

ADLERIAN PHILOSOPHY

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Since our philosophy is based on empirically gained psychological knowledge, we might speak of it as "Adlerian Empirical Philosophy" or "Adlerian Empirical Psycho-Philosophy."

Psychology has been born out of the need of speculative philosophy to study those human beings whom it has discussed for centuries without really observing their reactions or studying their actions. Now, fortified by several decades of experience with human suffering and striving, psychology must create its own empirical philosophy.

Empirical philosophy is a system of empirically acquired knowledge reduced to law, aiming at serving as a basis for a deeply satisfying way of living.

Adler was like a fountain of ideas, they welled out of his mind. But it was against his nature to function as his own Linné, i.e., to sit down and patiently collect, order, and group these ideas so as to construct a system. In consequence, if we want to present an Adlerian philosophy, we will have to construct it ourselves. When doing so, we shall have to use not only what Adler himself has actually said but also what is implicit in his teaching.

In the interest of Adlerian thought, we shall also have to point out how and why Adler has been misunderstood by psychologists of other schools.

THE STRIVING FOR SIGNIFICANCE

Those who call themselves "scientific psychologists" rather contemptuously class Adler's teachings among the theories that "ascribe all motivation to the operation of a single instinct or to a pair of instincts of an antagonistic nature." While some say Adler has only replaced the all important sex instinct of Freud, others like Shaffer (1) see in Adler a dualist, because he "stresses the ego instinct or urge to individual superiority,* counteracting it with a weaker social instinct."

*The expression "ego instinct" is probably a wrong interpretation of the Adlerian term "Ich-Ideal," the individual's concept of what his "I" should be and towards which he is striving. The term "urge to individual superiority" is probably a translation of "Ueberlegenheitsstreben," a term, however, which Adler soon replaced by "Geltungsstreben" or striving for significance, having found that the former term was practically always interpreted to mean "superiority over others." Adler has

In order to refute this criticism, we must, first of all, indicate the real place of Adler's striving for significance in our lives:

The striving for significance is not just "an instinct," not just one of the 14,046 human activities that, according to the studies of Bernard (2), have been termed instinctive by different authors; it is one of the three fundamental forms of the away-from-pain-and-towards-pleasure striving which is the basis of all human activity.

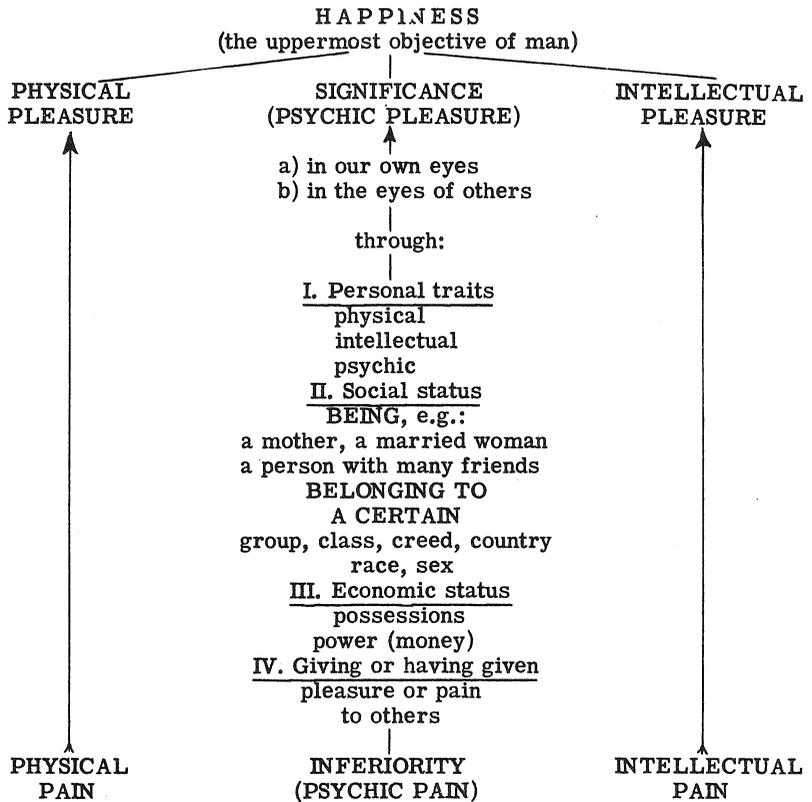
Here we once more get into a conflict with the "scientific psychologists." They dislike even the use of the words "pleasure" and "pain" because "they have been employed in many confused and unpsychological meanings." They speak in this connection of "pitfalls of introspective psychology and hedonistic philosophy." Others, when they hear the words "pleasure" and "pain," are reminded of Epicurus, and again others are reminded of Bentham (3). They are all apt to present the old objection that "voluntary submission to conditions of deprivation, sacrifice, pain and suffering" are contrary to the "pleasure-pain principle" (4). Again others will argue that, while pain has "a definite receptor or sense organ of its own," pleasure has none and therefore cannot be a sensation but only "attached to a sensation." They point out like Humphrey (5) that "the medieval ascetics, who flogged themselves 'for the glory of God' probably found a keen pleasure in their self-torture" and say that in such cases "pleasantness is fastened to the sensation of pain." They add that the opposite of "pleasure" is not "pain" but "dis-pleasure" and think that by introducing this new word they have clarified and not further obscured the issue.

