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## ALFRED ADLER'S "INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY"

- An Evaluation

By Margaret H. Gammon

Alfred Adler, M.D., one of the Big Three great pioneers of Psychiatry, was born February 7, 1870 and died in 1937 at 67 years of age, at the height of his powers. Edgar Cayce was born March 18, 1877 and died in 1945 at 67 years of age. These two were thus contemporaries; and in this writer's opinion there are some striking parallels between the spiritual approach to life in the Edgar Cayce readings, and Adler's psychology - philosophy which he named "Individual Psychology." This means the study of the individual as *an entity*, or indivisible unit. "You cannot divide the individual?" Adler asserted. "Man is a whole human being."

In Phyllis Bottome's life of Adler<sup>1</sup>, page IX, we find this description of him: "Alfred Adler loved paradox, and his life was largely built up of paradoxes. He was a philosopher who was known as perhaps the most brilliant practising psychiatrist of his day. He was a great psychiatrist distrusted by many of his colleagues because of the weight of his philosophy. He was a moralist without a dogmatic belief in any religion. He was a scientist who believed that man. *is a spirit and therefore responsible for his every act.*"

### The "Social Feeling"

Ten main contributions to the infant science of psychiatry by Adler are listed in the Bottome biography. All ten

are integrated with the basic premise that each individual has a goal in life. It is a secret goal, unless brought out into the open and examined by the individual. An Adlerian analysis helped to do this - but the real work depended upon the individual, in conceding the status quo and remaking his goal. The frequency with which all were admonished by the Edgar Cayce readings to externalise or state goals, from physical, mental and spiritual viewpoints, is so well known to A.R.E. members that there is scarcely need to mention any reading. Nevertheless, let us quote from reading #2700-L1:

"Here indeed may it be said: know first your ideal, physical, mental and spiritual. Each phase of your experience bears one upon the other, yet these are influenced definitely in the experience. But study to show yourself approved unto the ideal chosen. Keep self in body, in mind, *true to that ideal*; keeping self away from harsh judgements of others. For with what judgement you judge, you shall be judged yourself."

Compare this with Adler's statement in Understanding Human Nature,\* pages 19, 20: "The psychic life of man is determined by his goal. No human being can think, feel, will or dream without all these activities being determined, continued modified and directed toward an ever-present objective ... We cannot conceive of psychic evolution, except within the

1 G.P.Putnam's Sons, New York.

pattern of an ever-present objective, which is determined in itself by the dynamics of life. The goal itself we may conceive as changing or as static. On this basis, all phenomena of the soul life may be conceived as preparations for some future situation . . . and *Individual Psychology considers all the manifestations of the human soul as though they were directed toward a goal.*"

Miss Bottome states that since 1907 Adler had arrived at the opinion that the process of human thought was not basically causal, but teleological ... the belief that behind the regular laws of causality lurks the greater influence of an aim or goal. (Webster's New College Dictionary: teleology is the fact of being directed toward an end or shaped by a purpose. The doctrine or belief that design is apparent or ends are immanent, in nature; especially the vitalist doctrine that the processes of life are not exclusively determined by mechanical causes, but are directed to the realisation of certain normal wholes or entelechies.)

Members of the A.R.E. can easily project this vitalist doctrine into the larger plan of reincarnation, although Adler disclaimed any metaphysical connotations anywhere in his explanation of man-the-spirit. Apparently it was a large enough life-task for him to examine scientifically the effect of the goal or ideal held unconsciously by every human being, in this life, and to uncover the selfish aspects of that goal - always unpalatable to the conscious self.

In analysis and in lectures, Adler pointed out the good effects of a goal of brotherhood. Such a goal, he explained, made one helpful, friendly, patient, cooperative, cheerful and humble. These traits, the opposite of aggressive character traits (vanity and ambition,

jealousy, envy, avarice and hate), link one with his fellow human beings, promote a feeling of inner security and contribute to the good of "society" or humankind. Adler calls this the development of "social feeling", which is a translation from the German jaw-breaking term, "Gemeinschaftsgefühl."

