THE MODELS

How can we determine whether the psychosocial conflict model, the actualization fulfillment model, or the perfection fulfillment model is the most fruitful? One possibility is through research. Each of these positions has some fairly concrete implications around which empirical study can be planned. In my textbook (9) I have organized some existing personality research so as to bear on some issues separating the models. For example, one implication of the psychosocial conflict model stemming from the inevitability of conflict is that all behavior is defensive. In contrast, the two versions of the fulfillment model consider only some behavior to be defensive, as conflict only occurs if and when society fails the individual. Existing research has some few threads of relevance to this issue which can be gathered. But there is a paucity of research aimed right at this and other pertinent issues.

In the absence of extensive empirical evidence of the relative fruitfulness of the three models, there is little else we can do than express our opinions. It is my opinion that the model for living that one believes makes a large, general difference in the kind of life one leads. If you believe Freud's view, you tend to conform to social pressure, not taking your wishes to the contrary very seriously. To an extreme, you value selflessness, suffering, discipline, and shouldering responsibility. You are highly critical and distrusting of yourself. You do not believe in the possibility of changing your life. This is because you view society as a powerful and alien force riding herd on individuals.

If you believe Rogers' position, you think that the capability for a good life comes as a concomitant of birth, that there is nothing to be practiced, and little to be learned, or striven for. You advocate permissiveness and uncriticality for yourself and for others, as the condition sufficient to encourage creativity, loving, and all the other good things. You do not advocate suffering, and do not especially value discipline, dependability, or stability. You assume that change is frequent and its own justification, whatever the conventional

view of obligation and responsibility. Society can only hurt you, and is therefore more an enemy than anything else. But its effects can be avoided, so it is not as important as in Freud.

To me, both views seem limited. Perhaps this is because I have characatured them, but I do not think so. In any event, the Adlerian view is the most sound, in my opinion. If you believe it, you consider yourself able to make the decisions and do the hard work that is necessary to reach a good life. You believe in practice and discipline, but not merely to avoid the onslaught of a society that does not have your interests at heart. Rather, you consider practice and discipline to be ways whereby you can better your life and that of the society around you. You view society as something constructed by the individuals constituting it, and as in their service. Society is no better or worse than they are.

Given the choice of believing the psychosocial conflict, actualization fulfillment, or perfection fulfillment models, I would cheerfully choose the latter.

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