ADLER'S "STRIVING FOR POWER," IN RELATION TO NIETZSCHE[1]

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Adler introduced Nietzsche's term, "will to power," in his book *The Neurotic Constitution* in 1912. He likened the term then to his own term, the neurotic's "masculine protest," i.e., "wanting to be a real man," and stated, "Nietzsche's 'will to power' includes much of our understanding" (1, p. 3).

Power did not necessarily mean power over others. In fact, Adler kept modifying will to power, soon naming it striving for power, striving for superiority, from "below" to "above," toward a plus situation, toward completion or perfection, towards success as subjectively perceived. In time Adler stated, "We prefer the general term 'overcoming' " (7, p. 82).

Overcoming in general, rather than power over others specifically, was also at the core of Nietzsche's concept. According to Walter Kaufmann, for Nietzsche, " 'powerful' and 'powerless' are merely relative terms. . . . Power is enjoyed only as more power. One enjoys not its possession but its increase: the overcoming of impotence" (25, p. 185-186). The will to power "is essentially a striving to transcend and perfect oneself," and life itself, according to Nietzsche, is that "which must always overcome itself" (25, p. 248).

Both, Adler's and Nietzsche's concepts stand for a unitary basic dynamic principle, characteristic of a holistic, organismic and humanistic psychology (see also 25, p. 178). They involve an active and creative striving toward some value or goal, implying a cognitive psychology which belongs in fact among the social sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). After all, power is a value.

This is quite in contrast to Freud who had attempted to establish psychoanalysis as a value-free, physicalistic natural science, based on a tough-minded, mechanistic, causalistic, and reductionistic approach. When Freud founded his system on the sex drive, a physiologically

based drive, this was in line with his intention of being a natural scientist (14).

Adler was immediately misinterpreted as propagating the striving for power, especially of personal power over others, just as Nietzsche had been considered " 'endorsing' the will to power" (25, p. 247). What Kaufmann said with regard to Nietzsche applies to Adler as well, namely, "Any writer is misunderstood fundamentally when his intentions are ignored and he is identified with the forces he fought" (25, p. 15).

In the following we shall review briefly how Adler attempted to counteract the misunderstanding to which he was exposed, and give a recent example showing how the old myth nevertheless continues in certain instances.

When seven years after the original publication the second edition of *The Neurotic Constitution* appeared, Adler—in an effort to counteract "meaningless talk"—stated:

The serious reader will, I hope, . . . with me . . . regard each human psyche in a self-consistent progression toward a goal of perfection, so that movements, character traits, and symptoms point invariably beyond themselves. These insights will burden him with a life task: to show the way in the *reduction of the striving for personal power* and in the education toward the community (1, p. iv, italics added).

Three years later, in introducing the third edition, Adler once more asserted: "The views of Individual Psychology demand the unconditional reduction of the striving for power and the development of social interest. The watchword of Individual Psychology is the fellowman and the fellowman attitude toward the immanent demands of human society" (1, p. vi; 8, p. 114). Ten years later we read:

Regarding the striving for power, we find the misunderstanding that Individual Psychology not only regards psychological life as the striving for power, but propagates this idea. This striving for power is not our madness, it is what we find in others (8, p. 113). The striving of each actively moving individual is towards overcoming, not towards power. . . . Striving for power—better, for personal power—represents only one of a thousand types, all of which seek perfection, a security-giving plus situation (8, p. 114; 9, p. 275).

Yet it is hard to eradicate the myth. An extreme example of this can be seen in the German Marxist philosopher, Ernst Bloch, several of whose books have appeared in English. In what is perhaps his most important work, *The Principle of Hope* (18), scheduled to be published in English late in 1972, he writes:

By expelling sex from libido and replacing it with individual power, Adler's definition of drive went the intensified capitalistic way from Schopenhauer to Nietzsche . . . To this extent Nietzsche has won over Schopenhauer, that is, the imperialistic elbow has won over the pleasure-pain body of psychoanalysis, which is like that of someone living on his income (p. 64).

