Influence of Alfred Adler on Psychoanalysis*

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Mr. Chairman, Dr. Adler, Ladies and Gentlemen:

We came here today to pay tribute to the memory of Alfred Adler. Nearly half a century has elapsed since he made his first contributions to Psychoanalysis. For ten years, from 1901 to 1911, he supported and augmented the fundamental new discoveries of Freud. Later he branched out and became fully independent—in many ways erecting a system of psychodynamics contrasting to Freud's. The break with Freud had a double influence. Adler's contributions were not accorded the place they deserved until much later. On the other hand, some of the one-sidedness of the concepts of Adler are probably due to the rejection he encountered by the main body of Psychoanalysis, forcing him to overemphasize mechanisms which were either overlooked or minimized by them.

I very much appreciate being asked to discuss the influence of Adler on Psychoanalysis because my qualifications to do so are minimal. I am not an Individual Psychologist, except in the sense that I try to understand the individual in man, nor a Psychoanalyst except in the sense that I like to analyze people and their ideas. Because I did not know Adler personally, I can only judge him by his work, and I am impressed by the fact that he is so often with us in spirit, and that his ideas which were considered daring and unacceptable at first are accepted and commonplace today.

Adler started his researches on a constitutional level. He perceived the person handicapped by a physical defect as compensating for it physically, and as he especially emphasized it, mentally also. This psychic compensation when overdone (overcompensation) became the basis of Adlerian psychology. Adler maintained that this overcompensation is—so to say—an exaggerated self-preservation in a demanding social environment, and that the will to power is the main motive

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of human existence. This dynamic force was originally firmly anchored in a constitutional concept, but this was later lost when Adler assumed that an inferior organ was not necessary for compensation because inferiority is present as a universal feeling in every child. The child, being helpless, tries to overcome this state with his will to power. This is a generalization which as a causative factor for overcompensation is overdrawn, as, similarly, the Oedipus Complex was. However, his finding that the will to power has a goal which is a social one based on attainment and depending on the culture in which the individual lives had far-reaching import.

The analysis of the strivings and aims of a person, realistic or fancied, are a part of any well conducted analysis today. Here we see a marked difference between Psychoanalysis and Individual Psychology. Freud's psychology was based on the instincts or urges, and Adler's on goals. In his early phase, Freud was interested in the energy source of instinct—the libido; Adler was interested in the goal toward which the person was directing himself, and did not pay too much attention to the instincts which were driving him. Later in analytic literature the power drive of Adler became aggression—that which Freud first interpreted as an instinctive force (life and death instincts) —and today it is a goal-directed ego force. The ego analysis of today has become more preoccupied with aggression, more from an ego regulative than from an instinctual id point of view.

We have mentioned that the goal of Adler is a social one. He was one of the first to emphasize the importance of culture. Culture is not seen by him as a sublimated product of libidinal drives, but as a normal method to attain or retard power. Each of these points of view probably does not do justice to culture as a whole. Nevertheless, Adler emphasized the social aspects and communal aims. This is very important to the culturalist schools of Psychoanalysis of Horney and Sullivan. Adler was also first to point out the distortions in the goals of individuals. If the individual is thwarted in his goal to attain power, he develops a neurotic aim which is unrealistic, but is nevertheless persisted upon. The idealized image of Horney and the inadequate self-system of Sullivan are both based on Adler's concepts. These concepts are, of course, broadened and not seen alone in the light of power.

In addition to constitutional factors, this distortion of goals is based on early parental influences such as lack of understanding, rejection, and harsh treatment. Adler minimized the influence of the infantile sexual trauma, but emphasized the importance of the total early en-

vironmental attitudes toward the child. He rejected the Oedipal situation and castration theories as the basis of neurotic conflict. To him, the Oedipus Complex appeared more as a power situation—the child wanting victory over the restraining parent. It is not seen as a sexual conflict. Most likely, both Freud's and Adler's concepts are overstating the facts. Many of the differences between Freud and Adler can be understood if we realize that Freudian dynamics were founded on a study of adults, pre-eminently male adults, and on the observations of severe neurotics or, as we now see in retrospect, on schizophrenics. Adler's observations were based to a large extent on the behavior aberations in children. This perhaps explains the great stress laid by Freud on the unconscious and by Adler on the conscious; by Freud on the analysis of circumscribed sexual traumata and by Adler on the general attitude of the environment; by Freud on the technique of treatment, his analysis of the past as a form of applied human archaeology; and by Adler on re-education of the present situation for further social adaptation. Today these seemingly divergent approaches are merging and are applied elastically to a varying degree in individual patients. Adler was the father of child psychiatry and today his ego-supporting methods are used in children and increasingly in adults.

