

ALFRED ADLER AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

An Address Delivered in Memory of Alfred Adler in Brussels,
June 12, 1938, by Jacques De Busscher before the
Belgian League of Mental Hygiene

The author of the following memorial address, Jacques F. De Busscher, M. D., was born and died in Ghent (1902-1966). His foremost activities were as chief of Neurology and Psychiatry at "La Biloque," the Public Hospital, Ghent, and as professeur ordinaire in Neurology, Psychiatry and Orthopedagogy at the Ghent State University; he was also in private practice as a psychoanalyst. Beyond these, he taught at the Law Faculty and the "Leon Cornil" School of Criminology, at the Universite Libre, Brussels; further, at the School of Criminology and Police Science of the Belgian Department of Justice. He was a vice-president of the Belgian League against Epilepsy and of the Union for the Study of Multiple Sclerosis and a consultant of the Belgian Department of Public Health and the Family. He was also a Fellow of the Belgian-American Educational Foundation.
(J.M.)

If I have agreed to say some words of tribute in memory of the great psychiatrist Alfred Adler, it is only because of the situation which has developed: that--since the year 1929--I have been the only one in Belgium, as it were, interested in psychoanalysis. The latter is well nigh not practiced, if I am not mistaken, by the most eminent representatives of Belgian psychiatry, among whom I am honored to find myself at this moment. Thus it could appear presumptuous for me to take the floor after them, were it not for the rather special orientation which places me (aside from any personal qualification, of course) in the vicinity of the field in which the illustrious deceased did his work.

Certainly, I do not pretend to be an Adlerian, having always classed myself among the orthodox Freudians. Of what importance, though, is a difference of "school"? To begin with, Alfred Adler himself began his psychiatric career on the occasion of Freud's memorable work on hysteria. When Adler was practicing as a doctor of medicine in Vienna, it was at the invitation of the founder of psychoanalysis that Adler joined the circle organized about 1900 by Freud. It was at the time of their collaboration that Adler published his monograph "The Aggression Drive in Life and in Neurosis" (1908) in which we already find the bases of his teaching: recognizing as fundamental instinct the will to overcome and the rapture of mastering a situation. The following year we find another essential concept: that of the feeling of inferiority resulting from an organic flaw (the feebleness or deformity of an organ, hereditary or acquired) along with the concept of compensatory reaction by the psyche. The nucleus of Adler's leading thought was basically drawn from Nietzsche's philosophy, with which Adler, it seems, was deeply imbued; its title was "The Will to Power." What, in essence, do men wish for? To be powerful. What troubles the majority of them? Weakness, inferiority.

(Editor's Note: In fact, Adler deplored Nietzsche's "The Will to Power" as characteristic of mental disorders. Emphasizing the struggle for superiority over general difficulties in the quest of competence and a sense of completeness, Adler condemned the struggle for superiority over people.)

The poorly gifted one, tormented by the desire for dominance, strives with a passion to better himself--for he cannot bear the

thought of inferiority which overwhelms him. As a result of this effort to attain revenge, or compensation, a psychic superstructure is able to correct (and even more than that, to over-compensate) the distressing congenital bodily inferiority. Thus, the stammering Demosthenes becomes a sweeping orator; the eye-blinking myopic one, a painter of genius; the paralytic becomes a Stilicho or a Torstenson (these two paralytic war leaders were known and dreaded for the lightning-like speed of their troop movements).

According to Adler, the infant yearns to become a man, the woman would prefer to change her sex; for of the three, it is the man who is the strongest. But inasmuch as every individual is not a "Man" in the true sense of the word, those who feel weak aspire to becoming more virile (maennlicher Protest).

1) In the case of success, this process of "psychic compensation" of organic inferiority can thus produce a genius of which mankind can be proud.

2) In the case of failure, the person develops neurotic (neuro-pathic) symptoms, allowing him to excuse his inability to attain the ideal of superiority, which he never ceases to cherish in secret. He asserts these symptoms to justify his withdrawal from the struggle for life; and being unable to create for himself a place in society, he often confines his horizon, unduly, to the family circle, becoming its tyrant with his caprices and recriminations. Piousness, suicide, mental alienation (all modes of evasion), or crime (rebellion) are other alternatives. Of all these, neurosis is the most frequent. According to Adler, the criminal ought not to be punished, but rather to be treated thoroughly by psychotherapy. One can easily see the interest legal medicine could find in these Adlerian concepts.

