# Contributions of Individual Psychology To Social Work[1]

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"So long as one thinks of welfare as the facile benevolence of friends and passers-by, so long as it is a tool of authoritarian government, whether industrial or political, it will not stir much opposition," states Gordon Hamilton (9), one of the great theorists of social work. We would like to add that this kind of welfare and social work does not need any special theoretic foundation as such. "But in so far as it is the expression of free men creating the conditions of their own well being, its slow progress will be attended by plenty of dust and heat." It is in that heat and in the activity and struggle that raises the dust that the basic theory of a new social work must be found. Edward C. Lindeman, who has contributed so much to this new philosophy, stated in 1934 (11) that the "goal of rehabilitating unadjusted individuals cannot become the unifying principle for social work." That unifying force, he believes, should be "an even larger unity in society as a whole," whereby "social work would become the instrument of social justice on its lowest level and of social change on its highest."

Gradually the negative attitudes of blame, criticism, and threat toward fellowmen in trouble have been replaced by a more positive and constructive concern with the conditions under which these individuals got into difficulty. Social work has progressed from an exclusive interest in external problems toward the inclusion of personality difficulties. In today's society this problem is becoming more and more complex; more and more individuals have difficulty in finding a per-

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sonally satisfying and socially acceptable pattern of living. Economic hardship, poverty, unemployment, sickness, social status and prestige, unhappiness in love, friendship and sex, lack of secure provision against want and disaster, tension and anxiety, all these piles of unsolved problems are dumped into the lap of society.

We sought a tool and a method which would help us understand and cure not the symptoms but the causes of the trouble; we found the role of emotion in behavior and its problems to be of the first order in social work.

In this search for more knowledge about what makes the human being act as he does, why one person in stress succumbs, another takes it in his stride, while a third one is stimulated by difficulties to even greater efforts, dynamic psychology was found to be of great help. Especially here in the United States the profession of social work rushed to the psychological foundation for a new philosophy of social work and tried to apply new concepts in theory and practice to these services accordingly. Doing so it sometimes went far overboard, forgetting then the "social" in its services. Social workers were, perhaps, easily misled by psychological concepts when they tried to interpret difficulties with which they had to deal, emerging solely from unsolved conflicts in the sphere of individual sex life. Not every social difficulty can be explained by an unresolved "Oedipus Complex" or by "penis envy." A society, seen as a hostile force to which egocentric "drives" have to submit either by repression or by sublimation, cannot provide the right background for social services unless they are offered as the "facile benevolence of friends and passers-by" or "as a tool of authoritarian government."

Another school of thought indicated that social services were to be offered only if and when the client became emotionally ready to ask for it.

When I was studying at the New York School of Social Work, a funny story was told among the students to point up the difference between the Freudian approach of the New York School of Social Work and the Rank'sche approach of the Philadelphia School of Social Work:

A client comes to the office of the Freud-oriented social worker, sits down comfortably and starts talking. "I really came to ask you for some money for my rent this month. I lost my job, the factory closed down because of business. But if you want to talk about sex before you give me the money, that's all right with me."

The Rank'sche social worker is walking along the shores of a lake. He sees a man in a rowboat; the man falls into the water and goes under, apparently unable to swim. The drowning man comes up, goes down, comes up, goes down again. The social worker, who is an excellent swimmer, is terribly excited, but what can he do? At long last the man gets his mouth above the water and shouts "Help!" "Thank God!" exclaims the social worker, jumps into the water and saves the unfortunate fellow. He could not have done so without the "client asking him directly for help."

I do not pretend that a similar joke could not be told at the expense of the Adlerian approach to social work, but such a joke would have to ridicule community feeling, helpfulness, mutual cooperation and their social realization. The approach of the Individual-Psychologist is not the approach of the do-gooder; it seeks to rehabilitate the disoriented member of society so that he once more becomes an asset and contributor to the community. Its approach is client-centered and is focused on human relations. It tries to adjust or readjust the client to a normal life in society, so that he is able to lead a personally satisfying and socially constructive life.

Joseph P. Anderson (5) quoted Raymond Fosdick as follows:

"What has broken down is not so much an intricate economic mechanism as it is man's confidence in himself and in his fellowmen." And he adds that our most fundamental need today is a deep conviction of the worth and dignity and creative capacity of human beings and a confidence in man's ability to solve his problems cooperatively with his fellowmen. And Anderson adds that that society is the best which gives greatest practical recognition to the dignity of individual man and which affords greatest opportunity for the development of the higher potentialities of all men.

Is such a society possible for all its members? Can the instincts and drives of the human animal, his egoistic interests, be socially directed to serve the interests of all?

"Social feeling is not inborn but it is an innate potentiality which must be conscientiously developed," answers Alfred Adler (3). Social interest is not the will to perform certain prescribed good deeds; it is a normal attitude toward the community, an extension of self. Every stage of individual development, the road to self-improvement, moves toward the increase of these cooperative and social abilities.