The main break between Freud and Adler was the rejection by Adler of the libido theory and the sexual developmental scheme of Freud. Today the libido theory is more and more under attack. Horney, Sullivan, Rado, and others have followed Adler's attitude toward it with important modifications. However, Jung and, to some extent, Alexander tried to fuse the Freudian and Adlerian views. This, however, is not the place to take a stand pro or con on the libido theory which has such an important place in analytic dynamics. It has a sound core emphasizing the biological substratum of the organismic responses. The biological anchorage of many of the psychodynamic phenomena is more and more neglected by the pure culturalists. On the other hand, some of the strict interpreters of the libido theory indulge in esoteric constructions, and especially if applied to social forces which trigger off the organismic responses. Here Adler's views contributed two important developments to Psychoanalysis.

The first was the cultural element in some of the neurotic strivings of women. In the Western culture women feel inferior to men in a social sense and want to overcome this inferiority. This is the well known masculine protest of Adler, and the penis envy of Freud. Here

again Adler pointed out the great impact of social forces of mores on neurotic behavior. Even though cultural influences are of great importance in connection with this problem, it has to be emphasized that there are biological differences which cannot be understood based on cultural patterns alone. Even more important was Adler's findings that sex is not the cause of the neurosis, but is secondary. It is a special aspect of "egoistic strivings." The subordination of sex to the will of power is very questionable, even though it can be used at times for such purposes. It is more important to point out that persons with sexual disturbances display disturbed interpersonal relationships before the sexual disturbance appears. They are usually insecure individuals who hesitate before any new adaptation, who remain with any form of performance pattern already acquired. These tendencies combined with the presence of a great deal of social anxiety make them avoid intimate contact with others, and this in turn fosters their tendency to live in infantile sexual fantasies. The anticipatory fear of sexual failure is preceded by failure in other adaptations.

We have to mention here Adler's views on the neuroses, considering them as a flight into sickness. He treats the secondary gain in this respect as a primary one. The person escapes into sickness in order to be able to manipulate the environment, by seeking attention, thus avoiding responsibility, and by not making decisions. It is obvious that these mechanisms play a dynamic role in certain neuroses, and especially in those where face-saving devices are necessary. I am not quite sure if this mechanism is conceived by Adler as a conscious or unconscious one. He has the tendency to make the person responsible for his actions and this implies a conscious process. A somewhat similar attitude is now taken by Mowrer who considers the neuroses a product of the repressed super-ego and not that of the repressed id. Here Adler applies a moral force to re-educate the person to accept the social attitude versus his egoism. Again this contrasts to the more unconscious deterministic view of Freudian analysis. One of the important things in this connection is Adler's idea that the conflict is not as important for the genesis of the neurosis as the "handling" of it. It is here that Adler laid the foundation of what is called today the play of the ego defense forces, and probably with some pretense, "character analysis."

I have tried to show in this short review the many ways in which Adler influenced Psychoanalysis. He is again with us in the front parlor even though he has re-entered at the back door and not through the ornate front portal.

We have no system today which would encompass all the complicated mechanisms of the human psyche. We still know very little about it. In our floundering it is tempting to explain everything on one or two principles. In order to put a point over we sometimes overplay the importance of some dynamic forces. Here the study of contrasting views is healthy. In the development of Psychoanalysis this contrasting swaying back and forth is most illuminating: What should be stressed? The ego or the id, the conscious or the unconscious, sex or self-preservation, instincts or goals, past or present conflict, organismic or social forces, transference or re-education?

All this is not integrated yet into a comprehensible logical whole. In many ways Adler was and is the counterpoint to the points Freud made. We may disagree with many of his views, but we cannot fail to pay tribute to an eminently gifted, courageous, and above all, independent thinker and clinician.