3) But it is in the case of half-success, alas, that the consequences may become the most tragic. At certain critical turnings of history, the psychology of the masses is such that they may stand gaping at the monstrous pretenses of a lone individual ascribing to himself infallibility, nay, god-likeness. Then there arises one of those dangerous abnormals who lets human society make good, in unspeakable carnage, for the cruel and prolonged humiliation which he experienced earlier and for which he holds society as a whole responsible. Caligula may serve as a good example. One such being can put the entirety of civilization in peril. Who can afford to be uninterested in such problems!

All physicians have always known that the hysteric considers himself important beyond measure. And if they are honest, the doctors then try--regardless of the therapeutic means they may prefer--to minimize the importance of this so-called illness. They also recognize the (secondary) "gain of illness": the neuropath, dominating his environment, obligates it to caring, to showing pity, to giving attention, to making sacrifices again and again, thus giving himself much more importance than he could ever have had, had he stayed well.

But it was Adler alone who was able to surround that commonplace notion (of the neuropath's behavior) with powerfully significant concepts and, thus, to make it the basis for a remarkably fruitful therapy.

Freud, indeed, made great efforts to incorporate into his own teachings Adler's favorite idea; but at that moment he was not yet ready (as F. Wittels expressed it so well) to develop these points of Freudian doctrine which were, at a later day, to cover (and go beyond) this concept of Adler's.

It was, indeed, through fear of finding himself without a full answer to Adler's pressing questions that Freud built up, in haste, his theory of the ego instincts, which he had later to abandon as a useless bastion. Only much later did Freud succeed in providing an explanation for Pierre Janet's "sentiment d'incomplétude" (feeling of incompleteness) corresponding to Adler's "inferiority feeling."

(Editor's Note: Again, for Adler it was not the "inferiority feeling," but the struggle to overcome difficulties that was the primary motivation.)

But as the Vienna master managed—at the price of painful concessions to his pride—to keep as his co-worker a man with the talent of Adler, the latter on his part endured—with some impatience—the authority, often quite rude, of Freud. Then, in the spring of 1911, having been invited by the "Wednesday Group" (i.e. Freud's circle) to expound in greater detail his theories ("a critique of Freud's sexual theory of the psychic life"), Adler was made the target of a concerted attack by all the orthodox Freudians. This attack intended to and succeeded in evicting him and a number of his fellow members. Once the tie was broken, Adler could now develop his cherished idea. As the (pan)sexuality of Freud was the bête noire of virtually all psychiatrists, it was self-evident that all of Freud's disciples who were ready to diminish the importance of the sexual instinct in favor of another one, less scabrous, were to be received, comparatively speaking, with open arms.

Anyone who has ever lived in the United States of America knows to what extent the term "Inferiority Complex" has become a household word there, though not very many know its Adlerian origin. The great popularity which the public, physicians and laymen have given to the Adlerian theories in the Anglo-Saxon countries can be traced back, we think, chiefly to three main motifs:

1) Abandoning the tainting "pansexualism";

2) Renouncing Freud's extremely abstruse concept of the Unconscious. Adler speaks sparingly of the Unconscious. (Did not Adler go almost so far as to contend that the term "Unconscious" ought to be replaced by "Un-understood"—incompris, although Adler attributes great value to dreams, products of the Unconscious par excellence);

3) Adler's exceptional gift of exposition permitted him to explain, in language understood by all, the entirety of his theories within a few lectures, thus presenting his listeners with a coherent system capable of integrating the majority of observed facts in contemporary normal and pathological psychology. This great scholar Adler always scorned the semblance of profundity at the sacrifice of clarity. Forty years of his life he spent in the effort to put himself at the service of all—with the exception, perhaps, of those who measure the "scientific" character of concepts by the number of Latin and Greek terms employed, or by their closeness to "fashion-

able" (a la mode) subjects, with the great support of diagrams and a large massacre of laboratory animals. That is why those near to him, patients and students, loved him so much.

We find fragments of his teaching in the following of his works: Ueber den nervoesen Character (1912) and Praxis und Theorie der Individualpsychologie (1920). Among his numerous subsequent publications, Der Sinn des Lebens (Social Interest, a Challenge to Mankind, London: Faber & Faber, 1938) reflects with particular clarity his system of psychology. He does not study mankind so much as a mass, but rather as separate individuals in relation to the mass.

It is in the domain of pedagogy that Adler gathered his best laurels. Incomparable educator, he studied with admirable solicitude the character of each individual child and tried to adapt him, as it were, to the surrounding society by discovering the child's particular inferiority complex, teaching him how to compensate for it, and seeing that the child did this compensating at a normal pace. All those who saw Adler at work with "abnormal" children recognized and admired the masterful manner with which he made a diagnosis, indicating also a line of practical procedure, which is not let us admit it--the strong side of the psychoanalysts! Thus he had the right to name his system Individual Psychology; and it is well warranted that a distinguished speaker tonight spoke about "Individual Psychology and Pedagogy."