We need social interest, it is the air we breathe; without it man would be the weakest and most vulnerable of all nature's creatures.

The "iron laws of human co-living" make it impossible for any individual to achieve security or happiness, acceptance, prestige or significance if his actions do not contribute to the well-being of the other members of his society. The more his acts benefit his fellowmen, the greater their approval, their admiration, their love—and on these his self-approval, his importance, his prestige, his own well-being and happiness are based. We must live by this law.

A child, by the very fact that he is small and helpless, feels inferior. This sense of inferiority makes him strive for prestige and power, and may force him to seek superiority by dominating others.

Adler saw the inferiority feeling in every human being. We can hinder the tendency to strive for power by promoting and developing the innate potentiality of social emotion. Cooperativeness cannot be taught by moral preaching, it can only be achieved by cooperative living. We learn what we live, we learn by doing, says Kilpatrick (10). We gain insight by practicing social cooperation, by contributing to the welfare of the community; we win the sense of belonging, co-operation, prestige, admiration, and love, and we found our "super-ego" on these feelings. Society in itself is not hostile to the individual; it can be a community of cooperative forces ready to support one another. It is not "social anxiety," as Freud (8) calls it that forms the superego; it is not repression, suppression or sublimation.

> Individual Psychology demands neither the repressing of justified nor unjustified desires. But it teaches that unjustified desires move contrary to social feeling and that if an individual's social interest is increased, his unsocial desires will not be repressed but eliminated. (Alfred Adler (3) )

Individual development and social progress are both functions of interaction between the individual and society. They depend on the individual's inherited personal endowments, on the structure of the society which passes on to him the wisdom of the race; they depend on personal-environmental interaction and on interpersonal relations. Harmonious life must be based on a successful relationship to society, on work and on love, all three closely interwoven and "all linked together through the first one." (6) Its motivation are not drives or instincts but logical requirements of community living.

> The psychic life of man is determined by his goal. (Alfred Adler (4) )

> The aim of the mental life of man becomes its governing principle, its *causa finalis*, and sweeps every motion of the mind into the stream of mental happiness.—It matters not what may have been the source of its energies: not their origin but their end, their ultimate goal, constitutes their individual character. (Alfred Adler (1) )

Individual Psychology emphasizes the purposeful nature of human behavior. A man becomes neurotic in the pursuit of "fictitious goals." Neurosis is due chiefly to lack of knowledge of how to deal with the problems of life in a common sense way—that is in a fashion productive for others as well as oneself—combined with a desire to solve them in one's own private personal way. Neurosis is not so much a disease as a false interpretation of life, hence the large number of neurotics in changing social situations. "Neurosis and psychosis are the means of expression for discouraged human beings. And speaking of the causes of discouragement," Adler (4) says, "they are always erroneous. There are no entirely sufficient reasons for discouragement." To escape difficulties, man creates neurotic symptoms. A child confronted by situations which he has not learned to expect feels lost, insecure, upset, aggressive; to meet the situation, he may turn delinquent, he may grow neurotic. Frustration imposes the pattern of delinquency and neurosis. We must teach children how to overcome their difficulties, and these difficulties must be made to exercise a stimulating and strengthening effect. All human beings are so constituted that they desire to master obstacles.

> Consequently, education, in so far as one may define it, means not merely allowing favorable influences to work their will, but also means taking good heed as to what the creative strength of the child forms out of the material. Thus, in the event of faulty construction one is able to smooth the way to improvement. In every case this "way to improvement" lies in increasing the cooperative and social abilities. (Alfred Adler (3) )

Cooperation always depends on mutual give and take. This develops tolerance and understanding of the point of view of others without the abandonment of one's own opinion. Adjustment means cooperation, not submission; it means the relating of self to the only standard man has, his community.

Only the community can make a human being out of an organism. What kind of human being one becomes is not biologically predestined. To socialize is also to humanize by the giving and taking

of love, by acceptance, by belonging, by wanting to belong. There is no room in this concept for Freud's (8) statement that society "represents the authority, whose punishment we feared and for which we have undertaken so many repressions."

Individual Psychology does not demand a super-ethic: love your neighbor as you love yourself. The more your acts benefit your fellowmen, the greater their approval, their admiration, their love, and these constitute his self-approval, his importance, his prestige and his own well-being.

If cooperation is important, independence and individuality are no less so. We need not static adaptation to a given society, but creative adaptation to an ever-developing community, eternally striving toward the goal of human perfection.

Close conformity to society's established beliefs, supine adherence to conventional modes of thought and behavior, blind obedience and suggestibility by the herd add nothing to the already existing spiritual wealth of the community (6).

