HEIDEGGER, ADLER, AND THE PARADOX OF FAME

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The fame and influence with which Martin Heidegger is currently blessed is one of the more unlikely events of our time; and it becomes even more striking by contrast with the treatment that recent history has accorded Alfred Adler.

On the basis of his lectures and writings Adler ought to have been the first source rediscovered by adherents of the new existentialist emphasis in psychology and psychiatry, yet he was for a long time less than widely read and even now is not fully appreciated. With Heidegger, on the other hand, his abstruse, semi-poetic, nearly mystical metaphysics seems to cast a spell over the intellectual life of a continent, in spite of the fact that this is an age in which poetry is hardly read, philosophy is universally degraded, and the most valued of skills is the ability to communicate clearly and to “sell oneself.”

The contrast between the fate of these two men—the one who turned a monumental trick on his own century and thereby achieved an eminence which was less than justified, and the other who best represented the essence of the movement which he helped to found but curiously failed to gain the position that he deserved—will provide a most instructive story of what might be termed the paradox of fame.

THE EXISTENTIALIST NEED

It is widely recognized that we live in an age of moral crisis. Nothing satisfies us—not the surfeit of civilization’s appurtenances nor the unlimited power that we command over Nature. In place of the ancient gods and the medieval deities who once ruled men’s affairs with absolute and arbitrary commands, we have substituted reason, progress, and the unfettered inquiry of science. Material comfort for all, freedom from want, and the abolishing of illness and pain, are within our grasp. Yet in the midst of this glittering Eden a terrible emptiness is felt. It is an age of anxiety when by all the signs it should be a period of peace and pleasure.

With no stable values to fall back on—not religion nor traditional morals nor established custom—the sophisticated and reflective person today searches for some doctrine to provide a ground for his thinking, an orientation to guide him toward an enduring set of values, the assurance that there is some worth in the world he knows and in the existence he so vacantly pursues. The philosophy on which he settles
has the distinguishing characteristic of commitment; it is a self-
conscious attempt to strip away falsity and distance, to face directly
the issues in life which seem meaningful, to come to grips with what
counts. Blessed as well as cursed with a level of scientific progress in
which he finds himself far removed from the concrete realities of the
world he knows, modern man turns on himself in a desperate reversal
and seeks out, at whatever cost, the critical, the essential, and the
authentically true. The existentialist philosophies which promise to
satisfy the most urgent need of contemporary man have this in com-
mon, that they call upon him to confront his fate and to attempt again
an engagement with whatever is most central to his world and his
destiny.

However, the life and thought of existentialist thinkers, from St.
Augustine through Kierkegaard to Sartre, have shown that it is just
this desperate relevance of a position of full commitment which exacts
too great a cost for most men to bear. The bitter example of Kierke-
gaard comes to mind. He spent his life at the core of this human
dilemma—caught up in the repetitive discovery that true faith is an
absurdity; that the heart of his every authentic act was a leap into
nothing; that only the “individual one” had a right to speak but that
he renounced his right in the very act of communicating to another.
It was Kierkegaard’s tragedy to learn that the practical life fights at
every turn against man’s essential need to be committed. He lived
with this secret, knowing that man is the creature who both lives and
knows, who exists within situations given to him and also transcends
them by way of systems that he hopes will outreach and outlast him.
An existentialist philosophy inhabits the very heart of a dilemma: its
doctrine, if it is lived but not known, will fall short of being a system
and thus will not reach beyond the immediate situation of the phil-
osopher himself; whereas if it is known as a system, it ceases to be a
central part of the life of the person who propounds or follows it.
Kierkegaard’s answer was that the individual should submerge his
existence in faith while recognizing fully that true faith is founded on
the absurd; but this way out has found few ready adherents since
his time.

The Uses of Dasein

It was at this juncture, in the midst of a rumble of related de-
velopments in Europe in the decade following World War I, that
Heidegger offered a provocative and radically new solution for the
existentialist dilemma and thereby answered most powerfully to the 
need of his century. He proposed to discuss, not man, but Being, 
yet in the discussion to deal at the most fundamental possible level 
with man. The work in which in 1927 he made this major contribu­
tion to existentialist thought, while explicitly disclaiming such an 
intent, was Sein und Zeit (Being and Time) (6). It is a condensed, 
almost forbidding piece of writing, couched in a convoluted style 
which is replete with unique terminological inventions; it has not yet 
been translated into English; in any case, it is only the first of at least 
three proposed sections of a major work; and it has nothing directly 
do with psychological theory or therapeutic practice. That it should 
have become a basic text in a new clinical field, and that its author 
should be chief theorist for a most significant modern development in 
psychology, tells us how great has been the need for some doctrine 
with which modern man can find a foothold in his newly discovered 
cosmos of blindly whirling dust.

