

## ALFRED ADLER AND GEORGE H. MEAD

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To the volume *Scientific Psychology*, edited by Benjamin B. Wolman and Ernest Nagel, Heinz L. Ansbacher and I contributed two papers: his on "The Structure of Individual Psychology" (1) and mine on "George H. Mead: A Pragmatist's Philosophy of Science" (3).

On reading my paper, Mr. Ansbacher wrote that it confirmed his view of "the kinship between Mead and Adler." He noted, among other points of similarity, that both men combine a behavioral and phenomenological point of view (3, p. 403 and 1, pp. 345-347), both stress the teleological nature of human action (3, p. 407 and 1, pp. 343 and 350), and both share the position that the individual lives with other individuals in a common world in which common sense forever remains important (3, p. 404 and 1, p. 353). Mr. Ansbacher suggested that I give my own reaction to the viewpoint expressed in his letter.

I do feel that there is a close kinship between Adler and Mead. The most important similarity lies in the fact that they share what later came to be called a biosocial orientation. Both see the human personality as built upon the interaction of an organism with other organisms in a social matrix. And both maintain that the self which emerges in this process of interaction nevertheless is a creative agent which plays a part in the direction of its own growth.

The differences between Adler and Mead do not seem to me to be oppositions, but complementary emphases, understandable in terms of their different tasks: Mead is, in the aspect of his work here relevant, a social psychologist, while Adler is a therapist.

Mead is concerned with the general interactive process in which a human organism becomes a person who can think, become an object to himself, and take into account in his actions the interests of others. Hence Mead, while admitting individual differences, does not seriously study them; nor is he attentive to the disturbances of persons which arise in the process of social interaction. To Adler as therapist, however, these matters are of focal concern: individual biological differences become very important, as do individual differences (such as birth order) in the family constellation. What Adler writes about such matters does not contradict Mead nor minimize their general kinship,

but supplements Mead's developmental account from the Adlerian focus of the therapist.

A similar relationship shows itself in the matter of their phenomenological orientation. Mead is a phenomenologist in the general sense of working within what he called "the world that is there," and which is sometimes called by phenomenologists "the living world." It is in this world that we live and move and have our being; it is in this world that all theories arise and are brought to test. Mead, however, is not a phenomenologist in the sense stressed by Adler and others, namely, the need for understanding the individual in terms of how he himself feels and knows his world. This stress is appropriate and indeed necessary for the therapist, but recedes into the background when merely a general theory of the nature and origin of the human self is under consideration—as it was for Mead.

Further, Mead did not present the view that each individual constructs a life plan or style of life which becomes the "final cause" of his own search for success or perfection. It is, however, possible to see how this could happen in terms of Mead's "cognitive" theory of the self and the role of symbols in the control of its action, though I believe that Mead himself would not have gone as far as Adler did in the stress upon the autonomy of the self.

Adler's position seems to me supplementary to that of Mead, and in general much more congenial to Mead's thought than is Freud. Mead refers in one place in *Mind, Self, and Society* to the "more or less fantastic psychology" of Freud (2, p. 211); nothing in Adler's position would seem fantastic to a follower of Mead. The Adlerians could profit from Mead's fuller account of the nature of symbols and their role in human behavior, and the way in which the "social interest" develops. The Meadians could profit from Adler's stress on individual differences and the manner in which personality disturbances develop in the biosocial process of interaction. Mead and Adler are two sides of the same coin. Their followers would do well to know both of them.

#### REFERENCES

1. ANSBACHER, H. L. The structure of Individual Psychology. In B. B. Wolman & E. Nagel (Eds.), *Scientific psychology*. New York: Basic Books, 1965. Pp. 340-364.
2. MEAD, G. H. *Mind, self and society*. Ed., with introduction, by C. W. Morris. Chicago, Ill.: Univer. Chicago Press, 1934.
3. MORRIS, C. George H. Mead: a pragmatist's philosophy of science. In B. B. Wolman & E. Nagel (Eds.), *Scientific psychology*. New York: Basic Books, 1965. Pp. 402-408.