All these objections to the pain-pleasure principle,* as well as the objections to Adler's inferiority-significance principle, can exist only because of a lack of understanding for the fundamental subdivision of the pain-pleasure principle into three parallel strivings, as represented by the following arrows:

gradually more and more departed from the original Nietzschean concept "will to power," which, of course, meant "power over others" and has recognized that the real objective of the individual was: to grow in significance. "Power" and "superiority over others," he saw, were only two of the innumerable forms of significance.

*This is a better name than "pleasure-pain principle," because we strive away from pain and towards pleasure. Only the Freudians can believe in a striving in the opposite direction: the striving towards self-destruction, that is just as contrary to human nature as nearly all their other ideas.

CHART I.



Any advance, upward on these arrows, is pleasure; any sinking downward on them is pain. Getting away from pain, no matter how little, is pleasure - any loss in pleasure is pain. In this way, any move of the individual is doubly - but not dualistically - motivated; by the repulsion of pain and the attraction of pleasure.

If we consider the pain-pleasure principle in this way, all seeming contradictions disappear:

Self-flogging "for the glory of God" has caused physical pain, but it also brought pleasure-through-significance through the feeling that one was psychically superior and lifting oneself closer to God by "mortifying the flesh."* Instead of saying that "pleasantness was fastened to

*There was also an admixture of physical pleasure, since mortification of the flesh was intermixed with liberties allowed this "flesh."

the sensation of pain" we can say more clearly: physical pain was the price for psychic pleasure.

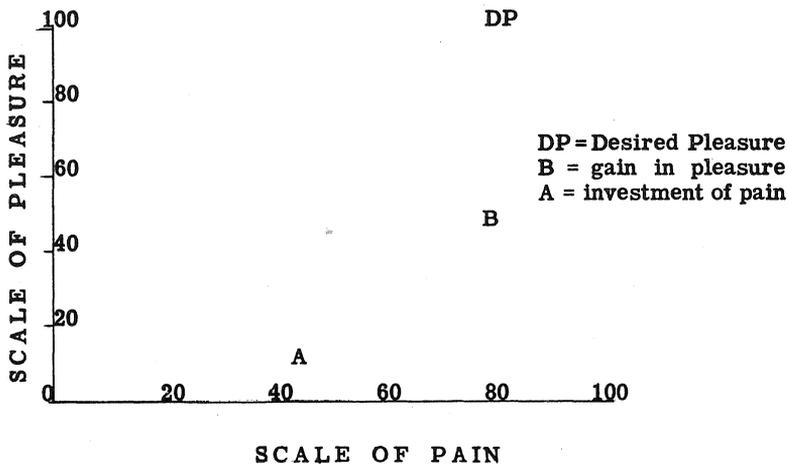
"Voluntary submission to conditions of deprivation, sacrifice, pain and suffering" no longer appears contrary to the pleasure-pain principle: people will submit to pain in order to attain a pleasure that seems to them worth the price-in-pain to be paid. Both the price-in-pain and the pleasure desired can be physical, psychic, or intellectual.