In addition, Heidegger's undeniable success may be taken as an 
indication of how novel and attractive was the device he offered. In 
the prefatory note to his book he states that the aim of his discussion 
is "the concrete elaboration of the question concerning the meaning 
of Being;" and in order to accomplish this aim he introduces an 
entity for which he proposes the name "Dasein." The chapters which 
follow are devoted to an exposition of what Heidegger terms the 
"Analytic of Dasein"—the meaning of the entity, its structure, and 
its significant aspects and forms. Yet it is essential to the organiza­
tion of the book that Dasein is nowhere unequivocally defined; rather, 
it is described, referred to, or summed up. One example is his refer­
ence to Dasein as "the Being of man" (6, p. 25), which is quite similar 
to the description proposed by one commentator, that Dasein "ex­
presses man's peculiar way of being—man considered ontologically" 
(7, p. 32). The term Being is meant to refer to the most basic con­
ceivable phenomenon—that which infuses each particular being or 
entity, and makes it what it is. Dasein is one such entity, but it is a 
unique or, as Heidegger calls it, an "exemplary" one, for by means of a 
thorough examination of it and a full exposition of its Analytic, it will 
one again become possible, as it has not been since the time of the 
pre-Socratic philosophers, to "re-awaken an understanding" of the 
meaning of Being.

The ontology, or systematic study of Being, which will be spelled 
out in the Analytic of Dasein is bound to be the most fundamental
one possible, according to Heidegger, for the Being which is understood by Dasein is primordial and seen in a "pre-ontological light." For example, in a brilliant discussion of space and spatiality (6, pp. 104-113) he argues against the traditional view by which space is conceived as an empty manifold which is somehow filled up with extant objects. It should be viewed, rather, as made up of regions which in turn are disclosed in everyday comings and goings. It is "circumspection," or attentive concern, he proposes, which comes first; and following on this, space comes to be known as an aspect of the world which is made up of practical discoveries about its regions and places.

What strikes us about this method of analysis is that it is quite similar to that of the European phenomenologists who undertake to describe appearances as these occur in a consciousness unencumbered by presuppositions. The similarity is not a coincidence, for Heidegger's professed method, too, is phenomenological. However, it is a method used in his own way and for his own novel purposes. As he states at the outset, the subject matter of his inquiry is fundamental ontology; and therefore one would expect that he would pursue it, as is customary, by means of rigorous analysis which is necessarily deductive. But his discussion of the nature of the phenomenon and the logos leads him to conclude that "ontology is possible only as phenomenology" (6, p. 35). By means of this unexpected twist he is enabled to make use of the phenomenological method, just as though he were describing the world as it appears to human consciousness, yet to state the Analytic entirely on an ontological level because it is concerned with the meta-human "world" of Dasein. Indeed, we may rightly suspect that this is more than an ingenious trick. We have here our first indication of what Heidegger will offer as a major strategy—to utilize the conception of Dasein as a means of talking about man without risking some of the existential consequences that might usually be faced in doing so.

As one goes through this book, there is apparent through all the elaborate terminology a deliberate attempt to handle, one by one, the separate problems belonging to a phenomenological psychology. There is, for example, the issue of subjectiveness, and in reference to this he concludes that Dasein always has the character of "ever-my-own-ness" (Jemeinigkeit). In reference to the question of mental content, he presents a brilliantly original discussion of worldliness and of
two kinds of presented entities: those which are at-hand (zuhanden) and have the sort of Being that an implement has, and those which are on-hand (vorhanden), or merely present. Again, this can only be characterized as a phenomenological analysis, one which presupposes the intentionality of consciousness and therefore understands the world of man as made up of man's meaningful actions in it. Even the critique of Descartes, although it claims to deal only with an ontological being, makes clear—particularly in regard to its phenomenological insights concerning experiences of resistance and hardness (6, p. 97)—that what may have been introduced as a new conception is at best only a new term; that the undeniable contributions can be applied with no modification to the basic problems posed in a phenomenological psychology.