In support of this, Bloch quotes from the same edition of *The Neurotic Constitution*, ironically, in which Adler demanded, as already quoted, "the unconditional reduction of the striving for power and the development of social interest" (1, p. vi).

AFFINITY TO NIETZSCHE

We have seen that "will to power" is of systematic significance in two respects: (*a*) as part of a holistic theory of human dynamics, (*b*) as belonging to a value rather than a drive psychology. Since this was the direction in which Adler was tending even while he was a participant in the Freudian circle, Adler warmly accepted Nietzsche's ideas when they were discussed there, while Freud disclaimed any knowledge of Nietzsche.

As early as 1908, four years before his mention of the "will to power," Adler expressed the greatest praise for Nietzsche. At a meeting of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, after Edward Hitschmann had read a paper on Nietzsche, Adler asserted, "among all great philosophers . . . Nietzsche is closest to our way of thinking" (32, I, p. 358). With this, some others agreed, while Freud is reported as insisting, "He does not know Nietzsche's work . . . He can give the assurance that Nietzsche's ideas have had no influence whatsoever on his own work" (pp. 359-360).

Five years later, in 1913, Adler designated Nietzsche as "one of the soaring pillars of our art" of psychotherapy (10, p. 130). This sentiment is confirmed by Hertha Orgler, biographer and personal friend of Adler, who notes in the German edition of her book that Adler "very particularly venerated Nietzsche" (33, p. 250). Two followers of Adler have made substantive comparisons between him and Nietzsche, namely Robert Freschl (22) who previously had published some biographical remarks on Nietzsche (21), and F. G. Crookshank (19) whose monograph particularly discusses similarities.

The present section will deal with similarities in methodology, where we were guided by Kaufmann's discussion of "Nietzsche's Method" (25, pp. 72-95).

Dialectics

Nietzsche was more consistently dialectical even then Hegel, according to Kaufmann (25, p. 84). But he did not believe that reality is self-contradictory; he held only that unqualified judgments about reality involve us in superficial inconsistencies (p. 80). Thus Nietzsche can be regarded as a "dialectical monist" (p. 235).

Now, the *dialectical tradition* is, according to Rychlak (35) the one that is appropriate to the world of judgments, the subjective world, and to the humanistic sciences where the proper approach includes soft determinism, final causes, teleology from within man, and where self-contradictions are accepted.

Consistent with his humanistic position Adler accepted dialectical thinking as a modus operandi in his psychology, of which the following passage may serve as example· " 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair,' as the witches chant in *Macbeth*. Grief becomes joy, pain changes into pleasure, life is thrown away, death appears desirable—as soon as defiance interferes strongly" (8, p. 66).

Opposed to the dialectical tradition is the *demonstrative tradition* of objective reality, of the positivistic natural sciences, where we have hard determinism, efficient causes, and where something cannot also be its opposite.

Freud, intent upon being a natural scientist, could from the above be expected to disavow Nietzsche and dialectics, which is indeed what he did, as already mentioned. But his subject matter did actually not permit the positivistic natural-science approach, and thus we have the strange phenomenon that Freud employed dialectical reasoning by subterfuge so to speak. While Freud objectified man, he "made his energies behave dialectically," according to Rychlak, who continues, "As is well known, the libido's versatility is limited only by Freud's genius in making it do his theoretical bidding" (35, p. 314). Adler had expressed the very same observation when he said, "Freud, with incomparable grace and ease, invests each of his postulated 'instincts' with human attributes" (9, p. 120).

Dialectic Dynamics

The single basic dynamic principle of the will to power, striving for power, or overcoming, is derived from the very center of dialectics. It is so to speak a paraphrasing into more concrete terms of Hegel's proof "that something can both be and not be at the same time" (35, p. 286). According to Rychlak, "Hegel asserts that it is possible for something to both be and not be when it is in the process of 'becoming' " (35, pp. 286-287). Referring to Nietzsche's dynamics, Kaufmann states, "the metaphysics of the will to power is a dialectical monism in which the basic force is conceived as essentially creative" (25, p. 241). Kaufmann gives the illustration: "The acorn strives to become an oak tree, though this involves its ceasing to be an acorn and, to that extent, self-overcoming. Man desires to be perfect and to have complete mastery of himself, though this involves a measure of asceticism and self-denial" (25, p. 242).