The Law of Social Interest, or development of social feeling, is listed as number ten under contributions to psychiatry in Phyllis Bottome's biography. Many bells have kept ringing, from time to time, as this A.R.E. member has studied the readings against a long-buried background of knowing Dr. Adler. One has been the difficulty of separating the man from his work. Another has been the difficulty of separating one principle from all others so inextricably connected. It is true in respect to aspects of Individual Psychology; it is even truer, because we go deeper, in studying the readings.

The goal of brotherhood resulting from development of Social Feeling is a case in point. Dr. Adler not only taught this; he showed by example that the unselfish goal produced a wholesome and well-balanced human being, able to take the stresses and strains of life with serenity. Thus the man was, in a sense, greater than his teachings, great as these are - simply because many philosophers can construct great philosophies, but how many are shining lights of example? And the Edgar Cayce readings say over and over again, in an infinite variety of ways: live the ideals, practice patience, longsuffering, kindness and love. The ideal alone is not enough.

"As you express or manifest in your dealings with others, so you deal with your Maker. Then choose you peace, harmony, longsuffering, brotherly love, kindness and patience. These, as it were, take hold of the hand of the Living God, as manifest in Him

who walked in the earth. When manifesting hate, jealousy, contention ... one walks in the very valley of the shadow of death, as it is so called."

#1825-1

Adler stated this from a purely ethical or moral viewpoint - all the more remarkable in that it is stated by a man of science: "Only the law of social interest, well practiced, can free the latent powers of a human being and help him to overcome the ego-centric aim *out of which all neurosis is born*"

### **The Inferiority Complex and Will to Power**

By these two phrases Adler is known to most people, especially to laymen. Let us examine their meanings as explained by Dr. Adler; for any tabbing or ticketing of ideas into neat pigeon holes or catch phrases can be highly misleading. The inferiority complex has come to mean almost an epithet; and the idea of being dominated by a "will to power" is especially repulsive to Association members. What did Adler mean by these?

An inferiority *feeling* in a child was, in Adler's mind, never a failing or defect - nor in any way comparable to a neurosis or complex. The child is really helpless. His physical and mental dependencies are facts of nature; not attempts upon the child's part to evade responsibility. Only if the child uses this fact of his helplessness as an alibi to prevent himself from making contributions *within his power*, does the inferiority feeling become a "complex" which prevents the child's normal development. He applied the same reasoning to adults, in helping them solve their problems. Here again we have the influence of the goal, or ideal. Is it to contribute, in outward actions; or to withdraw from responsibility for one's brother?

Let us explain the superiority

complex and the "will to power", by quoting from a leaflet published by the Individual Psychology Foundation.

". . . the impetus of life is an unconscious sense of inferiority which has two courses open for its compensation: (1) a useful and worth while one, or (2) a useless one, producing neurosis, psychosis, insanity. The superiority complex is ... an over-compensation for a too great feeling of inferiority, and must be treated as such or there will be no cure effected."

Adler has often been heard to explain this impetus of life - the so called will to power - from the lecture platform and in round table discussions. He believed it was the inborn urge, yearning, inner desire and need to make the most of oneself; to make one's own special talents and abilities count for something. For what? Well, that would depend upon the person's goal in life.

On the constructive side, Adler links the impetus of life with the feeling of security derived from cooperation with others, from contributing and being a part of the good forces in one's community. On the destructive side, the goal is egocentric and anti-social; and the will to power could produce major and minor Hitlers in various aspects of human relationships!

Thus the term, "will to power," as usually understood, is in direct contradiction to the broad concept Adler enunciated. He called the over-striving for power *the most prominent evil of our civilisation!* On page 26 of *Times of Crisis*<sup>2</sup> we find this same evil described:

"Man finds himself endowed with body, mind and soul. Each phase of his consciousness is ever seeking to satisfy or gratify the longings of those three portions of his nature. Hence . . . we find three desired purposes, or three natural laws pertaining to his material existence.

<sup>2</sup> A.R.E. Press

These are: the survival of his species or the preservation of life; the desire to give expression to his own concept of life; and the desire to be heard or be noticed in his activity . . . Out of this individual threefold purpose or desire grows the condition or attitude known in various groups or countries as nationalism, patriotism, and the ability to rule - to force his concept upon others."