The fundamental structure of Dasein, Heidegger states, is being-in-the-world. By this he means unequivocally that Dasein is not to be understood as one entity placed opposite another set of entities which are collectively termed "world." The term "world" is to be found only in the full expression "being-in-the-world," and the analysis begins with this clearly expressed. But it turns out that the "world" of Dasein, even when understood in this way, is not a generalized and universal phenomenon but rather is surprisingly familiar. It is simply that nexus of implications and practical concerns which is known, or knowable, to adult, civilized, urban males in our society. The things which are zuhanden have the Being of tools—but they are tools for the actions of men, not women. As Erwin Straus (9) has pointed out, there are in this limited "world" no animals, no children, and indeed no aspects of Nature except insofar as they appear as signs for the use of civilized man. Even more striking is the introduction of the term das Man to refer to the phenomenon of the indeterminate "one" who (or perhaps which) haunts the social life of modern man. We say, "One does not do this sort of thing," and in saying it we refer to some "neutral one," the one who is not you nor me, nor any particular person, yet is everyone; who by virtue of this very vagueness exercises a "dictatorship" which prescribes the everyday mode of Being; and who in this way dissolves the Dasein which is "ever-my-own" into the mode of others. The conception is both novel and alarming—yet it smacks of the complaint of contemporary urban man who is constantly cursed with a sense of the sheer publicness and the inevitable sociality of his existence.
EXISTENTIALISM WITHOUT PAIN

One of Heidegger's most profound and significant contributions is his discussion of death. Its conclusion, that the authentic being-to-death is truly a freedom-onto-death, is not only a most fitting climax to his analysis of the "whole Being" of Dasein but serves also to call into question that unauthentic denial of mortality which underlies and typifies the existential sickness of our age. It is philosophy in the truest and highest sense. Therefore we are, quite properly, disquieted to note that he has carried it off by means of a trick.

However one deals with the question, death must be recognized as constituting the ultimate expression of the body's finitude in a human existence which seeks constantly to transcend finite limits. However, if the discussion is concerned, not with man and his body's limits, but at least ostensibly with Dasein, which is neither mortal nor a finite entity, it can only pretend to comprehend the full existential significance of death. And this, in fact, is just what does occur in Heidegger's discussion. He does bring up the problem of the ending of something which is alive, but he applies to it the distinctive term "perish" (verenden) and his discussion of it is on the level of an ontological analysis of the ideas of end and totality (6, pp. 241-246). What should be a discussion of death, with its significance gained from what this means for living man, is turned into a treatment of the coming-to-an-end of Dasein.

As in all of the examples that we have discussed, the words are there, hinting at a human significance and thus persuading us of their import. But in every instance, and most acutely when the discussion centers on what is most meaningful or tragic, the argument is revealed as hollow. In the end it is a way of evading the very existential consequence with which he pulls us on. The monumental endeavor houses a trick of historic proportions. It is an existentialism without pain, denying to modern man just what it purports with a metaphysical flourish to give him. For modern man in search of what remains of his soul, Heidegger thus becomes the fountainhead of a New Truth, telling his followers all they need to know of man without ever touching them irretrievably by speaking of man.

Not all commentators on his work will agree with this judgment, of course. Brock, for one, thinks that the "more congenial" aspects of Heidegger's thinking such as "the philosophic study of human Dasein," those aspects which appear to "fulfill a requirement of the age," constitute what the public has taken eagerly from Heidegger, but that
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Not all commentators on this work will agree with this judgment, Heidegger's thinking such as "the philosophy of man" as "the more congenial aspects of being," those aspects which appear to "fulfill a requirement of the age," constitute what the public has taken eagerly from Heidegger, but that this is only a happenstance; the more fundamental contributions will only slowly be understood (5, p. 38). But the fact is that the curious circumstance of Heidegger's fame is explained if his major work is viewed as—intentionally or not—a device by which we were persuaded that somehow the human dilemma could be by-passed and a philosophy of man's true nature achieved without cost to the philosopher.