Adler directly continued from here, stating in 1909, "Hegel . . . enabled the idea of evolution to make a breakthrough in philosophy,"

by "his conception of dialectics, i.e., the transformation of one thing into its opposite, of the thesis into the antithesis—matters that occupy us continuously" (32, II, pp. 333-334). In 1912 he described the thesis as the feelings of weakness and inferiority which merge under the present social conditions into a sense of femininity, and the antithesis, as wanting to be strong and powerful like a real man. From this "dialectic" develops the "dynamic" of the "increased masculine protest as a resolution of the disharmony" (3, p. 15).

While Adler soon gave up the terms of femininity, masculinity, and masculine protest for this dynamic conception, he retained its structure and meaning. The following is a particularly explicit later statement:

The future is tied up with our striving and with our goal, while the past represents the state of inferiority or inadequacy which we are trying to overcome. That is why . . . we should not be astonished if in the cases where we see an inferiority complex we find a superiority complex more or less hidden. On the other hand, if we inquire into a superiority complex . . . we can always find a more or less hidden inferiority complex. . . . If we look at things this way, it takes away the apparent paradox of two contradictory tendencies . . . existing in the same individual. For it is obvious that as normal sentiments the striving for superiority and the feeling of inferiority are naturally complementary. We should not strive to be superior and to succeed if we did not feel a certain lack in our present condition. . . . The striving for superiority never ceases. It constitutes in fact the mind, the psyche of the individual (6, pp. 27-28).

Questioning Attitude, Idiographic Approach, and Problem-Thinking

One part of Nietzsche's dialectic approach is the questioning of one's own assumptions and premises. He became suspicious of the absolute value of any system, asserting, "I am not bigoted enough for a system—and not even for *my* system" (25, p. 80). All assumptions had to be questioned (p. 84). Adler expressed the same principle of wide openmindedness more concretely, from the viewpoint of the psychotherapist, when he wrote at the beginning of the preface to his last book:

The uniqueness of the individual cannot be expressed in a short formula, and general rules—even those laid down by Individual Psychology, of my own creation —should be regarded as nothing more than an aid to a preliminary illumination of the field of view in which the single individual can be found—or missed. Thus we assign only limited value to general rules and instead lay strong emphasis on flexibility and on empathy into nuances (8, pp. 194-195).

We see here how the searching, dialectic, supposition-free approach becomes in practice the concrete approach to the individual case, the idiographic versus the nomothetic (35, p. 456). This implies that we meet the individual case not with fixed preconceived categories, but let these emerge from the case itself.

With this questioning attitude Nietzsche is described by Kaufmann as a problem-thinker rather than a system-thinker, following Nicolai Hartmann's similar distinction. The problem situation is the starting point of the inquiry, rather than a set of premises. Problem-thinking, according to Kaufmann, becomes "a search for hidden presuppositions rather than a quest for solutions. . . . The result is less a solution of the initial problem than a realization of its limitations: typically, the problem is not solved but 'outgrown' " (25, p. 82).

This is exactly what goes on in Adlerian psychotherapy. The therapist considers all mental disturbances as attempts of the individual to solve his life problems, grouped into the three categories of communal living, work, and love. The patient approaches his problems with erroneous, most often tacit, presuppositions, which include his goals and proposed ways of attaining these, his life line. These are identified by inferences "guesses," from his behavior and its consequences, and must be demonstrated to the patient. Adler suggests:

Look for assumptions according to which the behavior of the patient becomes understandable (8, pp. 331-332). The disturbing behavior is related to and grows out of a particular conception, or misconception, of life (p. 395). We are always able to draw attention to errors only and never to innate defects (p. 342). [Thus the Adlerian psychotherapist also does] not deviate from the path of encouragement (p. 342). The cure . . . is brought about by a correction of the faulty picture of the world and the unequivocal acceptance of a mature picture of the world (p. 333).