"Another important contribution of Adler's has been his awareness of cultural factors," says Clara Thompson in her book on Psychoanalysis. (13) "Adler saw the male as the symbol of power in Western society. Therefore, strivings for power could be called masculine. There is no physical inferiority in women. Culturally in an inferior position, the term feminine was used as a symbol of inferiority." In this striving for power to get from the below position to the above position, which Adler called the masculine protest, he saw a temporary cultural phenomenon, not a permanent physiologically determined hostility based on penis envy.

In his striving for power man uses various means; one of them is flight into illness. In this and many other ways people attempt to dominate by helplessness, and they often succeed in forcing others to submit to their illness or weakness.

It is constructive social work to deneuroticize and to humanize the individual by helping him to find his own well-being in the only relationship in which he really exists, his relationship to human society. He is led to the realization that he must draw his strength from the evolution of the community, which directs his own strivings and those of others toward the goal of social usefulness. Harmonious life must be founded on successful relationships to society, on work, and on love. It cannot be based only on successful sexual relations or its sublimations. No human being can exist without the other two.

The end ultimately realized by the community cannot be one man's ideas but must be rather a synthesis of the good and bad efforts of all its members. This requires tolerance toward others' opinions, and a strong interest in the progress of others. Our willingness to admit the value of our fellows arises from our confidence in our own; our helpfulness toward others springs from our recognition that our own progress is inseparably connected with theirs.

In modern practical social work, Individual Psychology emphasizes the close inter-relationship between personality and total environment, the influence of sociology, the importance of economic and emotional factors in human experience. We cannot improve one without improving the other. We must see the sick individual, but no less the sick society. Alfred Adler (4) states:

> . . . the soul arises from a hereditary substance which functions both physically and psychologically. Its development is entirely conditioned by social influences. On the one hand the demands of the organism must find fulfillment, and on the other the demands of human society must be satisfied. In this context does the soul develop, and by these conditions is its growth indicated.

If social work is to strive toward a society in which all members find security, freedom from want, and freedom of thought and decision, Individual Psychology can make its contribution to general philosophy and a detailed approach to individual social work disciplines. Individual Psychology offers psychological verification and ratification of a philosophy of social work which Kenneth L. M. Pray (12) describes as resting

> . . . upon a profound faith in human beings, in their inherent and inviolable right to choose and to achieve their own destiny, through social relations of their own making, within the essential framework of a stable and progressive society. It rests upon a deep appreciation of the validity and the value to society as a whole of these individual differences in human beings. It conceives of social unity and progress as the outcome of the integration, not the suppression or conquest, of these differences. Accordingly, it tests all social arrangements and institutions by their impact upon individual lives, by their capacity to utilize for the common good the unique potentialities of individual human beings, through relationships that enlist their active and productive participation. It is, in short, a genuinely and consistently democratic philosophy.

Lewis Way ends his book, *Adler's Place in Psychology* (14) as follows:

> His work lives because, to my mind, in this as in so many other ways it makes a beginning, not an end. His successful answer to some problems provides us with fresh question marks, and his overcoming of certain obstacles opens up new paths for others to tread. This, surely, is as he would have wished it, for he did not believe in limitation.

For the psychological foundation of social work's general philosophy and approach, Individual Psychology certainly offers plenty of answers; it supplies challenging "fresh question marks" opening up "new paths for others to tread." To mention only a few: the concept of a universal inferiority feeling, its compensations and overcompensations; the striving for power; the innate potentiality for social feeling; the necessity for promoting the individual's well-being in the community in all the three relationships of a harmonious life: society, work, and love; neurosis and delinquency as misinterpretations and means of expression for discouraged human beings with mistaken goals in life; cooperation as a mutual give and take in the interest of the receiver as well as the giver; the cultural factors in the female inferiority feeling; the masculine protest; the flight into sickness; purposefulness of behavior; society as a friendly and helpful factor in human life, constructive adjustment to it; creative community cooperation as promoting independence—and many, many others.

Individual Psychology contributes to case work and group work, to community organization, and to social action. Its theory has served well in child-guidance clinics, in vocational and marriage counselling. With its help we have come to better understand the importance of recreation and hobbies in the over-all welfare of the individual; it has taught us the dangers of authoritarianism and the importance of equality in therapy and education, of social feeling and social cooperation as factors in group therapy, the usefulness of Socratic antithesis in the treatment interview. It has given us new insight into the mentality of criminals and enabled us to understand shock reactions and accident proneness as expressions of the life style. The progress of children's institutions from custodial care to systematic education and treatment has found its best support and guide in Individual Psychology. Individual Psychology provides the foremost single technique in preventive social work, the most cogent argument for health insurance and universal social security.

In his foreword to Dreikurs' *Fundamentals of Adlerian Psychology* (7) Alfred Adler outlines Individual Psychology's chief contribution to the social work approach:

> Individual Psychology will draw a dividing line between those who use their knowledge for the purpose of establishing an ideal community, and those who do not. It will give its followers such keenness of vision that no corner of the human soul will be hidden from them, and it will ensure that this hard-earned capacity shall be placed in the service of human progress.

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