In this, too, there is explained the fact that Ludwig Binswanger, who was influenced by Heidegger and tried hard to find in this seeming existentialism a workable basis for therapeutic practice, was forced to reconstruct it in two ways. To Heidegger's conception of Care—which the latter used to refer to the total existential structure of Dasein, the Being of Dasein itself in virtue of its concern with its own being—Binswanger (4) added the mode of Love, thereby proclaiming that man could be fully understood only in a reconciliation of two polarities. Secondly, Binswanger (4) perhaps deliberately committed what may be termed an "ontic error"—that is, he treated Dasein as though it meant, not an exemplary and ineffable entity, but the actual existence of some particular human being. On this basis he was able to proceed to an analysis of typical cases, each of which exemplified a different mode of existence: his Daseinanalyse, or as we have come to call it, Existential Analysis.

THE VARIETIES OF FAME

The contemporary vocabulary of existentialist thinking, particularly as it has affected the practice of therapy, stems almost without exception from Being and Time. The emphasis on the significance and centrality of death, the stress on time and temporality, the idea of authentic-unauthentic, notions such as being, becoming, and transcending, and even the revival of the term 'dread' in place of the Freudian anxiety—short, the working vocabulary of a new clinical discipline, correctly used or not, has been taken from this one work. What is most remarkable, then, is that although Heidegger treats these issues with originality and often with brilliance, he never seems to take a stand on any of them. His influence has somehow pervaded the field in spite of the fact that one cannot find anything in his writing to be grasped and held as reminder or comfort, solace, warning, or advice. He may instruct, but at no point does he declare how things are or ought to be.

Heidegger's comment on Kierkegaard is most enlightening in this respect. He blamed the Danish philosopher for providing material
of value only in his “edifying” writings, which were those in which he explicitly pointed a moral or undertook to advise or instruct. Heidegger, it appears, would prefer that a philosopher’s most valuable contributions be found entirely in his formal, systematic writings. The implication, here as elsewhere, is clear: in matters that count, Heidegger would prefer not to speak of the human world at all. His mark, in this book as well as in his life’s work, is that he sustains no relation to concerns which are simply human. He may speak of what is authentic, but it is never in a value-laden sense. He may choose the word *Gerade*—meaning “talk” but with some connotation of “chatter”—to refer to the speech of “everyday Dasein,” but he makes no explicit judgment as to its worth. In the last analysis all his basic concepts might be said to refer to the human world and nothing else—*Dasein* to man as a unique kind of being; *Care* to an enriched version of Husserl’s formal principle of intentionality; *everyday Dasein* to the life of practical action among men; *thrownness* to man’s fate as having limits—but Heidegger neither affirms nor denies such an interpretation. By implication he affirms that he makes no reference to the world which encompasses and determines the very person who transcends it; and he affirms further that he is not himself committed to the significance of the philosophy which he espouses. If we are to believe his claim, he has found a way to handle all that is central to man, but to do so as though he himself were a minor god who remains untouched by the significance and the consequences of a doctrine which begins and ends within the limits of human existence.

Compare Heidegger, now, with Sartre, whose postwar career has been one of complete engagement—at times passionately, often foolishly, perhaps even inconsistently, but always with an attitude of commitment to whatever realities his history forced upon him. Sartre’s life represents one variety of fame and thus has this lesson to teach us: that the man who is fully committed may attract a following although he rarely gains a lasting influence. The latter comes about only when he is judged by his contemporaries as uncommitted or else as neutral in regard to significant human issues. The case of Kierkegaard is very much the same. During a lifetime marked by passionate conviction and a commitment to the full reality of the spiritual life, he gained some fame, in the sense of contemporary notoriety, as well as a small and devoted following; but his influence was not really felt until, after the lapse of over half a century, the world could gain enough distance from his intense and personal
struggle to view him with some neutrality, as though he were in fact disengaged. The existential dilemma—that men need to become committed but are just as strongly impelled to resist its awful consequences—is reflected in the paradox of fame: that they can allow only a limited and passing notoriety to those who touch them most deeply by attempting to expound a philosophy of fundamentals.

Finally, there is the case of Adler, who has surely been treated most shabbily by those of his own time. As the Ansbachers have said in referring to this unfortunate and puzzling phenomenon:

The explanation, in our opinion, is in large part the fact that Adler's writings are unsystematic and therefore make unsatisfactory reading. As the number of those who learned from Adler through personal contact has grown smaller, he has understandably become less well known, and others who expressed the same ideas more lucidly and more recently are referred to instead (2, p. v).