BRIDGE TO OTHER SYSTEMS AND THERAPIES

The attributes of Adler's Individual Psychology that are related to his basic dynamic principle of overcoming, his dialectic monism, and the psychotherapy derived from this, place Adler into a very natural relationship to several present-day therapeutic, philosophical, and theoretical trends.

Communication Therapy

Within the dialectical tradition where, subjectively, a thing may indeed be its opposite, Adler, as we have seen, reconciled contradictory behavior from the viewpoint of an inferred goal of overcoming. This, incidentally, replaced the far more complicated and less dynamic concept of ambivalence. Adler gives as a simple concrete example of such a dialectic resolution the indicent of a speculator on the stock exchange. He may "sometimes act the bull and at other times the bear." But in either case his object would be "to gain

money, that is, power" (8, p. 232). Similarly vanity could show itself through rags (p. 232); obedience or defiance can both be methods of insurrection (p. 66); tears may exercise "water power" (p. 288), etc., and suicide, obviously self-destructive, may very well have a large enough component of hurting or accusing others, for this to become an effective dialectic construction for psychotherapy (13).

Today, Jay Haley (23) and other "communication" psycho-therapists have described this kind of behavior as "paradoxical communication" (40). Neurotic behavior and symptoms of which the patient complains are regarded as means on his part for controlling people, exerting power over them—without taking the responsibility for doing so, a further aspect which was also stressed by Adler (8, pp. 270-271). Psychotherapy, in turn, also resorts to the paradox of dialectics by, e.g., prescribing or encouraging the symptom itself. Again, "the problem is not solved but 'outgrown.'" In discussing the general theoretical background of this approach, Haley (24) differentiates between digital and analogical communication, a classification parallel to Rychlak's differentiation between the demonstrative and dialectic traditions.

Pragmatism

Adler was truly what Kaufmann calls a "dialectic monist" (25, p. 235). That is to say his basic presupposition was the unity of man, including psychosomatic unity, which he expressed eventually in the term, "life style." Man's tendency to think in terms of antitheses, contradictions, and categories does not correspond to actual reality. Rather these are thought constructs, fictions, for the purpose of dealing with reality. They were recognized as such by Hans Vaihinger (38), the German pragmatist whom Adler followed enthusiastically. As soon as Vaihinger's book appeared, in 1911, Adler recognized in it strong support for his own orientation, especially also since Vaihinger considered Nietzsche a precursor of his. In *The Neurotic Constitution* (1) Adler referred to both with equal frequency and importance.

The relationship of Adler's psychology to pragmatism has been made the object of a careful study by Kenneth Winetrout (41), who found the entire intellectual movement that can be designated as pragmatism and Adler's psychology "unusually supportive of one another." Attempts to describe the relationship of pragmatism to psychology altogether would, according to Winetrout, be most fruitful if made in the light of Individual Psychology.

Existentialism

With Adler drawing on Nietzsche and Vaihinger who recognized similarities of his own to Nietzsche, and with Nietzsche being often considered a fountainhead of existentialism, one might expect a kinship of Adler to existentialism. And indeed, Harold Kelman, a leader of the Horney group noted, "Of existentialism there is least in Freud, somewhat more in Jung and Rank, and the most in Adler and Ferenczi" (27, p. 120). There are actually separate studies on the positive relationship between Adler and Viktor Frankl, Rollo May, Sartre, Camus, Binswanger and Boss, Jaspers, Heidegger, and, not to forget, Nietzsche (17, 15, 37, 34, 39, 36, 29, 19, respectively, with only one representative reference given in each case). This list includes five of the nine authors in Kaufmann's anthology of existentialism (26), Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus, while it does not include Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Rilke, and Kafka.

On Dostoevsky, however, Adler gave himself a moving talk, calling him "our teacher even today, as the teacher Nietzsche hailed him to be. . . .Dostoevsky has become a great and endeared master in a distinct number of fields" (2, p. 290). What Adler saw in him again described was that in human affairs self-contradictions must be accepted, that a thing can be its opposite, or, in modern terms, the phenomenon of paradoxical communication.