It is not necessary, either, that pain and pleasure belong to two different categories, they can belong to the same one. A man, for instance, may accept humiliation (psychic pain through being inferiorized) in his work life in order not to lose the pleasure-through-significance of providing well for his family.

People will also grab pleasures even though they know that these will be followed by pain: they will, for instance, spend all their earnings in drink (i.e., physical pleasure, accompanied by the psychic pleasure of freedom from the consciousness of their own inferiorities), even though they know that psychic pain (through inferiority) will follow when they get home without money for rent, food, etc.

The following chart will, perhaps, make this presentation still clearer:

CHART II.



If, according to what the individual feels (and thinks) $B > A$, i.e., that the gain in pleasure will be greater than the investment of pain, the individual will strive towards the desired pleasure (DP); if not, he will refrain from investing the pain to be paid for the pleasure.

Human beings are not as simply organized as experimental animals and the life-situations they find themselves in are not as simple as the one, for example, in which rats have to pass an electrically charged grate (pain) in order to get to the food they hunger for (pleasure).

It may be that, with all his thinking concentrated upon the pleasure he expects, a person will just go ahead trying to attain it, without evaluating the pain he will have to suffer; but, generally, the individual will strive towards his aim with a feeling that it is worth any pain that may come before or after the pleasure. People also frequently miscalculate the amount of pleasure and pain objectively to be expected and, not knowing themselves well psychologically, also under- or overevaluate the subjective value of both pleasure and pain for them.

If we thus recognize the place which Adler's inferiority-significance striving occupies in human life, we can see that it is the most important of the three fundamental strivings for civilized man.

The more complex human life becomes, the less dominating a part does the physical category play in it. The intellectual category is constantly growing in importance - we flee from intellectual pain (boredom, unsatisfactory, unintellectual amusements, etc.) and constantly seek intellectual pleasures - but Adler's inferiority-significance striving is THE source of most (not "all")* activity and of most happiness or unhappiness.

CO-FEELING

Adler showed that the nature of our striving for significance depends on the intensity of our co-feeling with the others. He did not "counteract" the striving for significance by a "weaker social instinct" ** as our critic pretends.

It is not so that co-feeling would necessarily be weaker in every one of us than the striving for significance. In many people the striving for significance is weaker than their co-feeling; in others, both factors are strong (these are the people who must strongly strive to do something for others), while in some both factors may be weak.

At any rate, our significance depends just as much on the intensity of our co-feeling as on the intensity of our striving.

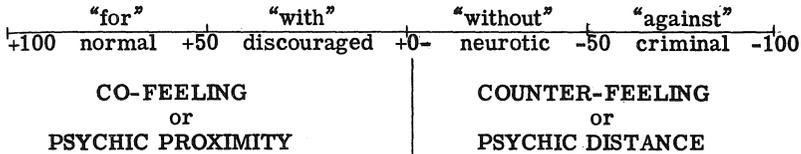
*Adler would have said, in his inimitably attractive way: "the source of NEARLY ALL activity."

**Adler's original word: "Gemeinschaftsgefuehl" must be either rendered by "feeling of community" or by the less heavy "co-feeling" which is similar in construction to the very well known word "co-operation." It has been a mistake to weaken the meaning of the original word by translating it as "social interest." It sounds too much like the interest an individual doing occasional social work might take in his wards. "Social instinct" never was used by Adlerians. As to Adler himself, I have never heard him use the word "instinct" nor do I remember having seen it in his writings.

Once more, a chart will probably further clarify our point:

CHART III

THE FOUR WAYS OF LIVING or THE SCALE OF SOCIALITY
(four basic attitudes of the individual towards the others)



The striving towards significance may be located at any point of this scale. It will be "for" - "with" - "without" or "against" the others, in accordance with the intensity of the individual's co-feeling or of its opposite: counter-feeling or psychic distance.