On page 76 of *Understanding Human Nature*, Adler says: "The striving for power and dominance may become so exaggerated and intensified that it must be called pathological . . . Where we are dealing with a pathological power drive, we find individuals who seek to secure their position in life with extraordinary efforts, with greater haste and impatience, with more violent impulses, and without consideration for anyone else."

But most of us, as normal or average people, are less interested in explanations of neurosis and psychosis than in understanding ourselves and in making ourselves a constructive force, day by day. Where is the point of balance between inferiority and superiority feelings - the happy medium, Horace's Golden Mean? This writer once asked Dr. Adler. "Where do you strike a balance? You mustn't feel inferior, you mustn't feel superior. Then where are you?"

His eyes twinkled. "Just there," he said, "You are no more important than the next person - but, on the other hand, neither are you less important?"

Thus we come to that great law of balance, or harmony, taught in the Edgar Cayce readings - although we have come by the route of inspired ethics instead of the Christ example. Early in life, Adler became a Christian of the Protestant faith. The influence of the Christian ideal can be seen in his precepts and in the fact that he

developed them comparatively early in his career. The development of this ideal caused him to break off his collaboration with the Freudian school, to which he was invited by Dr. Freud, as one - well established by reputation and with much to give to the new and controversial psycho-analytic school.

### **Adler's Dream Theories**

According to *Individual Psychology*, the dream serves a purpose. "The dream is extraordinarily well suited to intensify an emotion or to produce the verve which is necessary to the solution of a particular situation . . . The dream is like a column of smoke which shows that a fire is burning somewhere." (*Understanding Human Nature*, page 116.) Naturally, some dreams are caused by physical disturbances such as indigestion, etc.; but in dreams the self or soul is trying out this or that solution to his problems in attaining his goal. Dreams would thus be the self's way of spurring himself on toward the goal, or of warning him off the obstacles to it.

The Edgar Cayce readings take a much broader view of the function of dreams, because the concept of the body-mind-soul is much bigger.

"Now, as we have that condition . . . this ability of sleep and sense or a sixth sense; just how may this knowledge be used to advantage, so that an individual may develop towards that which it would attain? How it may be used, then, depends upon what is the ideal of that individual. For, as has been so well pointed out in the Holy Writ, if the ideal of the individual is lost, then the ability or faculty for an individual to contact the spiritual forces is gradually lost. Or barriers are built that prevent the sensing of the individual's nearness to a spiritual development. For one nearer the spiritual realm, visions, dreams and the like are more often retained by the

individual; as is seen, self-preservation is seen to be a first law. Self rarely desires to condemn self, save when selves are warring, one with another; as with the elements within a body when there has been eating of food which produces what is termed a nightmare ..."  
#364-Se-5

There is much more here than may be found in dream theories of any school of psychology, unless one excepts Jung's Collective Unconscious theory. Adler postulated no larger self, no Mental or Super-conscious self with its higher goal. Yet for those whose sights are lifted only as high as this life, the Adlerian concept of wholeness and balance; of unity in all phases of the soul activities - including dreams - of striving towards good for one's fellow man - are very worth while concepts. Perhaps these are the missing steps for many who find it difficult to reconcile "practical" selfishness with Christ-like virtues. The readings say: "Scientific or religious convictions are one. The first lesson for six months should be one, one, one! Oneness of God - oneness of man's relationships - oneness of force - oneness of purpose- oneness in every effort! Oneness, oneness, oneness!"  
#8337-MS-8

"For you are a corpuscle in the body of God. Thus you are a co-creator with Him, in what you think, in what you do . . . No soul may come in contact with the entity without being changed in body, in mind or in purpose. And purpose, of course, is of the soul."  
#2794-L-1

### **Other Parallels**

Just as Edgar Cayce's ideal was to be of the greatest help to the greatest number of people, so was Alfred Adler's. Nothing else would account for the patience with which he listened to the elevator boy's questions, or the one who stayed after the lecture, hoping to have a

question answered; or the help for people who walked into his hotel with emotional problems - and no money.