This describes that variety of fame in which there is some following but little enduring influence. Unlike Heidegger, who has had an influence but without a large following, and more like both Kierkegaard and Sartre, Adler's fame seems to have been based on a lifetime of full commitment. It will be of some interest, therefore, to compare his views with those of Heidegger on some issue that strikes at fundamentals. The one we choose has to do with man's relation to his fellowmen.

**Being-with-others versus Social Interest**

Surely the most appealing of the conceptions stressed by the existentially oriented schools of therapy is the one termed "being with others." It is supposed to be the goal toward which the patient strives, and it is meant to connote a full and meaningful life of brotherhood and understanding shared with one's fellow men. The phrase itself is taken from Heidegger and is presumed to be a translation of his term describing his conception of social values. In actual fact, however, it has nothing to do with Heidegger's expressed views. An examination of this particular misconception, and a comparison with Adler's term "social interest," will provide an excellent instance of the way in which Heidegger's contribution has been changed and Adler's largely overlooked.

As part of his discussion of the structure of Dasein, which he calls *being-in-the-world*, Heidegger takes up the question of "who" Dasein is. His analysis begins with an exposition of a mode which he terms *being-with-others*. It should be kept in mind that Dasein is always singular, not plural, and that the first expression descriptive of
It is ever-my-own-ness. The "others" who appear in the expression "being-with-others," then, are not to be taken as separate "Daseins" who share a common setting; Heidegger's ontology is neither biological nor sociological in content. Rather, these "others" are to be understood as one of the given aspects within the whole of the structure of Dasein. In short, being-with-others does not at all mean being with others, but refers to a condition in which others may show their presence. The condition itself is an aspect of the whole structure of Dasein. Again, one senses an undertone of the voice of the modern inhabitant of cities, his life tied to the sheer inescapable present-ness of his fellows.

What is lacking, however, in Heidegger's conception is a simple fact which we may express, as we choose, in either sociological or biological terms—that there exist a vast number of separate entities who together make up the human community. Because he chooses to rewrite the human condition on an ontological dimension, Heidegger has no way to introduce the simple fact that there are people; and as a consequence he cannot handle the further fact that there are many possible modes of interrelation among them. He can analyze being-with-others but he cannot mention interdependence; he can talk of being-oneself but not of solitude; and in the elaborate structure so carefully built up, there is no place for either love or aggression.

In sharp contrast—perhaps the difference is nowhere more striking than at this point—is Adler's central emphasis on the social aspect of man's existence, the good as well as the ill of it. The three problems which he thought were paramount in the individual's life—those referring to society, vocation, and love—are all basically interhuman. The conception of the masculine protest, also, although it has to do with the problem of a single individual, was based on the social phenomenon that in contemporary society women are always underestimated. Similarly, all the problems that Adler stressed as fundamental, all the guiding ideas of his thinking, were derived from concretely realized situations found in social relations—the spoiled child and the hated child, the style of life, the importance of the family history, the stress on the great complexity of living relationships within the family. For Adler always viewed the person in his active aspect, as a striving member of a larger group, with all that this meant in regard to feelings and attitudes of status, of power, and of felt goals. The person for him was not a hypothecated entity and not a compound of part processes but always a confronter of given social
reality, one who faced life’s demands in his own way, and therefore a creature of weakness and potential, of courage and failing and social interest. Character, as he saw it, was not a formed complex of energies but a “ready attitude” to life’s problems—and this again is a conception which is pointed outward, as it were, and pointed ahead toward a goal as determiner of both anticipations and present actions.

We are not surprised, then, to find that Adler’s own life shows a pattern of consistent interest in the ordinary person and in the pleasures and interests with which most people are occupied. Nor should we be surprised to note that in an otherwise intransigently pro-Freudian text, Ruth Munroe admits that Adler was the first to treat of the whole person in his milieu and that only recently have cleverer writers elaborated some of his insights into impressive systems. “The very great merit of (Adler’s) . . . inquiry into social factors . . . has had to be rediscovered by other analytic schools and by ‘environmentalists,’ who often did not see the basic problem so clearly as Adler did” (8, p. 380).