Dostoevsky's principle had been . . . to approach truth through falsehood, for we never can be certain of possessing truth and have to be prepared to resort to infinitesimal lies. Thus he grew up to be the enemy of Western culture, whose essential traits appeared to him to be a striving to arrive at falsehood through truth (p. 282). Salvation was, to lie in submission as long as submission contained within itself the secret enjoyment of superiority over others (p. 286). The limits of power intoxication he found set by the love of one's neighbor (p. 282).

We are particularly impressed by Adler's comments on Dostoevsky's confessing at his trial that his punishment was just: "But all Russia denied his guilt and began to understand that a word, a thing, can mean its own opposite" (3, p. 200; not included in the English edition).

DIVERGENCE

In both Nietzsche and Adler "will to power" or "striving for power" did not mean power over others as such, but "overcoming." This is a dialectical process where a feeling of inferiority (powerlessness) and a goal of success (envisionment of powerfulness) are simultaneously present, merged into the movement of striving, of

overcoming. The agreement refers to the kind and structure of the dynamics.

However, when we consider the objective of the overcoming, and further, the theory of the nature of man and of society, enormous differences present themselves. Nietzsche represented an aristocratic and actually quite self-centered philosophy, in opposition to socialism and democracy (25, p. 149). Adler's philosophy was completely democratic, and his key concept, communal feeling or social interest (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*), was "absolutely foreign to Nietzsche," as Ellenberger (20, p. 630) has pointed out.

Superman

For Nietzsche, the ideal was the "superman" (*Übermensch*),[3] an elitist, aristocratic conception. What is to be overcome is a baser self; self-mastery, self-conquest, and self-perfection are the goals (25, p. 252). "Man is a rope, tied between animal and superman—a rope over an abyss" (p. 310). "The goal of humanity" can lie "only *in its highest specimens* . . . in single great human beings" (pp. 311-312). They are "the *windfalls* of humanity" (30, p. 156).

Nietzsche makes a sharp distinction between the strong and the weak, between potential superman and the herd. He notes that "cooperative unions . . . sprang up in the lowest stratum of contemporary society," while "the strong strive as much for isolation as the weak for union" (30, pp. 175-176). He trusts not even the union of marriage. For Nietzsche, according to Kaufmann, marriage is apt to be a "temptation for man to betray his call. . . . Although 'for the most part two animals find each other,' marriage can be creative . . . when two single ones meet" (25, p. 311).

With his general disbelief in equality, Nietzsche's views on women were as uncomplimentary as those of Freud. For example,

What inspires respect for woman, and often enough even fear, is her *nature*, which is more 'natural' than man's, the genuine, cunning suppleness of a beast of prey, the tiger's claw under the glove, the naïveté of her egoism, her uneducability and inner wildness, the incomprehensibility, scope, and movement of her desires and virtues . . . this dangerous and beautiful cat (31, p. 169).

Children are practically not mentioned at all in Nietzsche's writings (25, p. 278n) and mostly as a means to self-overcoming, self-actualization, "living monuments to your victory and your libera-

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[3]The German word *Übermensch* is rendered by Kaufmann, in his later translations as "overman." While we can well appreciate the merits of this translation, we have retained "superman," simply because through general usage it has the advantage of familiarity.

tion" (p. 310). As to education, it was in the end "a question for the single one" (p. 418). All this is consistent with a denial and "vehement scorn of the idea of progress" and a doctrine "of the eternal recurrance of all things," a "Dionysian faith" (p. 320).

Based on such beliefs Nietzsche's ultimate formula for happiness became actually one of resignation — "amor fati," love of fate. He explains: "My formula for the greatness of a human being is *amor fati:* that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity" (25, p. 243).

Fellowman

For Adler, the ideal was the "fellowman, whose law of movement is prescribed by the welfare and perfection of mankind" (9, p. 53). Far from regarding the individual man as "the single one," he saw him inextricably embedded in a social system. "The starting point for all our deliberation . . . is: The concept of man includes the concept of fellowman" (4). And, "We refuse to recognize and examine an isolated human being" (5).