This ideal would account for Adler's desertion of learned scientific language in favour of simple understandable English. He learned English late in life, when he was nearly 60, and never felt completely at home in the language. This did not prevent him, however, from being a very successful lecturer. Some kind of empathy or spiritual osmosis seemed to establish itself immediately between Adler and his audience. It has been said that Edgar Cayce could perform the same miracle with his audiences. Writing bored Adler and was difficult for him. As the Bottome biography puts it, "perhaps because he disliked and distrusted precise definitions or 'prescriptions,' as he called them." He was careless about keeping notes on the records of his lectures and clinical successes; and one often suspects that translations of his German works are not always as fortunate as might be. Jung and Freud, on the other hand, have been adequately presented to the public and voluminously translated.

### **Other Contributions of Individual Psychology**

To be fair, one should mention - even if only in passing - some other Adlerian theories which have stood the test of time and sunk namelessly into the body of psychiatric practice. One is the family - constellation theory, upon which much of modern child guidance is based. This theory means that the individual child's position in the family group is an influential factor in his development. The oldest child may develop according to one pattern; the second child follow another; and the youngest still another. Thus each child has a special and competitive "environment" of his own. This principle

shattered much of the heredity-of- traits theory - certainly some of its excess importance.

Some know Adler's work for his enunciation of the "masculine protest" theory. This is the theory of equality-of-differences between the sexes; the inferiority or superiority feeling which prevents full partnership and harmony. Adler first among psychiatrists brought this matter out into the open, showing that "neither sex should assume a higher value than the other. But certainly, if nature has a favourite, it is the female, since she grants to the mother the closest form of cooperation." (Page 156, Bottome biography)

We must remember that even in our own lifetime, women have been considered inferior beings to men. Now we hear very little about it; and most psychiatrists accept the premise of this equality-of-differences between the sexes. The Edgar Cayce readings state that the soul chooses one sex or the other for manifestation according to the necessity for learning certain lessons.

Others know Dr. Adler only vaguely because he disagreed with Freud's sex theories. This disagreement, they suppose, placed Adler in the extreme and opposite position. In the Bottome biography, it is recorded that a reporter once asked him, "Dr. Adler, do you mind if I ask you a rather peculiar question? Are you specially fond of sex?" He replied promptly and with the respect due from one serious thinker to another. "In my psychology, we do not pick out parts. We look on a human being as a whole. Since sex is an instinct belonging to the life of man and natural to it, we accept it as such - but perhaps I should not call it my *favourite* instinct!" Here is an attitude which neither over-values nor under-values the sex drive. It appears to be in harmony with the readings of Edgar Cayce, as far as it

goes.

### Conclusions

As Miss Bottome points out, Adler lost the support of psychiatrists and the bulk of the medical profession when he insisted, also, that a truth is not a truth unless it is capable of being explained to every human being, and is true for all time. He believed that social interest - love of man for his brother man; is "a creative force, having the full stream of life behind it; whereas hate is direct negation of life itself, a turning back into the complete isolation of death" One is reminded here of reading #1825-L, quoted earlier, that when manifesting hate, jealousy, contention, one walks in the very valley of the shadow of death.

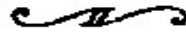
When Alfred Adler was challenged, as he so often was, by his fellow scientists for "letting down science" by his complete naturalness and the ease with which he could be understood by lay audiences, he would say "I have taken forty years to make my psychology simple. I might make it still more simple. I could say, 'All neurosis is vanity' - but this also would not be understood." (Page 258, biography)

Thus we come, full-cycle, to the explanation in the readings that all illness is sin; all sin is selfishness or as Adler put it, "vanity." . "We find that disturbing conditions aggravating the body at times will not yield to treatment until there is more peace or less consternation within self! All illness comes from sin! This everyone must take, whether he likes it or not - it comes from sin ... whether it be of body, of mind or of soul." #3174-1.

"What is the worst fault of each soul? Self - self! And what is the meaning of self? That the hurts, the hindrances are hurts to the self-consciousness. And what do these create? Disturbing forces; and these bring about confusions and faults of

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every nature. For the only sin of man is selfishness." #987-MS-1.



**NOTE:** This has is a REPRINT of a former monthly publication of the Association for Research and Enlightenment, Inc.