In 1927, Columbia University in New York City invited him to join its faculty. The University of Springfield, Illinois, made him Honorary Doctor, while the city of Detroit, Michigan, built a clinic to treat patients according to his methods.

Having returned for a while to Vienna and having devoted himself to extending his work there, he emigrated again to the United States (pre-sensing, ever since 1932, the threat that hung over the former capital of the Holy Empire). There he fulfilled the duties of professor at the Long Island Medical College.

In April 1937, we had the pleasure of listening to his remarkable lectures in Brussels. They were part of the formidable cycle of fifty-six lectures he had undertaken and which, after a true "swan song" at Aberdeen, were to bring about the exhaustion of his generous heart. We recall, all of us, his sympathetic delivery, his natural gestures, all his attitude so gemuetlich--that quality until now (1938) so typical of Austria. The news of his unexpected death, on Friday, May 28, 1937--less than five weeks after we had listened to him in Brussels!--was a painful blow for those who take an interest in things of the spirit. Regardless of the school to which anyone of us may belong, Alfred Adler was incontestably one of the great figures of contemporary psychiatry. As Professor G. Vermeylen, president of the Belgian Society of Mental Medicine, so well said when he thanked Adler for the beautiful lecture he had just then delivered: "He, in psychiatry, occupied one of the summits of human thinking."

If there is one unselfish thought that would comfort us in his premature passing, it is this: that the grace was accorded to this great Austrian thinker that he did not have to be present, like his elder, Freud, at the erasing of the remainder of his country from the map of Europe.

Yes, of what moment is the theoretical system to which anyone of us has attached himself, be it by education, be it by personal preference--so long as one consecrates the best of one's self to psychotherapy! In our humble opinion, there exists between Adler and Freud no irreconcilable antagonism. Is it not the same word which designates sexual power and power pure and simple? For Adler, the Wille zur Macht (the will to power) is a primordial phenomenon; and its castration--like any other sexual manifestation--is nothing but a special application, if I may say so. Freud himself derives from the castration complex the instinct of domination.

(Editor's Note: Once again, this is not true, for Adler--to repeat--emphasized the struggle for superiority over difficulties, but never domination over others.)

In the case of the little girl, her humiliation over being deprived of the virile emblem (Freud's "penis envy") reminds us very nearly of (Adler's) "maennlicher Protest"; and so on. Like Freud, Adler admits that a person's attitude toward life is decided within the first four years of existence--just those early years which traditional psychiatry has considered as non-existent, or almost so. Like Freud, Adler was little by little brought to extend his method of treating neuroses to the domains of pedagogy and legal medicine. Like Freud, Adler tried by means of only one drive, one universal complex, to explain all psychic manifestations and to resolve the numerous problems of civilization, of religion, of sociology, of philosophy--attaining, thus, a new concept of the world. The future, perhaps, will view their two vast psychological systems as complements of each other.

The mechanisms described by Adler correspond, incontestably, with realities. It is not rare that love is sacrificed to the yearning for "success." The wild forswearing of love by Alberich and the curse on the Rhine gold are forever a reality. Who has not known people who, of no necessity, are ready to march over the dead bodies of their nearest and dearest, turning their coats more than once to obtain the external signs of power they covet! It was for the best of reasons that Adler pointed up the "conquerer's attitude," the domineering posture which certain persons have in loving, that he saw in the very act of sexual union--for some--a form of domination. (But see Editor's Notes, above.)

Finally, those who accuse Freud of generalizing in an out-of-the-way manner and of seeing sexuality everywhere could raise the same objection to Adler: it is, indeed, curious that it is very often the good-looking women, the most desired ones, who suffer from the gravest neuroses while an overwhelming majority of plain-looking, bodily ill, miserable ones do not react with symptoms to their profound social inferiority.

The true difference is to be found--we believe--in that Adler and Freud worked, with equal success, at different levels of the human soul, as do the farmer and the miner with the soil. Instinctively, sympathy goes to the farmer--who works the ground familiar to all, in open air, with loving zeal, and raises crops of which everyone can value the importance. Does that mean that the latter, in plunging into black underground caverns whence he reappears stained with coal-dust, must be considered a man of bad taste from whom

all ought to turn away in horror? That is what a little child might do; but one teaches him soon that coal is a treasure both indispensable and precious, and that he who sacrifices his health to extract it from the earth's bowels merits greatest respect. One does not value the farmer's work as opposed to that of the miner's. One says that the most fortunate country possesses both rich agriculture and rich coal mines.