Our scale can be used to measure the "degree of sociality" (asociality or antisociality) of an individual's attitude towards others.

The greater the individual's co-feeling, the greater the sociality of his striving and the greater the happiness he will derive of it. Only a striving beneficial to others can result in happiness.

Co-feeling automatically makes the striving for significance positive,* happiness-bringing, to the others and (in consequence) to the individual. Counter-feelings make the striving negative to both the others and to the individual.

Many people almost exclusively strive in one or the other of the four ways, but even they will, on occasions, strive in a different way, generally one contiguous on our scale.

Normal individuals, when they get discouraged, will stop striving "for" and strive only "with" the others; neurotics will make occasional attempts at striving with the others, and criminals (we must consider this chart rolled into a cylindrical form, so that criminal borders also on normal) will occasionally do things "for" the others. Furthermore, the normal ones strive occasionally against the others, due to some cause that arouses counter-feelings in them.

In most human interrelations - marriage, friendship, etc. - there is a co-versus-counter polarity. Some traits of the husband attract the wife while others may repulse her more or less strongly, making the feeling of proximity alternate with feelings of distance. This polarity is, in the ultimate analysis, nothing but a form of the pain-pleasure principle, since distantiating factors in the partner cause us pain, while attracting factors in him or her cause us pleasure.

*Mistakes as to what is positive for the others are, of course, possible.

When Adler allowed his British translator of his *Der Sinn des Lebens* to call the book *Social Interest - A Challenge to Mankind* instead of *The Meaning of Life* he doubtless did so because he felt that the increase in scope and intensity of the co-feeling of all human beings is the only thing that can save us from discouragement, neurosis, and criminality both on an individual and on a world scale.

LOGICAL LIVING

The efforts of all the religions to increase the co-feeling of humanity have not been able to change "the heart of man," especially not in the West. In our days, their chances are further diminishing. Perhaps the Rules for Logical Living, which we can derive from Adler's teachings, will some day become a basis for a new way of life, as Confucianism has become, to a large extent, the directive element of Chinese life.

Adler was not a "moralist" or a "religious propagandist" as many of those who did not like the implications of his wisdom have decried him. He did not ask people to "love" their "fellowmen" because this was moral or pleasing to God; he spoke as a philosopher and scientist who had reduced his empirically gained knowledge to a law. Again and again Adler showed that "the rules of the game of human society" or, as he also called them, "the iron laws of human co-living," made it impossible for anyone to derive happiness out of any attitude or action that was not in favor of the others.

On this basis, we may formulate:

1. Our happiness depends on our significance.
2. Our significance depends on what we mean or signify to others. They will admit, approve, or admire only such significances as are beneficial to them; they will not admit or will disapprove and despise significances that are indifferent or harmful to them.
3. Logical living signifies: living in accordance with the requirements of our own human nature and those of co-living. If we need significance and if we can get it only through attitudes and actions beneficial to others, then it is in this way that we must live.

The United States - and the world at large - seem to be in the grip of a crisis of objectives. People are doubting if the aims they have believed worth while for decades are really worth the "investment of pain" necessary to attain them.

There is no possibility to doubt the correctness of the philosophy just formulated. It is a frequent intellectual attitude to look upon the others with disdain, with the eyes of Freud, we might say, who felt discomfort in our culture and who said "Why should I love my fellowman?"

Adler's *The Meaning of Life* was an answer to this question. Adler taught that each individual must give this meaning to his own life. And, as we have seen, it must be a socially positive meaning. This is

the only way to escape the psychic pain that comes from defeatism and to gain psychic pleasure notwithstanding all that may happen in the world.

To restate this philosophy again and again, in a world that suffers more than ever from feelings of distance and separation, and to create greater co-feeling not only in individual consultants but in the world at large - this is our task.

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- (5) George Humphrey: *The Story of Man's Mind*; the New Home Library, New York, 1942, p. 201.