The Dual Ground of Psychology

Only an orientation completely grounded in the concretely observed realities of human social life could locate its major conceptions so consistently in the events and the structure of relations among people. Nevertheless, an account would be incomplete which described Adler’s approach entirely in social terms. Adler’s contribution was more fundamental. It lies in his grasp of a basic fact concerning psychology’s data—that they are necessarily in a unique realm. Psychology deals with people; but equally important, it can only deal with people as they appear to other people. For this reason the data of psychology do not consist simply of people as mere targets for the content of a science but primarily as objects in social perception. Psychology deals with persons as they appear to persons; with persons as they act in the unique realm which constitutes the ken of other persons who are also engaged in action.

Heidegger too seems to grasp this primary fact about the data of psychology, but his choice is to deal with it by means of a maneuver on a plane quite removed from the sphere of actual human perception and action. But Adler’s intuitive grasp of the problem in its full meaning enabled him to proceed, perhaps unsystematically but always with the certainty of the theorist who has the issue in hand, in a more fruitful direction. Viewing the results of his work in this light,
we can see how superficial is that interpretation of his views which calls them merely "social." As a result of his basic proposition, he tended to see the person as a carrier of a mode of expression rather than as a set of organized facts; and in line with this approach, he continually stressed the importance of observation and the significance of the way it occurs. Psychological phenomena, he recognized, are always expressions of the person.

This may seem either self-evident or superfluous, but to understand what it implies, consider only a view—such as that of Freud—in which expression is not even a logical possibility: for a boiler system does not express its pressure but only exhibits it. As a natural consequence, Adler stressed what are now called ego-psychological processes and gave little weight to presumed underlying dynamics of the unconscious. Freud contemptuously and rather glibly referred to the former as "surface phenomena," but this missed the all-important point. A full understanding of ego functions as observable modes of expression of the personality is, in truth, all the data that psychology will ever have; and this should remind us that it is all that psychology will ever need.

Psychology may be viewed as resting on, because it requires, two sorts of ground. One of these is the method, the orientation, and the findings of a phenomenological inquiry. Expression and observation—the mutually penetrating poles of the situation of social perception—may be said to form the natural setting for the phenomenological approach and method. Adler's natural bent in this direction led him inevitably to what we would now call a phenomenologically oriented psychology. Heidegger, on the other hand, although he made use of a phenomenological method and thereby made the most significant of his contributions, paraded his phenomenology under false colors, as it were. At no point did he come to grips with the concrete realities of human life. Indeed, a proof that he required a phenomenology as ground yet could not commit himself to a full use of it, may be found in his argument that ontology is possible only as phenomenology—for if this were really so, Heidegger's whole problem would be absorbed into psychological theory and disappear as such.

The second necessary ground for psychology is an unqualified acceptance of the human dilemma which is at the center of an existentialist orientation. The tenor of Adler's thinking is without exception in this direction, as witness the fact that adherents of current schools of existential therapy find his views wholly compatible with their own. (e.g., 10, 11). He put it succinctly in a paper thirty-five
years ago in which he summed up his views for American psychologists: "... the absolute truth ... is never to be found out. We are not blessed with the knowledge of the last truth; we are only striving" (1, p. 116). By contrast, the impression gained from Heidegger's series of apodictic generalizations is that some eternal truth has been captured and embalmed in the entity known as Dasein. The reader who accepts these ontological dicta is, like Heidegger himself, no longer concerned with the striving which defines merely human theorists. Further, neither Heidegger's reader nor the author himself is forced to face the very human paradox—that it is always this striving itself which makes up the content of the issues with which a theorist must be concerned.

Proverbs tend to find their way into a culture, yet one cannot usually point to any specific influence that they have; and conversely, scientific findings may have a profound effect but can rarely be said to become a meaningful part of our lives. This distinction is applicable to the pair of thinkers we have considered in these pages. Adler's work has slipped so easily, almost naturally, into the fabric of our common living and our contemporary psychology that our task today is to tease it out in order to trace its effect. It may be that the initial influence of others was necessary as a first step in assuring his historic place—the influence of Freud in making psychopathology a respectable topic, and the influence of Heidegger in making existentialism almost palatable. By this paradoxical route, an equal fame may soon come to Adler, now that we have become accustomed to his popularity.

References