Let us, today (1938), leave aside the problem of knowing whether sexual non-satisfaction is merely a "special case" of non-satisfaction. Let us admit that it was only the gigantic breach made by Freud in the bastions of non-comprehension which made possible the so fruitful career of Adler, but let us admit also that the latter did more than his old teacher in the pragmatic field, by bringing tangible and rapid benefits to the "average neurotic."

As I said in Riga three months ago, in a lecture at the Institut Français in that city: "As one studies the history of psychotherapy, one always sees the same process recurring. The head of a school arises, obtains astonishing results. All those who suffer from emotional ills become acquainted with him. His fame grows and soon transcends national boundaries. In keeping with the epoch to which he belongs, with the level of culture, with the prejudices and the preferences of those among whom he lives, he then erects an edifice of more or less complex theories in order to explain, to justify, somehow, the success he has obtained. And in measure with the percentage of successes, with the nature of the ailments responsive to his method, with the gratitude of the patients, with the manner in which his renown spreads--all this is a perpetual repetition!--we see a strong personality appear, affirming itself and revolutionizing the climate of opinion."

Alfred Adler had the honor of belonging to those great names marking an epoch in psychology. And without it being necessary for me to make any "declaration of faith" regarding his doctrine, I can hail in him respectfully a man of genius who possessed in the highest degree the art of approaching a psychological problem, of obtaining with extraordinary rapidity the total confidence of the ill person, of gauging him in some way by dint of his unequalled faculty of penetration, and of uncovering with an unheard-of mastery the "neuralgic spot" of the endopsychic conflict that tortures him.

It is just by particularly emphasizing this profoundly human--and non-dogmatic-- side of Adler's activities that, I believe, I am rendering him the most respectful and the most merited homage. Dogmatism, the construction of abstract theories, is the proper field of minds that are lucid but cold, that are far remote from the clinic, moving, as Bergson would have said, "in the domain of the immobile, of the non-continuum, of the inanimate." Alfred Adler, on the contrary, was infinitely nearer to living reality. He was possessed of vitality. And of that most remarkable manifestation of life, the human psyche, Alfred Adler had a comprehension which many psychiatrists could have envied him.

(Translated by Dr. Joseph Meiers, New York City, N. Y., in collaboration with Doris Ruslink, M. A.)

EPILOGUE

by Joseph Meiers, M.D., Psychiatrist
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There may be those who would raise the question: What could be the purpose of publishing this translation of a 1938 memorial address to Alfred Adler given by a Belgian neuropsychiatrist? Dr. De Busscher was himself a figure of great renown in his country and beyond. As the translator of his homage to Adler (Dr. De Busscher had transmitted his paper to me some time before his untimely death) I feel honored by the request of the Individual Psychologist's editor to state briefly my reasons why this unusual "human document" should be made more widely known.

First, there is the fact--and a rather significant one, in my view--that the Belgian Mental Health League, one year after Adler's passing, convened a memorial meeting, with their leading members as speakers, in one of Brussels' great halls; a report on it appeared in the official Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles, October-November, 1938. This may not have been known even to a large number of Adlerians, especially the younger generation.

Second is the no less interesting fact, emphasized by De Busscher himself, that he as an orthodox Freudian undertook to honor Adler--as "one of those who, in psychiatry, occupied a summit of human thought"--in itself, certainly, a rare event in the history of Western psychotherapy of the last half-century.

Last--but not least--let me state (though it may seem obvious!) that, in reviving here a significant voice out of the far-away past, we do not identify ourselves altogether with his opinions, especially not with his several views on parts of Adler's teaching, particularly with Adler's so-called "nearness" to Nietzsche's "Will to Power," as alleged by Dr. De Busscher, and on other points. We cannot, alas, ask De Busscher for answers nor continue a clarifying discussion with him. Still, his contribution--as it stands--can become an object of fruitful investigation and debate for our generation...thirty years after Alfred Adler's death.

ADLER AND CREATIVE POWER

by Irvin Neufeld, M.D., F.I.C.S.
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After an unusually lively lecture, Dr. Adler invited a few doctors to a small Viennese café for a discussion and planning.

His lecture on the "problem child" had been sparkingly witty. His elaborations on creative power, courage, responsibility, the sense of humanity ("Menschlichkeitsgefühl" along with "Gemeinschaftsgefühl") and other topics live vividly among my recollections as unmistakable fore-runners of a "pediatric existentialism." The lecture was followed by a rather long period of questions and discussion.