As a concerned psychotherapist, Adler could not accept a judgmental distinction between the strong and the weak, because after all it was the weak who came to him for help. And he recognized that the patients as well as those of better mental health were striving from a minus to a plus situation, and that the weak were actually the single ones, whereas the strong came closer to the ideal of a fellowman.

Adler's answer to Nietzsche's goal of superman for only the "highest specimens" was, "Every individual is seized by this striving for perfection . . . It is not at all necessary first to innoculate man with the desire to develop into superman, as the daring attempt of Nietzsche has maintained" (9, p. 31). What Adler meant by perfection was not a wanting to be perfect, as found in neurotics, but a sound striving for perfection (28) in the sense of perfecting something which is of some use.

Adler compared Nietzsche's specific conception of superman to the goal of godlikeness that one finds often expressed in mental patients. To Adler it was revealing "that Nietzsche when he became insane signed himself in a letter to Strindberg, 'The Crucified' " (8, pp. 314-315). During the meeting in 1908 from which we quoted previously, Adler had already stated: "Once one disregards the differences among the neuroses, and considers instead what they have in common, one can see very clearly in Nietzsche those tendencies that point to the deepest root of the neurosis" (32, II, p. 33). The striving

of those of better mental health is informed by a developed social interest, representing "common sense" (11), and meaning not conformity, but a striving with an interest in the interests of others (12). What they attempt to overcome are "common, instead of private, feelings of inferiority" (8, p. 155). Adler points out that society is based on cooperation, even if only through the division of labor (8, p. 132), and that any "striving for isolation" remains sound only in so far as, "whether he wants it or not, society derives a certain advantage from his work" (6, p. 41).

The ideal marriage, far from being the meeting of "two single ones," is for Adler "one side of cooperation in general, not a cooperation for the welfare of two persons only, but a cooperation also for the welfare of mankind" (8, p. 432), a cooperation of equal partners. Regarding the inferior valuation of woman, Adler considered it a "false valuation," in the same category as national and racial prejudices and blamed it for "the bitter struggle between the sexes, a struggle that is poisoning love and marriage" (8, p. 452).

This, incidentally, is another point where Adler was "identified with the forces he fought." A striking example of this has been furnished by William Barrett. In a comparison of Sartre with Adler he states: "Adler, following Nietzsche, based his psychology on the Will to Power . . . he condemns love to an endless cycle of sadism-masochism. . . . Eros disappears before the Will to Power. . . . Like Adler's, Sartre's is fundamentally a masculine psychology; it misunderstands or disparages the psychology of woman" (16, p. 258).

Children, according to Adler, are to be received with love and to be encouraged to become contributive fellowmen in the ongoing development of mankind. Education is not "a question for the single one." Rather, "The child must be educated for the community" (10, p. 23).

Adler was a firm believer in man's still undeveloped potentialities especially for social interest, and thus in "the progress of mankind," the title of one of his last papers (9, pp. 23-28), and he saw the task of psychotherapy and all human guidance and education in the "reduction of the striving for [personal] power and the development of social interest" (1, p. vi), to repeat an initial quotation.

SUMMARY

"Striving for power" helped Adler to establish his Individual Psychology as a value psychology, in contrast to Freud's drive psychology. Since power, not necessarily meaning power over others, as a human goal originated with Nietzsche, we examined the possible

broader significance of Nietzsche for Adler. We found this in the dialectical conception of the past and the future being combined in the present in reference to "becoming." Nietzsche's dialectic method includes also a questioning of one's assumptions and premises, in that any statement may contain its opposite. This became an important aspect of Adler's approach to the patient. Nietzsche's influence on Adler furthermore provides a bridge to other systems which in turn have similarities with Nietzsche.

The great difference between Nietzsche and Adler lies in their concepts of man and social philosophies, the former representing elitism, the latter democracy. This is expressed most clearly in their respective ideals of man—superman and fellowman. From the viewpoint of the psychotherapist the superman ideal is not helpful and often found in patients, whereas the fellowman ideal can easily be identified with better mental health.

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